

All Things For Good

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[0 : 00] Romans chapter 8 verse 28. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose.

Romans chapter 8 verse 28.

Which has many other rooms leading off it. It has implications for our mindset and our behavior in numerous ways.

It is truly a colossal verse. Romans 8 verse 28 focuses on what we call the providence of God.

That word in its basic meaning says the seeing in advance. The seeing ahead of time.

[1 : 38] But for the Christian, the providence of God is that work of God in the whole of creation by which he brings to pass everything that he has ordained.

It covers both the macro supervision of the cosmos and it covers his micro attention to all the details of our lives.

Truly, all things work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.

I want to ask two questions of this verse. And at first appearance they will seem to be absurdly simplistic, simple questions.

But I hope that you will see that they have huge importance. The first question is, who are the receivers of this promise in Romans 8?

[3 : 02] And then secondly, who is the giver of that promise? Well, first of all, let's look at the verse and ask, who are the receivers?

And the verse, interestingly, gives two answers to that question. The first answer is that it's those who love God.

And the second answer is, it's those who are called according to his purpose. Let's look at them in turn. Those who love God.

This is not actually the commonest Bible description of Christians. More often we are described as those who believe in God. But love for God is of the essence of our faith.

And love for God is the basic direction of every Christian. We love him. When we came to believe in him and having seen who he is, that produced our love for him.

[4 : 14] But the other way around is also true. It's because we saw his loveliness and his beauty that we were moved to put our faith in him.

So the Christian is someone who has a love for God. Secondly, we are described as those who are called according to his purpose.

When the gospel goes out, there is with it a general invitation, an open invitation to everyone.

Come to me, said the prophet, everyone who is thirsty. Come to the waters and drink. And similarly, in Jesus' parable of the wedding banquet, there was an invitation that had been issued and it was repeated.

But, and this is especially in the letters of the New Testament, within that open call and working alongside it, there is something much stronger.

[5 : 37] There is the voice of God saying to people here and there, come. And it's a summons.

It's a compelling summons to come to Jesus. It's irresistible. And if you're a believer, I'm sure you can look back and recall how there was a pool that took me to the Lord.

And so, we can say with Paul that he who had set me apart from before I was born was willing to call me by his grace.

You'll notice in this verse that this compelling call is closely linked with God's election. And that is found throughout the New Testament.

We are exhorted to make our calling and election sure. And here, those whom he foreknew and predestined, them he also called.

[6 : 58] And so, the call of God is his sure summons to come to Jesus. It's the summons and the call that enables us to see him.

It's the call that gives us a desire for him. It's like Jesus calling to the man who'd been dead in the tomb for four days.

And he says, Lazarus, come out! And that's what happened to you and me if you're in Christ. He calls us out of our own spiritual tombs.

So, here is whom the promise is given to. It's given to us who are both the lovers of God and the ones who are called by God.

And those two aspects of our salvation work in tandem. And they're true for everyone. We deliberately, voluntarily set our affections and came to love God.

[8 : 09] But at the same time, God was drawing us, calling us to himself. Now, before we go on, I want to press in on two implications.

The first is, the promise of Romans 8 is for Christians. And I can say it's exclusively for Christians. Sometimes you may hear people say, and they've got no real allegiance to Christ.

And they'll say when some great good fortune has happened to them, or they've avoided a dreadful accident, they'll not entirely seriously say, oh, someone up there was looking after me.

Well, someone up there was looking after them in that time. But that is as nothing compared to the overarching goodness and wisdom of God in making all things work together for good of the Christian.

[9 : 22] And if you're not a believer this morning, I hope that as we look further at this verse, you will see how much you are missing out on.

How much you are missing out on enjoying this extraordinary, eternal security of the child of God. But the second thing I want to leave with you on this question of who it applies to.

Can I emphasize, it applies to every Christian. You see, this verse can be corrupted in a way that makes us say, all things work together for good for those Christians whose love has reached a certain level.

Or for those Christians whose love is consistent in loving God. Emphatically, that is not what this verse says.

The verse is for all who have been called into fellowship with his son. Romans 8 is about those who are in Christ, those who are in the spirit, those who have the spirit inside them, those who've been adopted into the family of God.

[11 : 00] And every believer is covered by those things. Now, it is true that those whose love for God has waned greatly, those Christians who we might say are playing spiritual adultery with Jesus, they will have no awareness, no enjoyment of all things working for good in their lives.

They won't be able to appreciate it. But the promise of Romans 8, for the child of God, will stand nonetheless.

Nothing will nullify it. Now, can we move on to the second basic question?

And the question is, who gives the promise? And you might say, well, self-evidently, it's God.

God. And indeed it is. God. God gives the promise. But I want you to see that it is God who's working.

[12 : 30] Sometimes we can think of the providence as being like a kind of Christianized karma. a sort of the Christian's fate.

And even if we acknowledge that it is God's providence, we may lose the impact of God working. And it's as if we say, okay, God has loaded his software into our lives, and it's running, and it will keep on running.

But that, it's much more than that. God is bringing about his providence in a way that he actively and lovingly takes all the events of our lives and he weaves them together into the most fantastic tapestry for him.

God works. God is totally involved. Now, I want to home in on two particular features of God's character that we see in the promise.

[13 : 55] And the first is that God rules. I've never sung that hymn before, Sovereign Ruler of the Skies, but I really appreciate its words and the depths of its feeling.

God is the sovereign ruler of the skies and of the earth and of everything in it. The Bible gives us some amazing examples.

In the world, in the natural inanimate world, hailstones, thunderstorms are under his sovereign appointment.

And among the animals, you go into these wonderful pictures of the sea monsters and the eagles in the sky and the mountain goats.

And God provides for them all. And he's in charge of the death of a sparrow and so on. And then when we come to humans, God is involved in so detailed way.

[15 : 06] Our birth, the day of our death, and everything in between.

He is the sovereign ruler of our lives. And he's in charge of the happy days, the days of plenty.

I love the 16th Psalm. The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup. You hold my lot.

The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. But also the days of sadness, of poverty, persecution, adversity, and for a select few, even martyrdom.

So when Paul's spiritual midwife, Ananias, was told to go and see him when he was born again, God said, I'm going to show this man how much you'll suffer for the sake of the gospel.

[16 : 32] And later on, Paul would write to one of his churches and saying, it's been given to you not only to believe, but also to suffer for his sake.

And everything, I say again, everything that happens to us is by God's say-so.

Now, there's a word, it's one word in the original and it's the word that's translated work together.

And it's crucially important. By absolutely no means is everything in my life and that's happened to me good.

All things in your experience are not all essentially good. The false accusations that people have made against you, the attacks of the devil on you, the temptations that you've gone through, your and my dying, none of those are essentially good.

[18 : 00] This comes out really well in Joseph's analysis of what happened to him in our first reading.

Joseph, as a young man, had been trafficked by his brothers to some passing Bedouin and they traded him into Egypt and for many years he lost his personal freedom.

And when he got out of prison he rose meteorically and he became prime minister of that country and then years later famine struck and the brothers were forced to go down to the grain stores of Egypt where Joseph was in charge and to buy food.

And they were confronted not just with Joseph but with the sin, the terrible hellish thing that they'd done to their brother.

They were confronted by it. They thought it was hidden. And nothing we can say about that sin excuses the ten brothers.

[19 : 21] Not a thing we can say. It was all evil, utterly evil. And yet here's how Joseph rightly analyzes it.

You intended to harm me but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. And it was the good you see, not just for Joseph or Jacob, the old man, but also for the brothers themselves.

It was for their good, their sin. Was God in his majestic sovereignty putting something together for their good?

God. And that leads us on from his sovereignty to the second aspect of his character that I want to home in on.

And that is that God is good. God rules but God is good. One of the common sayings in the Old Testament is the goodness of God.

[20 : 29] Give thanks to the Lord for he is good. and again surely God is good to Israel. And his goodness is shown in this amazing chain of events that is given in 29 and 30.

A chain that secures the good things to us. Begins with God's foreknowledge. That is his setting his affection on us from eternity.

and moves on to his predestining us. That is him choosing us for a purpose. And then to that calling that I was speaking of earlier.

And then to justification. Him declaring you and me right. As right as Jesus is right. And then finally on to glory so that we are perfectly holy and gloriously happy in Christ.

The goodness of God. It's the purpose behind all this. Briefly note that the good purpose involves our becoming holy.

[21 : 50] holy. He called us that we might be holy in the image of Jesus.

And nothing that may seem good to you today, none of that is actually good if it isn't promoting your holiness. But let me move on.

Let me move on. How do I relate to all this? How does it tally with my experiences?

You know when they used to make clocks that weren't running on batteries, and these wonderful timepieces came out, I don't know how many hundreds of years ago, preachers latched onto them, and they said, ah, here's the best illustration of the providence of God.

You look into the back of the watch, and you see wheels turning, and springs attached to them, wheels turning wheels, some wheels going in one direction, others in the reverse, and to the untrained eye, it is just baffling.

[23 : 18] And that's exactly what the providence of God is. It's baffling. But actually, it can frequently be far worse than baffling.

It can be devastating. Listen to Job. today, today, my complaint is bitter.

My hand is heavy on account of my groaning. Behold, I go forward, but he's not there. I'm backwards, and I don't perceive him.

On the left hand, when he's working, I don't behold him. He turns to the right hand, but I don't see him. And the poor man is experiencing the twists and turns of the knife in his soul through the providences.

And he simply says to him, where is God in all this? He knew nothing about the conflict beyond his conflict, the conflict of Satan challenging the authority of God, and he simply knew that in his own life, things were unbearable.

[24 : 51] Someone has rightly said, and I can identify with this, the providence of God is often a dark and impenetrable abyss.

I can't expect, and I'm not even given to help you in all the answers of this, but I want to leave the opening two words of the verse, which I think go some way to helping us.

We know. Now, if only we did really know, if only we did know what was going on in the storms, which may not just be for a day or a week, but for a year, for decades, and the fact is, we know only a tiny fraction, but I listen again to Job, because hear how he goes on.

I do not see him. He turns to the right hand, but again, I do not see him, but he knows the way that I take.

and this is faith, not that I know what's going on, but it's faith that says, I know that he knows.

[27 : 05] I have confidence in God Almighty, the sovereign ruler of the skies, who is always good to me, that he knows what he's doing.

May God help us to see not just the truth of this verse, but the power of the truth in our lives, in our experiences, in the dark, impenetrable abyss that he may have appointed for you and me.

And to him be the glory. All things work together for good to those who love God and who are called according to his purpose.

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