

Sermons through

Romans

The Purpose of God

Part One

Romans 8:28-30

All Things

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
5/18/2014*

The Purpose of God

Part One

Romans 8:28-30
All Things

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are 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 (Romans 8:28-30).

Introduction

The initial verse under our consideration has been reduced to such a cliché that one hesitates to offer it as a remedy to human sorrow or hardship. You might even say it's become threadbare through overuse, often wrenched from its rich context—a context which would serve well to keep the nap of the verse's fabric thick with the warmth and comfort that was little doubt, the Apostle Paul's intention.

It might be a little overly optimistic to suggest that a phrase exists which is capable of effectively and immediately extracting the pangs of sorrow from the human soul or the difficulty of sickness and suffering from our mortal bodies. So often I've thought if I only had a button I could push to alleviate your (or my) physical pain, emotional heartache or current trying circumstance, I would assuredly do so.

But, alas, there is no such a button and we are left to endure the sorrows and grief. Though sorrows and grief are generated from the fall of man, they in and of themselves are not inherently sinful. Of Jesus, it was anticipated that He would be **“a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).**

So the question, not merely for the Christian but for any human is not 'will there be sorrow, grief, pain and trials in this life,' but is there any sense to it? Is life, as so many dark poets suggest, a tragedy? Are we humans merely carbon based pain gatherers rocketing toward a meaningless oblivion? Or is there a message—news from heaven which turns that dark message on its head?

Years ago in a physiology class I was given definitions of two similar feeling, yet dramatically opposite, experiences. The professor

spoke of *pain versus discomfort*. The distinction was not a matter of intensity—that is to say that discomfort could be much more painful than pain (if you follow). The distinction between pain and discomfort (maybe there are better terms) is that pain involves injury and discomfort does not.

I am currently going through rehabilitation for a fairly minor knee surgery. I've gone through this before. The first time when I was in high school I did my rehab at Pauley Pavilion at UCLA. In one of my first sessions I recall the late legendary trainer, Ducky Drake, working on a member of the Los Angeles Lakers, Happy Hairston, who also had knee surgery. Happy apparently had scar tissue in his knee that Ducky was dealing with by bending his leg further than Happy was happy with. I recall Happy yelling, "It hurts Ducky, it hurts". Ducky was unmoved by the prayers and petitions of Happy. He continued bending and twisting until Happy was back on the NBA court. Ducky wasn't injuring Happy, but the discomfort was necessary for true healing to take place.

There is a great redemption, restoration, rehabilitation if you will, taking place in the cosmos. For those, who by the grace of God, have cried out **"Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15)** there is no (by the definitions offered above, for sake of clarity) pain for the children of God for God is not seeking to injure His children. There is only discomfort. It may be a discomfort ending in the grave itself—it inevitably will be—at which point the faithful will cry with Paul **"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21)**.

God's power to restore is not frustrated even by death itself. The **"gain"** of which Paul writes is certainly the gain as he enters glory, but it is also gain for the advancement of the gospel. God took Paul home at the perfect time for Paul and the perfect time for Paul's ministry. In order for a passage/verse like the one we are looking at this morning to have its desired effect, there are things that must be observed.

If we don't, for example, agree on what the **"good"** of which Paul writes is, we might be frustrated when things don't turn our way. If we think the chief end of God's goodness is ensuring our dreams are fulfilled (as in a sermon I heard recently), or that events in this life will eventually turn our way (at least by our own definition), then this passage will be a bitter disappointment.

Paul had just addresses our tendency toward frustration when our prayers are not answered in the way in which they are submitted.

Our prayers are groanings which the Holy Spirit refines and submits **“according to the will of God” (8:27)**. We then have the confident knowledge that God’s answer to prayer will always be superior to the prayer itself.

How perfectly Paul’s short treatise on prayer folds into this most popular verse, utilized by the children of God for comfort in the midst of difficulty! In the same way our inadequate, shortsighted and perhaps even sinful prayers are utilized by God toward a just, holy and righteous end, Paul now expands that to **“all things”**.

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 (Romans 8:28).

We Know (at least we ought to know)

The verse begins with the verb **“we know”** *oikamen*, as if Paul is about to instruct on something that was common knowledge. What did everyone seem to know? What was so obvious? Perhaps it was the notion that if we have a Father in heaven who is infinite in being, glory, blessedness and perfection—who is almighty and everywhere present, knowing all things and most wise—who is most merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth—who because of the great love with which He loved us, sent His only begotten Son to die for us, He certainly will not allow that great work to be in any way upset by a random universe.

There is not a micro-second nor a quantum or nano-meter that falls beyond His power and jurisdiction.

The **“all things”** in this verse is just that—every last single thing—things that at first blush might make us uncomfortable.

The Lord has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom (Proverbs 16:4).

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come (Lamentations 3:38)?

But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from

God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips (Job 2:10).

Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it (Amos 3:6)?

It is not uncommon for people to understand Romans 8:28 to mean that God will make the most of a bad situation, as if man has scrambled the eggs and God will make an omelet. But it is not as if God is walking into the room of tragedy and saying, let's see if we can clean up this mess. Such thinking puts restraints on our understanding of the true sovereignty of God. God is not merely the one who sees us through the storm, He is the one who **“commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted the waves of the sea” (Psalm 107:25)**. God is the one who makes the storm.

In the tapestry of God's unfolding history, we have threads of good and threads of evil. What we learn in a verse like this, and others like it, is that God has ordained all these threads to form the design of His purpose and pleasure.

And what Paul is telling you and me is that the aim of God in the administration of His infinite love and power is the inclusion of all those that love Him in His good and glorious plan; a plan that will most certainly include days of heartache and trial.

Yet God is doing something magnificent, so much so that Paul can only express it:

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

We might be careful not to take Romans 8:28 and view it as a promise that we will eventually get what we want, though sidetracked for the time-being. We will then be tempted to measure whether or not God has kept His promise based upon whether or not we approve of the way things have worked out.

The **“good”** of which Paul writes is a good determined by God. As we shall see in the verses to come, that good certainly includes the very personal and (to borrow from Paul) unimaginable *ouk anebe* (lit. beyond our thoughts) preparations of God. But unless we are moved

to lay aside our own paltry definitions of **“good”** this glorious verse will lose its weight.

Not to be corny, but I can't help think of the speech William Wallace gives the soldiers as they look across the battlefield, drawing the conclusion that they are about to be slaughtered. And why—that the nobles can have more land? Wallace convinces them that there is something greater than the nobles, greater than preserving the extension of their own lives. He makes the great speech for freedom. It is with an enlightened recognition of this greater thing that they fight like “warrior poets.” Have we been convinced of what the **“good”** is to which all things are being cinched?

Lovers of God

When Paul writes that the recipients of this **“good”** are those that love God, it is just another way of denoting those who are Christians. This becomes clear with the phrase which accompanies it, **“those who are called according to His purpose.”** The **“call”** here being the effectual calling of God. It is not outward call but the inward call—that irresistible call which transforms a heart of stone to a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) and opens blind eyes (John 9:25).

It is a great, comforting and glorious truth that all things work together for good. It is equally true that those who trust in Christ can rest in the assurance that they are the unique beneficiaries of all these things which are working together for good. But what is this **“good?”** Is it the job I want, the family I desire, is it health, friendships, reputation, respect?

Shortly, Paul will begin a thought with the words **“What then shall we say to these things” (Romans 8:31)?** Then he will give his own speech—a speech that in my opinion is virtually unparalleled in terms of depth and encouragement. In that speech he set the temporal, historical and stark reality of **“being killed”** and **“regarded as sheep to be slaughtered”** against the eternal and spiritual reality of being **“more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”** What is this **“good”** that God is accomplishing that can yield such a statement? We will pursue that more fully next time.

Questions for Study

1. Are pain, sorrow and grief sinful? Why or why not? How do people generally deal with such things (pages 2, 3)?
2. What is the distinction between pain and discomfort? Why is this significant (page 3)?
3. What does Paul assume his readers know (page 4)?
4. What is included under “all things” (pages 4, 5)?
5. What kind of limitations do we put on our understanding of the sovereignty of God if we think of Romans 8:28 as God merely fixing the mess (page 5)?