

PM Romans 8:18-39 Confidence in God's Plan

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[0 : 00] I'm curious how the Lord can work even through the mistakes of man. Even though I got that completely wrong, those verses are so wonderfully appropriate to what I want to say tonight.

! So I'm glad that we sang that psalm. Let's turn now to the Scriptures.

Romans chapter 8. Andy preached this morning from one of the greatest texts in the Bible, John 3.16, For God so loved the world.

And thank you, Andy, for that message. I want us tonight to look at another great text of Scripture. We're actually going to look at verses 28 to 30, but especially verse 28.

A very famous verse. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to his purpose.

[1 : 17] Both of these chapters, John 3 and Romans 8, speak of the love of God.

John 3 speaks of the love of God in sending his Son. Romans 8 ends with the eternal security that we have in the love of God.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And the love of God lies at the heart of our text tonight in verse 28.

What is it saying to us? It's saying that the sovereign God who controls and rules all things is using that almighty power for us.

He's ordering everything for the good of his people. If that isn't love, then I don't know what is.

[2 : 40] I'm not really into pop music, but there was a song back in the 1990s. Everything I do, I do it for you.

Well, that is literally true of God here. Everything he does in this world is for us as Christians.

The NIV translation emphasizes that it is God who is behind all this. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.

In other words, it's not just that things turn out alright of their own accord. But God in his love is making sure that they work out.

God is working out all things according to his plan. As it says in Psalm 57, God fulfills his purpose in me.

[3 : 53] And we can have confidence in that plan. Because we know that he will accomplish it. And we know that it's good. Now it seemed to me that this was a very suitable text for the last Sunday service of the year.

As we look back over 2025, I'm sure there will be many things to give thanks for. But there will also be many things that will perplex us.

How are we to make sense of what has happened in the past year? Well, as Christians, we can have confidence that God has been working all things together for good for us.

Even if we can't see how. And as we look forward into 2026, there may be many things that we're anxious about.

How can we face the future? With confidence. Knowing that all things will continue to work together for our good.

[5 : 19] I want us to look tonight at this confidence we have in verse 28. Then the reason for that confidence in verses 29 to 30.

And then to look at some examples in scripture. And to apply it to ourselves. First of all though, let's look at the context.

Our text comes towards the end of Paul's great exposition of the gospel. Which runs all the way through the first eight chapters of Romans.

It's a gospel of sovereign grace. It begins with the wrath of God. And it ends with the love of God.

In chapter 1, verse 18. The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness. In chapter 8, verse 39.

[6 : 25] Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God. Wrath to love. In between, he explains how, although all of us are sinners, and all of us deserve God's wrath, God in his love has provided an answer.

A wonderful answer. In chapter 3, verse 24, he says, We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Christ, out of love, Christ, out of love, has died for us. He has died as a sacrifice for sin.

That's the great transition between wrath and love. Christ has borne the wrath so that we might enjoy the love.

He has explained in chapter 4, how this wonderful salvation comes to us through faith alone.

[7 : 43] Then in chapters 5 to 8, he has been explaining how it changes our lives. God has not merely saved us, but sanctified us and filled us with his spirit.

And then we come to our text. In a sense, this is the climax of the gospel. Paul is declaring here how everything in life has been leading up to this one great purpose of God, that we should be saved and sanctified and glorified.

The rest of the chapter is really a response to that. With Paul rejoicing in the wonder of it all and reflecting on our absolute security in Christ.

So let's come now to our text. And first, the confidence that we have in verse 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.

Let's look at this phrase by phrase. Paul begins by saying, we know. In other words, we are certain.

[9 : 19] We are confident. We are sure. He has used those words before. I don't know if you noticed them.

In verse 22. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Waiting for the redemption.

The underlying thought is the same. We know what's going on. In verse 22. God is redeeming creation.

In verse 28. God is redeeming us. The words are carefully chosen.

We know. We don't necessarily see or understand. Sometimes, of course, we can see.

[10 : 18] Sometimes we can understand in real time what God is doing. Often we can understand it in retrospect. The Puritan John Flavel wrote a wonderful book on this subject called The Mystery of Providence.

It's based on Psalm 57. But in another of his books, he writes that life is best understood like a Hebrew text.

Hebrew, you know, is read from right to left. It's read backwards. What he's saying is that the best way to understand is to read it backwards. Look back over your life.

And then you'll see more clearly what God has been doing. But sometimes, whether we try to read it forwards or backwards, it still doesn't make sense.

It's still a complete mystery. There seems to be no rhyme or reason about things. We live in a chaotic world and we can't see any obvious purpose.

[11 : 29] But what Paul is saying here is that we know that there is a purpose. Even when we can't see it. Even when we can't understand it.

We know that God is fulfilling his purpose in us. And this is something that we know that others don't.

Someone has described it as the family secret. The rest of the world has no idea what's going on. But we know.

Because God has revealed it to us. So what do we know? That all things work together for good. To those who love God.

And that really does mean all things. Good things and bad things. But they only work together for good.

[12 : 33] Together. Individual events may be incomprehensible by themselves. They might even appear to be working against us.

But together we know that they are working for good. The illustration that is always given is of a tapestry.

On the one side it's all loose threads. On the other side it all makes sense. I prefer a chess illustration.

Some of you will know that I'm a keen chess player. Our daughter played chess at international level. And consequently I've often watched grandmasters playing chess.

I even once played a former world champion. Vasily Smyslov. I lost. Sometimes the moves that these grandmasters play.

[13 : 34] Are completely beyond me. But I know that they've got it all worked out. When they sacrifice a pawn in the opening.

They have a reason. To the untrained eye perhaps it might just seem like a waste of a pawn. But the grandmaster knows that he's going to get some advantage from that.

Maybe it's freedom for his pieces. Maybe it's a stronger centre. When he makes some apparently trivial pawn move.

Again you know there's a plan. Maybe he's defending a weak square. Maybe he's preparing for an attack. The point is he knows what he's doing.

We don't know. We can't make sense of it. But he knows. And so likewise with God. The ultimate grandmaster.

[14 : 40] He knows what he's doing. And he will accomplish his plan. Finally he says who this promise is for.

Basically for Christians. He describes us here in two ways. First we are those who love God. Now it's important that we grasp this.

The text doesn't just say all things will work together for good. Full stop. It is for those who love God. It is for those who love God. Those who hate God.

Can expect nothing from God. We might even say for those who hate God. All things work together for evil.

Even if things appear to be going well for them. It will do them no good. If they remain in a state of impenitence.

[15 : 46] Riches will count for nothing on the day of judgment. Fame will vanish away. Indeed it will count against them. And God will say I gave you all this. And in return you hated me.

But those who love God. We can expect that even the bad things. Will work out well. But also he describes us as those who are the called.

According to his purpose. You see our love for God is really a response to his love for us. And that love goes back to eternity past.

When he chose us to be his. And planned our salvation. Salvation. The Bible is very clear about this. Salvation is his initiative.

From start to finish. The psalmist says salvation is of the Lord. He has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[17 : 02] He has called us into the fellowship of his son. He has called us to be holy. As he is holy. Our love for God.

Is indeed the mark of a Christian. But our calling by God. Is the inward reality. He has called us to eternal salvation.

And that plan. Can never fail. Which brings us to our second point. The reason for our confidence. In verses 29 to 30.

For those whom he foreknew. He also predestined. To be conformed to the image of his son. In order that he might be the firstborn. Among many brothers. And those whom he predestined.

He also called. And those whom he called. He also justified. And whom he justified. He also glorified. The word for links this to verse 28.

[18 : 09] Paul is explaining here. What God's plan is. And why it can never fail. Sometimes called the golden chain. Or the chain of grace.

Has five links. Which can never be broken. At each stage notice. It is he. Who does these things.

The almighty God. And no one and nothing. Can frustrate his plan. First we are foreknown.

By God. Before the foundation of the world. God knew his people by name. And he chose us.

To be his. I don't understand that. Any more than you do. Why should he choose me? There is certainly nothing in me. That would cause him.

[19 : 07] To choose me. But the Bible assures me. That. If I am a Christian. It is because God. Chose me. Some have tried to interpret it.

That God foreknew. That we would believe. But Paul doesn't say that. He says that God foreknew us. He knew. Who we were.

Next we are predestined. Not just to be saved. But to be holy. He predestined us to be. Conformed to the image of his son.

In order that he might be. The first born. Of many brothers. You see. God wants a family. He wants brothers and sisters.

- For Christ. And for one another. Who will bear. The heavenly image. Third. We are called.
- [20 : 09] To achieve his purpose. God has called. Each one of us. One. One. By one. One. Not just with the outward call. Of the gospel.
- But with the. Inward call. Of the spirit. And he spoke a little this morning. About how he was called. I think it was at a.
- Free church camp. When he heard. John 3.16. And realized. That God loved him. Personally. Many of us here. Could give a testimony.
- Of how we were called. Out of darkness. Into God's light. Fourth. We are justified. Those whom he called.
- He also justified. That of course. Is where the cross comes in. Christ died. And rose again. For our justification. On the cross. Our sins.
- [21 : 02] Were counted to him. And his righteousness. Was counted to us. So that we could be declared. Just. Or righteous. Before God. That's what justified means.
- At the moment we believe. We are justified forever. And the final link in the chain. We are glorified. Those whom he justified.
- He also glorified. Paul jumps. Straight to glory here. Because the moment we are justified. Glory. Is. Certain. But there is a process.
- Leading up to it. He says in 2 Corinthians 3.18. We all. With unveiled face. Beholding the glory of the Lord. Are being transformed. Into the same image.
- From one degree of glory. To another. At the last day. That process will be complete. When we are raised again. In the image of Christ.
- [22 : 04] That is God's plan. And it is absolutely. Guaranteed. Absolutely foolproof. Those links can never be broken.
- That. Is why we are confident. We are part of a magnificent plan. Of redemption. Which cannot fail.
- And everything that happens. Is part of that plan. But now let's look at some. Practical examples. God's.
- People down through the ages. Have gone through all kinds. Of ups and downs. But in retrospect. We can see. How God was at work. Perhaps the most.
- Obvious example. Is Joseph. Joseph's. Life. Began badly. Favoured by his father.
- [23 : 10] But hated. By his brothers. Joseph was sold. As a slave. Into Egypt. Not a good start. And then.
- Just as things appeared. To be getting better. And he is put in charge. Of Potiphar's. Household. He is falsely accused. By Potiphar's wife.
- Ends up in prison. And as if that wasn't bad enough. When he interprets. The dreams. Of the chief butler. And the chief baker.
- And he asks. That the butler. Will remember him. To Pharaoh. The butler forgets. Joseph. Could have been forgiven. At that point. For thinking. That God. Was against him. Everything. Was going wrong. Maybe you have gone through.
- [24 : 06] Times in life. Like that. All these things. Are against us. How can you say. That God is for us. But you see.
- We are only half way. Through the story. Of Joseph. You know how it continues. Pharaoh has a dream. Then the butler remembers him.
- Joseph is called. He interprets the dream. Warns Pharaoh. About seven years of plenty. Followed by seven years of famine. He comes up with a plan. And Pharaoh puts him.

In charge. He becomes effectively. The ruler of Egypt. Now. At that point.

He might have thought. This is obviously. What God's plan was. God wanted to raise me up. And make me great. Because he loves me.

[25 : 07] Wrong again. That wasn't the plan. God's plan. Was to save his people. Joseph's brothers.

Come to him. For grain. They're reconciled. They're brought down. To Egypt. And then. Joseph understands.

What it was all about. You meant it. For evil. He says. But God. Meant it. For good. To save. Many people. Alive.

And amongst. Those people. The Hebrews. From amongst whom. The Messiah. Would come. All the horrible things.

That had happened. To Joseph. Were leading up. To this. They were a way. Of getting him. Into position. As it were. In Egypt. To save.

[26 : 05] God's. People. Wasn't just. For Joseph. Personally. Though he did well. Out of it. But for his people. That extends.

Right down. To the details. There's a curious. Incident. In Genesis. 37. Where Joseph. Is looking. For his brothers. And sisters. And a man.

Tells them. They went. To Dothan. Think about it. That. Nameless. Man. Saying.

They went. That away. Has a walk. On part. In the history. Of redemption. He probably. Thought nothing. Of it. Just some lad. Asking for his brothers.

Joseph. Probably. Didn't think anything. Of it. Probably. Wished he hadn't. Told them. Because that's. What led him. Into the trap. Where he was sold. As a slave. But if Joseph's.

[27 : 05] Brothers. Hadn't found him. Then the rest. Would not. Have been history. They would all. Have died. In the famine.

And there would have. Been no Messiah. Do you see. That one man. Giving directions. Such a trivial thing. But it was all.

Part of God's. Plan. Even the trivial. Things in your life. They're part. Of God's plan. Take another.

Example. I must be. Brief over this. Seeing the time. Esther. Famously. God isn't mentioned. In Esther. But he's there.

In the background. Directing. Everything. Again. Esther's. Early life. Wasn't. Promising. There she was. In exile. In Persia.

[28 : 03] Brought up. By her uncle. Mordecai. Presumably. Her parents. Had died. And then the king's. Servants. Turn up. Wanting her. To take part. In a beauty contest.

To become. The wife. Of the emperor. Of Persia. Great opportunity. Not really. No.

Pious. Jewish. Girl. Would want. To be the wife. Of a pagan. Emperor. And certainly. Not in such. A sordid way. But she does.

Become queen. Is that the plan? Refugee. Rises. To royal. Splendor. Wonderful story. But no.

That's not. What it's about. God is simply. Moving her. Into place. Ready. For what is to come. Think again. Of the chess grandmaster.

[28 : 58] When he. Promotes a pawn. And it becomes a queen. Like Esther. Is that it? No. He plans to use. That queen.

For the checkmate. But again. In the book of Esther. The plan. Isn't yet obvious. Things quickly. Go wrong. Mordecai.

Mordecai. Gets into trouble. With Haman. Haman. Demands that all the Jews. Should be killed. Must have looked. As if God was mocking her. Raising her up.

Just to cast her down again. But no. As Mordecai. Says. Perhaps you have come. To the kingdom. For such a time.

As this. This is God's plan. This is why. You became queen. Esther is able. To intercede.

[29 : 52] With the emperor. And the whole situation. Is turned around. Haman. Comes in. At just the wrong moment. Or just the right moment. From God's point of view.

And he's condemned. To be hanged. On the same gallows. He'd prepared. For Mordecai. And the Jews. Gain revenge. On their enemies. This is God.

Working all things. Together. For good. In a grand way. Not just for Esther. Personally. Though she did well out of it. But for God's people.

Or take the greatest example. Of all. Jesus himself. Again. The early years. Are not promising. The son of God. Has come down to earth. And where is he?

In a carpenter's. Workshop. Ah. Ah. But then his ministry. Gets underway. People are coming to hear him. People are being healed.

[30 : 53] This is God's plan. Surely. But then it all appears to go wrong. He gets arrested. In the garden of Gethsemane.

He is brutally crucified. Dead. And buried. Has God's plan failed? Of course not. The third day.

He rises from the dead. He ascends to heaven. He pours out the spirit. Three thousand are converted. The cross. Was a necessary part.

Of that plan. The disciples. Didn't realize it. At the time. But when they look back. Through the scriptures. Then they understood. That these things.

Had to be so. Once again. All things. Working together. For good. For the people of God. We could go on.

[31 : 52] To apply it. To the church. In Acts 8. Persecution. Breaks out. Saul is. Wreaking havoc. In the church. Hundreds. Are fleeing.

From Jerusalem. All in God's plan. The disciples. Are scattered. Preaching the word. That a church.

Is founded in Antioch. Where Saul. Himself. When he is converted. Will come and preach. And for those. Who suffered. Well.

God was. Purifying them. As by fire. That they might come forth. As gold. And so on. Through history. Thousands.

Upon thousands. Of Christians. Have suffered. Martyrdom. All in God's plan. Tertullian said. The blood of the martyrs.

[32 : 46] Is the seed. Of the church. God knows. What he's doing. That's what it's really. All about. He knows the end. From the beginning. And everything.

Along the way. Is necessary. For that end. But as we close. What about ourselves? God has a purpose.

Well many things in our lives. Are perplexing. There are times. When doubts may arise. In our hearts. Is God really there?

Maybe over the past year. Things haven't worked out. Quite the way that you hoped. But rest assured. If you are a Christian. God has a purpose.

In it all. If you are not a Christian. Of course. In one sense. There is no comfort for you here. These promises.

[33 : 44] Are for those who love God. But maybe. The twists and turns. In your life. Are precisely for this purpose.

To draw you to Christ. Christ. And when you have come to him. And trusted in him. Then. You will share. In this confidence.

That we have. Even as a Christian. You may not understand. What God is doing. As the hymn says.

God moves in a mysterious way. His wonders. To perform. That same hymn says. That behind a frowning providence. He hides.

A bright. Design. Perhaps all you can see. At the moment. Is the frowning providence. But one day. You will see. The bright design. If you can see.

[34 : 42] What God is doing. In your life. Give thanks. But if you can't. Still trust him. As we sang earlier.

There are many things. That we don't know. I know. I know. Not. What of good. Or ill. May be reserved for me. Of weary ways.

Or golden days. Before his face. I see. But this one thing. We do know. I know. Whom. I have believed. And am persuaded.

That he is able. To keep that. Which I have committed. Unto him. Against that day. Likewise. In the church. Many things. Are perplexing.

Here in Dumfries. Five years on. After Trevor left. We still don't have a minister. What is God doing? Elsewhere.

[35 : 37] We hear of churches. Closing. How can that be. In God's will? I don't know. The answer. To those questions. But we have to trust.

That God. Is. Working his purpose out. For his church. We can't always look at it. And say. This is what God is doing.

Sometimes we can guess. But who would have guessed. God's plan with Joseph. Or with Esther. Or with Jesus.

Unless they'd really studied. The scriptures carefully. But we do know. That all things work. Together. For the good.

Of God's people. May we go into. 2026. With that confidence. Amen. We're going to.