

God's Unfailing Purpose

(Romans 8:26-30)

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Can we still believe in Romans 8:28? Do all things really work together for good? A seemingly healthy 12-year-old Christian girl develops severe migraine headaches. On Friday she is taken to the hospital and on Saturday she dies. The father called her “the sunshine of my life.”

A young Christian boy goes with his church youth group on an outing. That night he comes down with a fever. The next morning he has trouble breathing and his mother calls the doctor. By the time the ambulance gets there, he has stopped breathing. The doctor does everything he can, but the boy dies from a bacterial infection.

A Christian man feels the call of God to go into the ministry. He leaves his good job and moves to a distant city to enter seminary. His wife takes a job to help him make it through. He's in his last year now. In just a few months he'll take a church

somewhere and begin serving the Lord. But one day his wife comes in and says, "I'm leaving you. I don't want to be a pastor's wife." She walks out and never comes back.

A Christian policeman stops a man known to be a drug dealer. It happens on a busy down-town street and a crowd gathers to watch the unfolding drama. There is a struggle and somehow the drug dealer grabs the officer's gun. Someone in the crowd yells, "Shoot him, man." And he does, at point-blank range, in the face. The officer was in his early twenties.

Do all things really work together for good for God's people? Do they? Can we still believe in Romans 8:28?

The great composer Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) lived much of his life in fear of deafness. He was concerned because he felt the sense of hearing was essential to creating music of lasting value. When Beethoven discovered that the thing he feared most was coming rapidly upon him, he was almost frantic with anxiety. He consulted doctors and tried every possible remedy. But the deafness increased until at last all hearing was gone. Beethoven finally found the strength he needed to go on despite his great loss. To everyone's amazement, he wrote some of his grandest music after he became totally deaf. With all distractions shut out, melodies flooded in on him as fast as his pen could write them down. His deafness became a great asset!

This is one example how God can use suffering and bad experiences and turn them around for our good and His glory. This is the lesson of Romans 8:28. God works or weaves together all the events of our lives to promote His goal and purpose which is Christlikeness in our lives. Romans 8:28 is a handbook for hard times for it reminds us what God is doing and how He is at work through our difficult times of suffering.

The book of Romans has been called the constitution of Christianity. Therefore, we must approach these verses with reverence because of the great truths that are presented in them. Romans 8:28 is like a John 3:16 in the Bible. It is one of the most precious promises found in the Bible. May God help all of us as Christians to

surrender to His providential working in our hearts and lives as we study God's unfailing purpose for our lives.

Romans 8:18-25

Introduction to God's Purpose

Romans 8:26-27

Spirit's Role in God's Purpose

Romans 8:28

Providence and God's Purpose

Romans 8:29-30

Description of God's Purpose

Many times we jump into a Bible verse and don't fully understand it's real meaning. Like any other verse found in the Bible, Romans 8:28 does not stand alone. What precedes and follows this beloved verse is all linked together. This means we are going to embark on a study of the surrounding verses of Romans 8:28 as well as study this particular verse. Only when we do this can we expect to fully understand what Romans 8:28 is teaching

and how it relates to our lives today. The Power Point seen above is not our outline for this study but it shows how everything surrounding Romans 8:28 is interrelated. Now let's begin by stating a clear proposition of what these verses are all about.

God's unfailing purpose is that He will make us more like Jesus.

This purpose is revealed to us in 10 ways.

I. God's unfailing purpose comes to pass through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26-27).

Romans 8:26-27 leads the way into Romans 8:28, reminding us of the Spirit's helpful role in our prayer life. The Holy Spirit prays to the Father on our behalf, with inexpressible groaning's, to bring about God's ultimate goal in our life which is Christlikeness. Paul connects the help of the Spirit in our prayer life with becoming more like Jesus, which is first mentioned in Romans 8:18-25



with the teaching about our redemptive bodies and glorification. The connection with what was previously said about our glorification with the Spirit's intercession with our prayers, seems to be this. The Heavenly Father will provide us with a glorified body someday which will be in exact moral conformity to Christ, but in the meantime, the Holy Spirit will help us to move toward this redemptive goal of Christlikeness. As the Spirit prays for us, His goal is to bring about God's unfulfilling purpose (Christlikeness) for our lives.

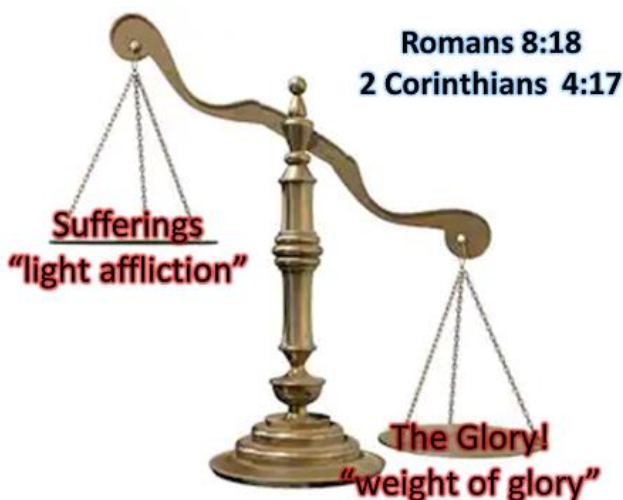
So, in Romans 8:18-25, Paul sets the groundwork and underlying premise behind Romans 8:26-30, when he comments on the glorified body we will receive someday, which will manifest perfect Christlikeness. This is the starting point which gives us an understanding of what follows in Romans 8:26-30. It is the connecting point and link to all that follows.

Paul states in Romans 8:18-25: For I reckon (count this to be true, come to a settled conclusion) that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared* (the future glory of our redemptive body is so great that present sufferings are *insignificant* by comparison to the *magnificence* that lies ahead for the child of God) with the glory which shall be revealed in us (also "to and through us" – meaning that we are the recipients and possession of a future glory, as also mentioned in Colossians 3:4, which refers to the magnificence and splendor of our glorified and transformed bodies we receive the Rapture). For the earnest expectation of the creature (all of natural creation) waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God (when God's saints will be glorified and officially revealed as His Sons at the Rapture – prior to the release of natural creation).

"For the creature (natural creation) was made subject to vanity (futility and frustration), not willingly (without any choice), but by reason of him (God the judge who uttered the sentence of the curse) who hath subjected *the same* in hope (creation will one day be delivered from its curse during the Millennium and Eternal State – Isa. 11:5-9; Rev. 21:5), Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption (Genesis curse of decay, deterioration, and death) into the glorious liberty of the children of God (the same freedom from the Genesis curse that God's children will experience, the natural creation will experience, the

creation also waits for a great destiny at the Second Coming of Christ to earth - Matt. 19:28; Isa. 11:6–9).

“For we know that the whole creation (the totality of natural creation still under the Genesis curse – Gen. 3:17-19) **groaneth and travaileth in pain** (like the pains of childbirth the creation waits deliverance from the sinful curse, the time when the *groaning* creation will become a *glorious* creation!) **together until now** (the present time). **And not only they** (natural creation – animals, fish, birds, the ground, and all of nature), **but ourselves also** (the sons of God), **which have the firstfruits of the Spirit** (the regeneration, baptizing, and sealing ministry of the Spirit – a foretaste of many more future blessings, including a new, glorified body and living in God’s presence), **even we ourselves groan within ourselves** (as we experience the pains, temptations, misery, and losses associated with this life), **waiting for the adoption** (the future, finale, and official revelation and unveiling of the Church, presenting us as God’s legal sons, a time when we enter into a full “face-face” relationship with God, an unveiling of God’s sons in the sense that they have been transformed and receive glorified bodies at the Rapture), **to wit** (that is to say, namely), **the redemption of our body** (when we will receive a deathless, sinless, and diseaseless body at the Rapture – “the day of redemption” - Eph. 4:30). **For we are saved by hope** (with the future hope of our redemptive body in view): but hope that is seen is not hope (“faith is the evidence of things not seen” – Heb. 11:1): **for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not** (our glorified body – 2 Cor. 5:1-2; Phil. 3:21), **then do we with patience wait for it** (with great anticipation since it is our “blessed hope” - Titus 2:13-14).



The road to Heaven travels through a wilderness of suffering (“the sufferings of this present time”). But Paul pictures our sufferings being placed on one side of a scale and our future glories on the other (specifically the glorified body that we will receive), and then we watch with him as the scale drastically tips downward toward the side

containing glory. The sufferings of this life will seem to have no weight at all when we look forward and eventually step into our eternal inheritance. This is why Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory."

One day, while visiting a home of mentally handicapped children operated by a Christian friend, Joseph Stowell, president of Moody Bible Institute, noticed the tiny hand prints of children covering the window. Stowell remarked about them to his friend. His friend responded, "Oh those prints. The children here love Jesus and they are so eager for Him to return that they lean against the windows as they look up to the sky." Do you have this kind of attitude about the Lord's return? Are you groaning and longing for the future glory that you will receive at Christ's coming?

This means the believer should not focus on today's sufferings; he should look forward to tomorrow's glory, the glory of our redemptive and eternal body, which will be free from sin and suffering (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:15–18). Today's groaning and bondage under the Genesis curse will be exchanged for tomorrow's glorious liberty! Our groaning will end in glory! Paul says that we are going to get a redeemed and glorified body someday. This is our blessed hope! We are headed toward this indescribable and infinitely wonderful glory! Glory could just be around the corner for us! It's the glory of a redemptive body, seeing Jesus for the very first time, and being exactly like Jesus!

"Oh, that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me,
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me."

But in order to get to this state of glorification, God must intervene. God will certainly intervene at the Rapture by transforming us instantly and making us just like Christ. But until then, the Holy Spirit intervenes to take us closer to this great goal of glorification and Christlikeness. This is why Paul says, "Likewise" (Rom. 8:26), or in a similar way, we need the Holy Spirit to intervene in our prayer lives today, so we can get our prayers aligned with God's ultimate purpose (Christlikeness), or becoming more like Jesus in our daily living, as we move closer to glorification.

Paul explains how this can be as he begins in Romans 8:26 by saying, “**Likewise** (“In the same way” - looking back to God’s ultimate goal and purpose for our lives which is glorification) **the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities** (helps our prayer infirmities with the intent of moving us, as the sons of God, toward this goal of Christlikeness): **for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself** (Himself) **maketh intercession for us** (before God’s throne) **with groanings** (feelings of deep compassion) **which cannot be uttered** (understood as a human language). **And he** (God the Father) **that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit** (the Father understands exactly what the Spirit is thinking because the Spirit’s will and the Father’s will are identical, and because God is one) **because he maketh intercession** (prayer intercession for the saints) **for the saints according to the will of God”** (redirecting and changing our prayers to conform to God’s will).

In summary, Paul is teaching that the Holy Spirit is slowly but progressively moving us toward God’s purpose of glorification (Christlikeness) as He aligns our prayers with God’s will. In Romans 8:18-25 our glorification (perfect Christlikeness) is in Paul’s thinking and in Romans 8:26 he reminds us that the Holy Spirit aligns our prayers with God’s will so that His ordained purpose for our lives (Christlikeness) will come to pass. This means that the Holy Spirit sometimes reworks and changes our prayers before the Father’s throne, so we can stay on course in our journey of Christlikeness. In other words, only as our prayers align with this great unfailing purpose (to produce Christlikeness) can we expect this purpose to come to pass in our lives.

I agree with William MacDonald, who states:

“There is mystery here. We are peering into the unseen, spiritual realm where a great Person and great forces are at work on our behalf. And although we cannot understand it all, we can take infinite encouragement from the fact that a groan may sometimes be the most spiritual prayer.”

Please note that the Holy Spirit is NOT praying through us causing us to speak in some kind of inarticulate and unknown language. Rather, the Holy Spirit is praying for us before the Father’s throne (“maketh intercession for us” – vs. 26). It’s the Holy Spirit who is groaning before the Father on behalf of the child of God and the “groanings” or groans are actually the Spirit’s prayers on our behalf. The believer is

not groaning – the Holy Spirit is groaning before the Father. The Holy Spirit’s interceding for us through prayer is something that “cannot be uttered,” which means it is something that is “unexpressed or unspoken.” No language that we know and can understand is in view here but only the inner groanings of the Spirit which is enough to communicate with the Heavenly Father. These are wordless groans. This has been called *intertrinitarian communication* – the divine articulations by the Holy Spirit to the Father on our behalf.

We have seen that creation “groans” (v. 22), Christians “groan” (v. 23), and now the Spirit “groans” (v. 26). “Groanings” or “sighs” means that the Holy Spirit expresses feelings of deep compassion for us and our weakened prayer condition. The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf with His deep sighs and compassion to demonstrate His love for us and desire to help us in our Christian life.

A man had a bad habit of grumbling at the food his wife placed before him at family meals. After complaining, he would ask the blessing. One day after his usual combination of complaining and prayer, his little girl asked, “Daddy, does God hear us when we pray?” “Why, of course,” he replied. “He hears us every time we pray.” She paused on this a moment, and asked, “Does He hear everything we say the rest of the time, even before we pray?” “Yes, dear, every word,” he replied, encouraged that he had inspired his daughter to be curious about spiritual matters. However, his pride was quickly turned to humility at his daughter’s next question. “Then, daddy, which does God believe, what we say before we pray, or what we say when we pray?”

This little story indicates that we need help when it comes to our prayers lives since we can pray in a manner which does not really reflect thanksgiving or we can “ask amiss” (James 4:3). The better we know God’s Word, the better we will learn to pray according to God’s will. But in these bodies of flesh, we will need assistance in our prayer lives and this comes through the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit “helps” (Rom. 8:26) our prayers by interceding for us and redirecting our prayers to match God’s will, even if God’s will includes suffering, so that we can move further toward the goal of developing Christlikeness in our personal lives. Even the Christian who prays sincerely, faithfully, and regularly cannot possibly

know God's purposes concerning all of his own needs or the needs of others for whom he prays. Paul illustrates this in 2 Corinthians 12:8 when He prays for deliverance but should have been praying for strengthening grace. Sometimes we don't pray correctly and therefore we must have our prayers realigned with God's will so that His ultimate purpose can come to pass in our lives which is to make us more like Jesus.



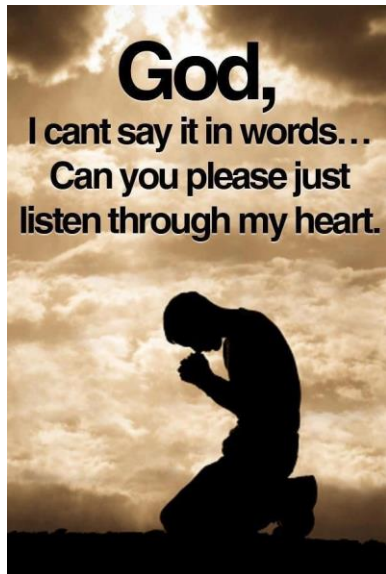
Many of us have watched a football game where our favorite team (the Philadelphia Eagles!) was about to score a touchdown. But on the one yard line the football was intercepted and the opponent ran the football in the opposite direction for 99 yards for a touchdown. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit intercepts our prayers and takes them in another direction so that they reflect God's will for our lives.

So what happens? When we do not know what to pray for, and even when we pray for things that are not best for our lives, we need not despair, since we can depend on the Spirit's ministry of perfect intercession on our behalf. When we pray, if need be, the Holy Spirit intercepts and interprets our prayers before God, correcting them and conforming to the will of God with deep sighs of compassion for each one of us.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for believers when we cannot pray because of a broken heart, when we do not know what to pray, and even when we pray incorrectly. He sometimes will change and conform our prayers to the Father's will. This is an amazing revelation of what goes on between two members of the Godhead who love us deeply as the sons of God.

Of course, Romans 8:26-27 does not imply that the Holy Spirit does everything, while we sit back and do nothing during our time of prayer. Rather, we are to keep praying, but as we pray, the Spirit sometimes will come along and grab the other end of our prayer to enhance it or change it before it gets to the Father. For

instance, He picks up our burden during our time of prayer and takes it before the Father's throne with His own groanings (deep sighs of inarticulate speech) that cannot be uttered. He also corrects our misdirected prayers and realigns them with God's will with groanings that cannot be uttered. The Holy Spirit knows HOW to take our prayers before the Father's throne and also WHAT to pray for when we don't. He is there for us.



Yes, the Spirit helps us by praying for us in our time of prayer weakness. How utterly amazing! Have you ever been so burdened that it was just difficult for you to pray? All we can say is, "Help me Father." It's in these times that the Holy Spirit comes to aid us in our prayers and enhances our prayers before the Father with deep sighs and groanings. Paul pictures the Holy Spirit prayerfully groaning on our behalf to convey the idea that He takes up our needs at the deepest emotional level (with deep sighs) and conveys our hurts and cares to the Father's throne with His groanings.

But more than anything else, the Spirit redirects our selfish prayers, our inability to know God's will for our lives in a given a situation, and makes them align with the will of God to bring about God's unfailing purpose of Christlikeness in our lives. What a great encouragement this is for God's children as they approach God during their time of prayer!

So how does the Holy Spirit's intercession connect with what follows in Romans 8:28 (everything works together for good)? The Holy Spirit will sometimes correct our prayers before God's throne and align them with God's unfailing purpose for our lives which is to produce Christlikeness in our lives. He makes our prayers conform to God's will with the goal that these "revised prayers" will bring about Christlikeness in our hearts and lives. In short, everything the Spirit tells the Father is for the benefit of this unfailing purpose coming to pass in our lives. The purpose that moves us toward glorification (Christlikeness) as the sons of God.

Think about this. The Holy Spirit prays for some things that we would never include in our prayers, such as losing our job, taking a trip to the emergency room due to an illness or accident, or losing the security of our retirement. The Holy Spirit prays about some things that God wants to use to bring about Christlikeness in our lives. Although we will not get to our perfect state of glorification in this life, the Holy Spirit is moving us progressively toward this goal as He intercedes for us during our daily times of prayer (Rom. 8:26) and the process of sanctification (2 Cor. 3:18).

Ray Stedman comments on this connection:

“Never separate this verse (Romans 8:28) from the previous two verses (Romans 8:26-27). The apostle is saying that what the Spirit prays for is what happens. The Spirit prays according to the mind of God, and the Father answers by bringing into our lives the experiences that we need. He sends into the life of those for whom we are concerned the experiences that they need, no matter what they may be. Now, that means that even the trials and tragedies that happen to us are an answer from the Father to the praying of the Spirit, doesn't it? You may leave this service this morning and become involved in an automobile accident on the way home. Someone may steal your purse. You may get home to find your house is on fire. There are a thousand and one possibilities. What we need to understand is that these things do not happen by accident. They happen because the Spirit which is in you prayed and asked that the Father allow them to happen -- because you or someone close to you needs it. These are the results of the praying of the Spirit.”

Yes, everything does work together for our good (Romans 8:28) and the Holy Spirit is making sure that this is exactly what happens in relation to our personal lives. The “good” in the context of Romans 8:28 is to be conformed to the likeness of Christ (“conformed to the image of his son” – vs. 29), and one reason this is happening throughout our days here on earth is because the Holy Spirit is praying for each one of us, in accordance with God's will, to bring about this transforming reality of Christlikeness in our lives, through our realigned and redirected prayers.

Professor E. C. Caldwell ended his lecture, “Tomorrow,” he said to his class of seminary students, “I will be teaching on Romans 8. So tonight, as you study, pay special attention to verse 28. Notice what this verse truly says, and what it doesn't

say.” Then he added, “One final word before I dismiss you—whatever happens in all the years to come, remember: Romans 8:28 will always hold true.”

That same day Dr. Caldwell and his wife met with a tragic car-train accident. She was killed instantly and he was crippled permanently. Months later, Professor Caldwell returned to his students, who clearly remembered his last words. The room was hushed as he began his lecture. “Romans 8:28,” he said, “still holds true. One day we shall see God’s good, even in this.”

According to Romans 8:28-30, the unending and ultimate good that comes from trials and tragedies is to primarily and ultimately develop Christlikeness in our lives. Everything happening in our lives is moving us closer to this goal of glorification (Christlikeness). The Holy Spirit’s role, through praying on the believer’s behalf, is bringing to pass God’s ordained, saving purpose from eternity past, the ultimate goal of which is conformity to Christ. This reminds me that if it were not the sustaining and intercessory work of the Son and the Spirit on behalf of believers (Rom. 8:26-27, 33-36), Satan could easily destroy our lives and undermine the completion of our salvation. Thank God for the work of the Trinity taking place on our behalf.

Essentially, Romans 8:28 promises that nothing will touch our lives that is not under the control and direction of our loving Heavenly Father’s purpose, which is to bring about our gradual conformity to Christ, the ultimate goal and plan of the Father. Everything that happened to us, everything people do to us or say about us, every experience we will ever have are all sovereignly used by God for our good.

The primary reference of “all things” (Rom. 8:28) looks back to the “sufferings of this present time” (Rom. 8:18-27, 35) and is pointing to the suffering related to our bodily pain, aging, sickness, disease, persecution, emotional and psychological distress. However, if God works these sufferings together for our good (Christlikeness), then He certainly weaves all the events of our lives together for our good, both the good and the bad, even the suffering that might be the result of sin and evil. Paul is not trying to limit the “all things” to a certain type of suffering nor is he excluding all the different happenings associated with our daily lives. With a broad sweep of his pen, he reminds us that all types of suffering and all the events

of our lives, good and bad, or happy and sad, somehow are used by God to bring about His goal and purpose for our lives.

We will not always understand the intricate details of why God allows everything to happen to us and we certainly will not always enjoy them. But we can be sure that God does have one overruling and unfailing purpose that He is bringing to pass for our lives no matter what we might face or experience in life. The main purpose for everything happening to us is to produce Christlikeness in us and through us.

- Have you surrendered to God's unfailing purpose for your life?
- How much do you really want to be like Jesus?
- Have you recently seen the Spirit redirect your prayers, so that God's unfailing purpose can come to pass in your life, or the life of someone else you love?
- Have you thanked the Holy Spirit for redirecting and changing your prayers?
- Has your faith been strong in the midst of your hardship and difficulty? Do you see God's providential hand working in all of it to make you more like Jesus?
- Do you believe that God can take both the good and the bad and weave all the events of your life together, to make you more like Jesus?
- In what ways have you been moving toward the goal of Christlikeness this week?
- Are you only focusing on today's problems and have you lost sight of the eternal weight of glory which is to come?
- Have you allowed today's burdens to steal away your heart from what God has in store for your life in the future?
- Do you need to refocus on the future and live with eternities values in view?
- Do you need to experience joy in your heart again even in the midst of your groaning?
- Have you come to the place where you can say, "Whatever He wants for me, His will, His will I must do?"
- Can you say today with all of your heart, "Dear Jesus, I love You and want to be more like You."

If you are honest, there may have been times when you ask this question “Why God?” “Why have you allowed me to suffer like this?” “Why did this happen to me?” Sometimes God brings some big tests into our lives to see what we are made of and to increase Christlikeness in our lives. This is what Romans 8:28 is all about. Former President Ronald Reagan likes to tell a story which he says is true about a newspaper photographer out in Los Angeles who was called in by his editor and told of a fire that was raging out in a hilly area south of Los Angeles.

His assignment was to rush down to a small airport, board a waiting plane, get some pictures of the fire, and be back in time for the afternoon edition. Breathlessly, he raced to the airport and drove his car to the end of the runway. Sure enough, there was a plane waiting with all the engines all revved up, ready to go. He got aboard, and at about five thousand feet, he began getting his camera out of the bag. He told the fellow flying the plane to get him over the fire so he could take his pictures and get back to the paper. From the other side of the cockpit there was a deafening silence. Then he heard these unsettling words: "Aren't you the flying instructor?"

Some of us have been in situations like this one. Our lives have been going along smoothly, flying on cloud nine. We thought we were in control, when "oops!" something changes and we realized we are in trouble. Maybe it's an illness, bereavement, marital or financial problems. The list goes on! Our text in Romans 8:28 is a recognition that life does not always operate according to plan. For God's people, it moves according to God's plan and unfailing purpose which is to produce Christlikeness in our lives.

The late Dr. Reuben A. Torrey was a great man of God. He knew the meaning of Romans 8:28 and called it a soft pillow for a tired heart. Many of us as God's saints have pillowed our heads on Romans 8:28. In fact, it can be said that this is one of the most beloved verses in all the Bible. Multitudes of saints have quoted it many times and lived by the comforting promise given in this verse. But we must move on to our next point on how God's unfailing purpose is revealed.

II. Through God's children.

Romans 8:28 is not a verse for universal optimism that can be claimed by all people. What did Paul mean when he stated, “to them that love God.” This phrase “them that love God” is further defined as the saints of God who are “the called” in Romans 8:28 and then in Romans 8:30 where the term “called” are referencing all God’s saved children who were called in eternity past. Paul will elaborate on this in verse 29. There is a sense where faithful and more obedient believers do love God more than less-faithful and less-obedient saints (John 14:15, 24; 21:15). However, it’s also a Biblical fact that all of God’s saints do love God; howbeit, in varying degrees and ways. God changes our hearts from being hostile toward Himself to wanting to please Him and love Him.



1 Corinthians 2:9

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

This is an all-inclusive statement about God’s saving plan for His children who are then said to love Him. In other words, these are spiritual blessings that God prepares for all His children who do love Him. Paul is not creating a dichotomy or division between Christians who love God more than others but is relaying the wonderful truth that all Christians do love God and will demonstrate this in their lives.

Ephesians 6:24

“Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.”

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

1 John 4:19

“We love him, because he first loved us.”

These verses, among others (1 John 4:16, 20-21), reveal that God's people are characterized as loving God. They are certainly opposite of those who are characterized as "haters of God" (Rom. 1:30). This is the way Paul is viewing God's people in Romans 8:28. He is viewing the saints in a corporate sense – not a selective sense. The phrase "them that love God" is a general description of all Christians (they love God) in the same way that the word "called" is a general description of His saving work in the lives of all God's children who have believed. The context clearly suggests this. All love God and all are called. There is a sense where all Christians love God while unsaved people do not love God because of their rejection of His Son and saving grace.

1 Corinthians 16:22

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha."

Again, all Christians love God in the same way that all Christian are called by God (Rom. 8:28, 30) which means they are one in the same or linked together. If one is called by God and born again, then they love God and God's children as John taught elsewhere (1 John 4:7-8). When people become Christians, they come to love God. The regenerated believer is given a new heart, a new will, and a new spiritual attitude, all of which will be expressed in love "because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5).

This means that only God's saints (the people that are rightly related to Him through Christ and who love God) can be reassured about the wonderful truth that God is working everything together for their benefit or good. Yes, God works all things together for "them that love God" (His people) but not for the unsaved or the devil's children.

Donald Grey Barnhouse comments in this way:

"For the unsaved, then, all things work together for ill because they do not love the Lord, because they are lying in the lap of the wicked one, resting supinely in his embrace, captives of his will."

Adrian Rogers said something similar:

“If you don't love God, this verse applies to you only in reverse. All things work together for bad to those who don't love God. Now, you think for a moment. The bad things work together for good if you do love God. The good things work together for bad if you don't love God.”

Think of what Rogers is saying. The Gospel is actually good news – the good news that Jesus saves! But if reject the good news by not receiving Christ as your personal Savior (John 1:12), then the good news becomes bad news to you for you have rejected the only message that can save you from hell (1 Pet. 4:17). The same wind that blows one ship into the harbor is the same wind that blows another ship upon the rock. All things do not work together for good to those who do not love God, for those who have rejected God's loving gift of salvation through His Son.

For the unsaved, all things ultimately work together for their eternal death and separation from God (“the wages of sin is death” - Romans 6:23). Romans 2:5 reveals: “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” In the case of the unbeliever, all things work together for his ultimate end which is God's wrath and judgment in the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15).

This verse is true of Christians and only of Christians. It is not a blanket promise to the whole human race. Why? First, it's because those who do not have a personal, saving relationship with God are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4) which means self-satisfaction becomes their god. They are not included in this group of regenerate Christians.

Second, it's because God's purpose is to progressively make only His children (not everyone in the world) like Jesus (Rom. 8:28) and one day perfectly make His children exactly like his Son (Rom. 8:29-30). This promise of all things working together for good is given to God's saints who will one day be exactly like Christ in their glorified state. This means the purpose cannot be shared with the unsaved.

Unbelievers do not have things working together for their good since the Bible says “Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not

known:" (Rom. 3:16-17) and their "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). We might conclude that Romans 8:28 is an evangelistic verse. We can use it in this way by asking two simple questions: Have you ever responded to God's salvation call upon your life? Are you part of God's saving purpose? You either answer "Yes" or "No" to these questions. There is no middle ground. Until you can answer "Yes" Romans 8:28 does not apply to you.

1 John 4:16

"And we (all God's children) have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love (expresses love toward others because God's love dwells in his heart) dwelleth in God, and God in him" (possesses a saving relationship with God as in 1 John 3:14, 24).

John is talking about a saving union and relationship with God ("ye in me, and I in you" – John 14:20). John repeatedly tells us in his epistle of the relationship enjoyed by all Christians who live in the sphere of God's love (1 John 4:7-8).

Coming back to Romans, with the proper use of exegesis, we must out of necessity understand the phrase "them that love God" (Rom. 8:28) as being connected with "the called" (Rom. 8:28) which is further explained as all God's children who have been "called" (Rom. 8:29, 30). This means that all God's children love God. Some love Him in a greater way than others, but all of God's children do love God, which is a manifestation of their divine calling to salvation by God. Those who love and those who are called cannot be separated in John's teaching. All of God's children, who love God, are then called according to His unfailing purpose to make them like His Son, Jesus Christ.

Roy Laurin said:

"If you are God's children you are in God's purpose, and in that purpose 'all things work together for good.'"

All of our sufferings in our present lives (Romans 8:18) serve as a constant reminder of His great and unfailing purpose to bring us into greater conformity to Christ. As children of God, who love Him, we must learn to bow the knee to God's providential workings in connection with our lives and get on board with God's

eternal purpose (Christlikeness) which came out of eternity past, and believe that everything and anything can be turned around to accomplish this great purpose in our lives.

“Out of the Darkness
Out of the dark forbidding soil
The pure white lilies grow.
Out of the black and murky clouds,
Descends the stainless snow.
Out of the crawling earth-bound worm
A butterfly is born.
Out of the somber shrouded night,
Behold! A golden morn!
Out of the pain and stress of life,
The peace of God pours down.
Out of the nails -- the spear -- the cross,
Redemption -- and a crown!”

Yes, all things work together for good to them that love God!

- Have you accepted what the sovereign God has recently allowed to come into your life?
- Are you ready to submit to His purpose for your life, so you can become more like Jesus?
- Are you running away from what God wants you to do, what He wants you to be and become?
- How much do you really love Him today?

“Earthly pleasures vainly call me,
I would be like Jesus;
Nothing worldly shall enthrall me,
I would be like Jesus.

He has broken every fetter,
I would be like Jesus;
That my soul may serve Him better,
I would be like Jesus.

Be like Jesus, this my song,
In the home and in the throng;
Be like Jesus, all day long!
I would be like Jesus."

III. Through the pursuit of Christlikeness.



God's unfailing purpose is revealed through our pursuit of Christlike living. We are excited to learn about Romans 8:28 but we cannot do this at the expense of Romans 8:29-30. This is because the reason for verse 28 (everything working together for good) is clearly explained in verse 29 ("conformed to the image of his son"). Romans 8:28 is an in-between step to the end goal (glorification – perfect Christlikeness). Paul reminds us about the future to help us focus on what God is doing in our lives today. The PROPHETIC in Romans 8:29-30 (glorification) is also to be PRACTICAL in our daily living (Rom. 8:28). Again, Paul links the past with the present to remind us what is happening in our lives today is an in-between step to something even greater! God's prophetic purpose reminds us that we are progressing toward this ultimate goal.

To be conformed to the image of His son is involving the word image and the word image was used when making Roman coins. How did you make a Roman coin back in the 1st century world? You would take a round piece of metal and place it under a die that had been engraved with the image of the emperor's head. You would take a heavy hammer and WHACK the die. When you pulled the round piece of metal from under the die, it would now have the image of the emperor's head on it.

God is allowing us to go through adversity, and He is even allowing us to be WHACKED at times, so that when the die is removed people will see the image of the Lord Jesus Christ in us. This is why God allows affliction in the life of a Christian. God takes us through affliction to help us to be more like His son. We can be certain that if we are a Christian, we will end up being more like Christ. That is what Romans 8:29 is about.

“And we know (The CERTAINTY of God’s providence = to know experientially in our heart) **that all things** (The SCOPE of God’s providence) **work together** (the CONTINUITY of God’s providence) **for good** (the RESULT of God’s providence) **to them that love God, to them who are the called** (the RECIPIENTS of God’s providence = God’s children) **according to his purpose** (the GOAL of God’s providence = making us like Christ as explained in vv. 29-30).

Romans 8:29-30 then go on to explain this purpose and the time we were called to God’s unfailing purpose of Christlikeness.

“For (the WORKING of God’s providence - in eternity past before Creation) **whom he did foreknow** (the chosen children), **he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son** (the destiny of God’s children), **that he might be the firstborn among many brethren** (the preeminent and distinguished Leader of His children). **Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called** (the unalterable calling of God’s children): **and whom he called, them he also justified** (the declared legal righteousness of His children): **and whom he justified, them he also glorified”** (the perfection of His children).

The heavenly Father is moving us toward this goal of greater Christlikeness (verse 28) which is explained in verses 29-30 and which will be fully and finally realized at the Rapture. So, any study of Romans 8:28 is incomplete without a study of Romans

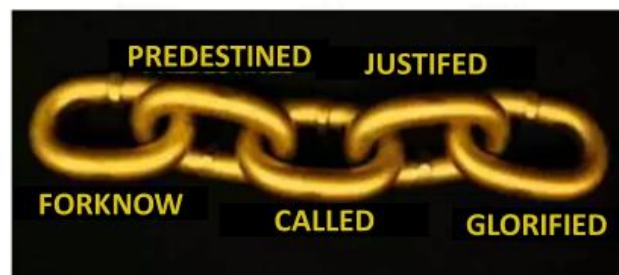
8:29-30. These verses give Paul's explanation of what it means to be one who has "been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Romans 8:29-30 specifies what the "good" in Romans 8:28 means (Christlikeness) and the time (eternity past) when we were called to be part of this wonderful promise. The good is Christlikeness and this glorious saving plan began in the past. This means the past and the present intersect one another in that what God ordained in the past is progressively coming to pass in the present. We are becoming more like Christ today and moving toward the final goal of glorification in the future. The beloved verse of Romans 8:28 declares:

Paul is going to go on and explain in Romans 8:29-30 how this unfailing purpose of God was part of the ageless past. Although our glorification (perfect Christlikeness) is in the future, it is stated in the past tense. It was something that God chose to do even before the universe was created. Yes, in God's mind, He considered His purpose as something that was already done and accomplished even before the universes was brought into existence. We were ultimately confirmed to be His children and be like His Son Jesus Christ long before we were every born. You say, "Wait a minute, I have not been glorified. How can Paul say that I have been glorified when I am still alive?" It's because in the reckoning of God, He "calleth things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17).

Between the start and finish of God's purpose and plan (glorification) are four steps – foreknowledge, predestination, calling, and justification. In Romans 8:29-30, Paul now goes on to explain why we are presently engaged in God's purpose to make us like Christ. He reminds us that this purpose began in eternity past.

What has become a passage of controversy, should actually be a passage of comfort and encouragement.

God's Unbreakable Chain



Romans 8:29-30

This Christlike purpose began in the past and can be viewed as the saving plan of God's unbreakable chain, which not only guarantees our salvation from God's wrath, but also a perfect conformity to Jesus Christ. Of course, a chain is no stronger than its weakest link but God's chain of salvation has no weak links! God's chain is a golden chain made on the anvil of God's grace with the hammer of God's omnipotence, that links eternity past with eternity future. And we are in-between the two filled with wonder and amazement at God's glorious salvation chain.

"Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span
at Calvary."

It should be observed that the great verbs and words of salvation, which are foreknew, predestinate, called, justified, and glorified (Rom. 8:30) are all in the past tense (the Greek aorist tense). This indicates that the entire unbreakable chain of events was something that occurred in the past. In other words, it is so certain that in God's eyes our entire salvation from start to finish is as good as done! God puts everything in past tense!

When we watch a parade, we watch one float at a time, but God sees everything at the same time. God already sees me like Jesus in a perfectly glorified body. This is the reason I believe in eternal security. That which has been settled in eternity past by God can't be undone in our time. Paul is not talking about someday in the future being called, justified, and glorified, but according to the Scriptures, I've already received all of these salvation blessings in the mind and heart of God even before the earth was created (Eph. 1:4). Every person who is genuinely saved is eternally saved. God's children can never be in danger of losing the spiritual life and salvation given to them by God through Jesus Christ, since God foreordained it in eternity past and considers our salvation, including our glorification, already complete.

We are now going to take a trip back into eternity past and see when God's purpose (to produce Christlikeness within us) began.

While we were on vacation at Disney World in Florida, my wife and I visited one of the places called Epcot. We went on a ride called “Soaring.” It was a multimedia ride that took you through the air to different places around the world. I remember it all too well! Paul is about to take us on a ride. We are going to soar into eternity past so see when God’s purpose originated.

Soaring Into Eternity Past



Romans 8:29-30 begins to speak of God’s unbreakable chain related to our salvation which is in the past tense. “For (the WORKING of God’s providence in eternity past before Creation, as in Ephesians 1:4, is the reason everything works together for our good). Paul now goes on to look at each link in the chain.



- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. DESIRE
“foreknow” | 2. DECREE
“predestinate” |
| 3. DECISION
“called” | 4. DECLARATION
“justified” |
| 5. DESTINY
“glorified” | |

A. DESIRE (“whom he did foreknow”) – In eternity past, God desired to love and save a group of people that would become His own children.

This foreknowledge speaks of knowing His elect body, which is the Church, in an intimate and loving relationship, through His foreordaining purpose and loving decree that was

accomplished in eternity past (Acts 2:23; Rom. 11:2; 1 Pet. 1:2). The “knowing” refers to God’s decision to enter into intimate fellowship with His elect body the Church. The “knowing” has to do with God’s predetermined plan and purpose in saving an elect group of people – not what He knew people will do within His plan and purpose.

John Philipps remarks:

“To say that God chose me because with His ability to foreknow the future He saw me choose Christ, robs God of His sovereignty. It would mean He has no alternative but to choose those who choose Christ—His choice is governed by ours. It throws the initiative on man. But God is sovereign and acts in accordance with His own will.”

Of course, this does not mean a person cannot personally choose to believe on Christ (John 3:16) and receive Christ as Savior (John 1:12). God does not take away our freedom to choose Christ as our Savior. What Paul is talking about is that God intimately knew and chose His elect body in eternity past – they did not know or choose Him (John 15:16). He foreknew them in accordance with His selection of them, not their selection of Him, and solely because of His desire to have an intimate relationship with them. Before we ever existed God knew us. This means He had our salvation in His mind. It was devised by God and according to God’s mind, it was a done deal in eternity past (“chosen us in him before the foundation of the world” - Eph. 1:3).

Jeremiah 1:4-5

“Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

God knows us for in eternity past He had plans to save us and make our lives into something that honors and glorifies Him. Our salvation and God’s purpose for our life was not an afterthought with God!

The question before us today is this. Are you willing to acknowledge that God has had His hand on your life and been drawing you to Himself, maybe for years, maybe for as long as you can remember, and you’re finally ready to stop running and believe on His Son Jesus Christ to be your Savior? You’ve long known someday you would come to Him, and right now there’s faith in your heart to say, “You win!” Maybe you are already a Christian and never have fully surrendered to the Lord. Are you ready to surrender to His will for your life today?

B. DECREE ("he also did predestinate") - In eternity past, God decreed that He would carry out His plan to make a group of people like Christ.

Predestination is based on God's foreknowledge. Predestination means to determine or mark out beforehand, to appoint beforehand to some particular end which contextually refers to conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. God has predetermined that all of His chosen children will be like His Son morally and spiritually and this was something that was confirmed as being already accomplished in eternity past (Ephesians 1:5, 11).

The ultimate goal of predestination is "*to be conformed to the image of his Son.*" This means to be fashioned like or have the same form or likeness of Jesus Christ from a moral perspective. Sanday and Headlam explain that this word "denotes inward and thorough and not merely superficial likeness." But this conformity does not neglect the body of God's redeemed saints. First of all, we will be like Christ bodily in that we will receive a transformed body that is painless, diseaseless, and deathless without any physical flaws (Rom. 8:23; Phil. 3:20-21). Second, we will also be like Christ spiritually or morally in our transformed bodies (Rom. 8:18; 1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2; Ps. 17:15).

Predestination in this context is linked to being like Jesus Christ morally and spiritually. It should be noted that in the Bible the word "predestinate" is never used in reference to lost sinners. It is only connected with God's saints and their eternal destiny which ultimately is glorification.

We cannot really apply the verses until we understand what the theology is teaching. God's predestination (to mark out beforehand) occurred chronologically in eternity past before our faith! Long before the creation of the universe – I existed! Yes, I existed in the mind, purpose and plan of God. He knew me (Jer. 1:5) as one of His called and predestined me to be morally like His Son.

Dr. Scofield said:

"Predestination is the effective exercise of the will of God, by which things before determined by Him are brought to pass."

Predestination simply means that God has marked out a glorious future for those who love Him (God's children) and this is to be conformed to the image of His Son or to be like Christ. I want to tell you something, when you look at Christians, you are looking at people who have been predestined to be like Jesus! God has selected beforehand the goal toward which He is going to move every one of us who believe in Christ and become part of His saving plan. The goal is conformity to the character of Christ. Paul is therefore teaching that everything that happens to us in this lifetime (Romans 8:28) focuses on this one supreme purpose of God which originated in the past (Rom. 8:29-30). In reality, God's purpose (our Christlikeness) was planned in eternity past, it is gradually occurring in the present, and will be finalized in the future. This is amazing grace. God has blueprint for each one of our lives and it will come to pass because in God's mind it has already been determined in eternity past and finished.

Theodore Epp explains it like this:

"As far as God is concerned, the entire process is already finished. And this is why, as far as the believer is concerned, all things work together for his good. Nothing is overlooked and no believer is lost in the process involved in making him like God's Son."

Although some of have tried to make predestination and all of God's saving purpose deal with His present work in the lives of people, when they are actually saved, the passage is clearly teaching that all of God's saving purpose or plan occurred in the past before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1:4). Once again, the word "predestination" means to mark out beforehand and speaks about something that God has done in the past. This means that everything about God's salvation plan and the people involved with this plan (the Church) was predetermined in detail before the universe was created.

The text goes on to say: "that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." The firstborn is the resurrected and glorified Christ, as seen in Colossians 1:15, 17. The firstborn refers to a title of dignity and preeminence that is given to Christ. He is the supreme and preeminent One of highest position over God's Church Age saints, who have been purified and transformed through their translation or resurrection at the Rapture.

Charles Spurgeon spoke about this in three pages of fine print in a way that I cannot, but I will summarize his insights. He says that “God predestinates us to be like Jesus that his dear Son might be the first of a new order of beings, elevated above all other creatures, and nearer to God than any other existences.”

“Moreover” (also and in addition) means that the link or chain of our salvation continues, when transitioning away from predestination (“whom he did predestinate”) to the next point in God’s chain.

C. DECISION (“*them he also called*”) – In eternity past, God decided to call a group of people to salvation and Christlikeness.

This means that God summoned or called a group of people in eternity past, by His own choice, to become His children, so they could experience all of His redemptive destiny and plan of salvation. Paul likes to use the word “called,” in referring to believers, to stress that our personal redemption owes its existence to the fact that God first took the initiative toward us. We are not intruders into this salvation which is ours through Jesus Christ. We were known and called long before we were born. As the well-known hymns says:

“He called me long before I heard,
Before my sinful heart was stirred,
But when I took Him at His word,
Forgiv’n, He lifted me.”

D. DECLARATION (“and whom he called, them he also justified”) - In eternity past, God justified a group of people which means to declare them as being legally righteous in the presence of God.

This means their sins were canceled out and they were covered in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Justification means to declare someone legally righteous in God’s presence, through the forgiveness of sins that comes through Christ’s sacrificial blood (Rom. 3:24) and His imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:4-5).

E. DESTINY (“and whom he justified, them he also glorified”) – In eternity past, God also confirmed the final destiny of a group of people to be glorified (to be exactly like Christ in a new body).

This is the ultimate and complete sanctification, the final goal of moral and redemptive Christlikeness that will be experienced in a new, sinless, painless, and deathless body (Rom. 8:18, 23), which also was already declared to be accomplished in eternity past.

So, there you have it - foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification. This is God’s unbroken chain that was linked together in eternity past, which guarantees our salvation and ultimate conformity to Christ in the future. You see, with God there is “neither before nor after” since He is eternal and views time differently than we do. He lives in the eternal present. We see events as they come to pass, one at a time. But God dwells in eternity and He sees the beginning, God sees the end, and God sees everything in between, all at one time. Strictly speaking, there is no past, present, and future with God because God sees everything in the present tense. Acts 15:18 says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world."

Of course, created human beings are not God and they do have a past and future and view time from a past, present, and future perspective. This means from our frame of reference and understanding, God purposed our salvation and Christlikeness in eternity past, even though from God’s perspective it has been already finished and finalized (“foreknew, predestinate, called, justified, glorified”), since He is the God of the eternal present.

From our human perspective and in our future, we will be glorified, even though God considered it finished even before the world was created. To be glorified is another way of saying that God’s children will be “conformed” to the likeness of His Son when they receive their new body at Christ’s return; and this is God’s ultimate “purpose.” No longer will God’s saints “fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Instead, in a new body they will perfectly reflect Christ. This is God’s ultimate “purpose” that Paul is talking about in Romans 8:28. It’s the goal to which we are moving and longing for in view of Christ’s return for His Church.

The believer's entire being and personality (the way he thinks, feels, and acts) is being conformed to the image of Christ progressively and will in the future be completely conformed to the image of Christ.

In Romans 8:28 the fact is stated (all things work together for our good today in our Christian life) and in Romans 8:29-30 the reason is given for the fact; it's because God in His past saving purpose has ultimately predestinated us to be conformed to the image or likeness of His Son. This means that what is occurring today in our lives (Christlikeness) is in a small way bringing us closer to the end goal. God is weaving all the events of our lives together to bring us closer to this final goal (conformity to Christ or glorification).

We discover from Romans 8:29-30 that God has done all that is needed to secure our eternal glory. He has already made His decision to save individual people who are part of His body – the Church: “and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” In other words, in God's mind, it's a done deal.

Many people get “hung up” on election and God carrying out His saving purposes (foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification) with an elect group of people on earth.

H.A. Ironside, writing “In the Heavens” (Ephesians), pages 27-28, speaks of God's election and saving purpose. “It has been pictured in this way. Here is a vast host of people hurrying down the broad road with their minds fixed upon their sins, and one stands calling attention to yonder door, the entrance into the narrow way that leads to life eternal. On it is plainly depicted the text, “Whosoever will, let him come. ‘Every man is invited; no one need hesitate. Some may say, ‘Well, I may not be of the elect, and so it would be useless for me to endeavor to come, for the door will not open for me.’ But God's invitation is absolutely sincere; it is addressed to every man, ‘Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely’ (Rev. 22: 17).

“If men refuse to come, if they pursue their own godless way down to the pit, whom can they blame but themselves for their eternal judgment? The messenger addressed himself to all, the call came to all, the door could be entered by all, but many refused to come and perished in their sins. Such men can never blame God

for their eternal destruction. The door was open, the invitation was given, they refused, and He says to them sorrowfully, 'Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life.' ... [But some will say], 'I am going inside: I will accept the invitation; I will enter that door,' and he presses his way in and it shuts behind him. As he turns about he finds written on the inside of the door the words, "Chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.'"

In this study, we are not discussing man's free volitional response to accept or reject God's offer of grace in view of God's sovereignty. Extreme Calvinism has left it impossible for man to be considered a free agent in any sense. Extreme Arminianism has advocated the fullest type of freedom and has left no room for the sovereignty of God. What we discover from Romans 8:29-30 and other Scriptures is that God determines to do WHAT He wills and He does it in the WAY that He determines (Eph. 1:5, 11). In other words, God brings His purpose to pass in the exact manner that He wills. There is no logical argument that free-will places restrictions on God and His sovereignty. A.T. Robertson said, "Paul accepts fully human free agency but behind it all and through it all runs God's sovereignty" (Word Pictures in the New Testament). We discover that Paul is not talking about human responsibility in this great passage of Scripture found in Romans 8:29-30, but is only discussing God's original purpose in saving His beloved saints and making them like Christ. Our salvation was planned in eternity past without any regard for our faith, free will, or intent to follow God's will.

I concur with Godet when he says:

"If his (Paul's) intention had been to explain the order of salvation in all its elements divine and human, he would have put faith between calling and justification, and holiness between justification and glorification"

Paul was not speaking about mankind's volitional response to God but God's response to mankind even before mankind was created.

The story is told of a group of theologians who were discussing the tension between predestination and free will. Things became so heated that the group broke up into two opposing factions. But one man, not knowing which to join, stood for a moment trying to decide. At last he joined the predestination group. "Who sent you here?" they asked. "No one sent me," he replied. "I came of my own free will." "Free will!"

they exclaimed. "You can't join us! You belong with the other group!" So he followed their orders and went to the other clique. There someone asked, "When did you decide to join us?" The young man replied, "Well, I didn't really decide, I was sent here." "Sent here!" they shouted. "You can't join us unless you have decided by your own free will!"

Divine determinism and human free will seemingly occupy opposite poles on the theological spectrum. But we must always remember that the Bible preserves a balance between God's sovereignty and man's free will. God's sovereign purpose does not cancel a person's need to respond to the free gift of salvation (John 3:16; 5:40).



John 6:37 sees both sides to this theological debate: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me (God's election – foreordained purpose); and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (God's way in bringing election to pass – free will).

Can the will of God and the will of man be reconciled, or must we everlastingly go round and round in circles on this question?

An illustration, might help us see that God, in the exercise of His sovereign will, does not necessarily deprive man of his free will. Imagine two men playing a game of chess; the one player is a master at the game, the other is very much an amateur. The master knows hundreds of moves for opening, pursuing, and closing the game, whereas the amateur plays blindly from one move to the next with little skill and only limited forethought. Both players have free will to make whatever moves they wish. But the master of the game, without in any way violating his opponent's free will, uses every move the amateur makes to move him into a corner and take his king.

This is just how it works in relation to God's sovereignty and man's freedom to choose or reject Christ as Savior. (John 1:12) God is moving behind the scenes to bring to pass His sovereign and saving purpose, which began in eternity past,

without violating man's freedom to choose or reject His saving grace. But we must remember that from God's side at least, the matter has already been determined and settled in eternity past. This means that no genuine believer need ever wonder whether he or she "has what it takes" to get to Heaven. God himself has planned through His past saving purpose that we will make it to Heaven. But remember that God's purpose is not merely to get us to Heaven but to make us like His Son.

The good of Romans 8:28 is directly related to God's saving purpose (our predestination or marked out destiny to be like Christ). According to Romans 8:29-30, God's saving purpose ultimately extends to our glorification, or making us like His Son, which goal Paul connects to our lives today (Romans 8:28) through progressive sanctification and transformation. This is why we sing:

"More like the Master I would ever be,
More of His meekness, more humility;
More zeal to labor, more courage to be true,
More consecration for work He bids me do.
More like the Master I would live and grow;
More of His love to others I would show;
More self-denial, like His in Galilee,
More like the Master I long to ever be."



In summary, Paul links “God’s purpose” (Christlikeness) with the present (Rom. 8:28) but realizes its origin is in the past (Rom. 8:29-30). He does this to remind the saints that what is occurring in their lives today is a journey that has already been planned by God. But he also connects the present-day status of God’s purpose (Christlikeness) with the future to remind God’s saints that what is happening in their present lives is preparing them in some small way for the future when we will actually be glorified and be perfectly like Christ in our newly transformed bodies (Rom. 8:30).

Our future glorification is presented in the terms of a moral and physical transformation that occurs in relation to both our bodies and souls. There is an internal and external glorification which works harmoniously together. In other words, we get the complete spiritual package in the coming day!

Romans 8:17-18 once again anticipates this exciting time:

“And if children (God’s children), then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (our grace-relationship with Christ guarantees that we share in all of Christ’s blessings and privileges); **if so be that we suffer with *him*** (the experience of all Christians in varying degrees), **that we may be also glorified together** (our moral and spiritual conformity to Christ in a newly transformed body). **For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared with the glory*** (the beauty, splendor, magnificence, excellence, majesty, exaltation, dignity, honor we will experience at our glorification) **which shall be revealed in us”** (our inner transformation to Christlikeness which is when we will be freed from the presence and every aspect of sin and evil).

Our groaning today will eventually be exchanged into our glorious liberty when we become conformed to Christ’s exact moral beauty and likeness. But our bodies will also be part of the glorification for they will be forever released from all pain and suffering. The entire sense of our glorification is that we will be given a newly transformed body, through rapture or resurrection at Christ’s return, and we will exist in a painless, sinless, and deathless body forever!

Romans 8:23 again anticipates this glorious transaction in the future:

“And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit (the blessings of the Holy Spirit in our lives today – regeneration, filling, transforming fruitfulness which produces Christlikeness, as in 2 Cor. 3:18, which is the foretaste of the glory to come!), even we ourselves groan within ourselves (inward sighing), waiting for the adoption (the thrilling climax to the adoption that took place at our conversion – our future glorification which is the time when we enter into the future privileges connected with our inheritance as God’s sons), *to wit* (that is to say), the redemption of our body” (our perfected state - when our bodies will be redeemed from all suffering, sin, pain, and even death).

“Yea, justified! O blessed thought!
And sanctified! Salvation wrought!
Thy blood hath pardon bought for me,
And glorified, I too, shall be!”

William Booth was greatly stirred by the needs of the poor of London, and realized that most churches were doing nothing to reach the “undesirables”—drunkards, morphine addicts, prostitutes, and the poor. He set out to reach them with what he called the 3 S’s: soup, soap and salvation. Thousands were saved among those that most churches had no interest in reaching. Booth gave his life for the cause of reaching others.

In his 80s, Booth’s work began to be hindered by blindness. He briefly lost his sight and then recovered it, but later he lost his vision permanently. His son Bramwell came to bring him the bad news that he would never see again. Booth replied, “God must know best, Bramwell. I have done what I could for God and the people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God and the people without my eyes.”

Booth had the right attitude that is reflected in Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.” As we have seen, this good is the constant development of Christlikeness. As we have already seen, when taking a ride into eternity past we discover that this was the time when God confirmed that we would be glorified and just like His Son. Paul reminds us what God planned in the PAST (conformity to Christ and glorification – Rom. 8:29-30) He

is bringing to pass in our lives today as we gradually become more like Christ (Rom. 8:28). He also reminds us of the future (Rom. 8:23) to encourage us in the present, when we realize that what is occurring in our lives today is preparing us in some small way for what it will be like in the future, when we will mirror the moral and physical likeness of Jesus in a new redemptive body.

We have learned that we cannot study Romans 8:28 at the expense of Romans 8:29-30. This is because the reason for verse 28 (everything working together for good) is clearly explained and stated in verses 29-30 (“conformed to the image of his son” and “glorified”).

A.T. Robertson speaks of "the gradual change in us till we acquire the likeness of Christ the Son of God so that we ourselves shall ultimately have the family likeness of sons of God."



The Bible reveals a three step process in God’s purpose of glorification. God is preparing us today (Romans 8:28) to be more like Christ in view of what He purposed in eternity past (Romans 8:29-30) and this will happen at the Rapture, the time we get a new body and finally meet Jesus (1 John 3:2).

God uses suffering to build Christian character in us, conform us to Christ, and prepare us for final glory. What God has begun, He will complete in us (Phil. 1:6) at the Rapture when our glorification occurs. Until then, the purpose for which all things are working together for our good (Rom. 8:28) is conformity to Christ. This purpose is gradually occurring today but will be finally realized when we are conformed to the image of His Son in eternity (Rom. 8:29). So Paul connects the past (what God has purposed) with the present (what God is doing).

Paul reminds you and me that God is preparing us to be more like Christ in view of what He has purposed to do at the Rapture (Rom. 8:23), when we get a new body and finally meet Jesus (1 John 3:2). If in eternity past God prearranged and predestinated us to perfect Christlikeness, then He will certainly bring this to pass. This means that what is occurring in our lives today (the “all things” related to suffering and by extension everything that happens to us and in our lives) is the gradual change and transformation into Christ’s moral likeness and beauty. We are headed toward this ultimate goal.

William Coltman, writing in “The Cathedral of Christian Truth,” states:

“The machinery of the universe works together along the line of God’s purpose and what is that purpose? It is very clearly stated in verses twenty-nine and thirty. It is that we shall be ‘conformed to the image of His Son’ it is in line with this purpose that ‘all things work together’ and not apart from it. God keeps this purpose in view as He works. This purpose is the goal of our redemption.”

If everything is working together for our good because of the unfailing purpose of God (Rom. 8:28), which is then stated as final glorification and perfect Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29), then Paul is linking our present sufferings as part of His purpose (Christlikeness in our lives today) as we move closer to the final goal. In linking the now (our progressive sanctified state) with the future (our perfect sanctified state), Paul views our gradual transformation today (Rom. 8:28) as a foretaste and preparatory step of what lies ahead (Rom. 8:29) and what God ordained to come to pass in the lives of the “called” and “them who love God.”

One Christian shared this:

“I have a friend back home named Alison. I’ve known Alison for several years now, and I’ve noticed something. In fact, it’s hard to help noticing if you’re around her a lot. She loves birthdays. You see, Alison will turn 16 this year. And though her birthday isn’t ‘til August, she’s been talking about it for months. She’s not excited just because of the presents and the sweets, although she likes them. It’s because she is excited about getting a year older. This year, of course, she’s looking forward to getting her learner’s permit – the first step towards her license.

“A couple of years ago, she was excited because she was going to turn 13 and she officially became a teenager. She had looked forward to that day for a long, long time. After she turns 16, she will no doubt start to count the months until she reaches the magic age of freedom: 18!

“Do you know why kids love birthdays and adults don’t? It’s because kids love what they are becoming and adults are afraid of what they are becoming! Do you remember that old commercial that said, ‘You’re not getting older, you’re getting better!’ If it is our desire to become like Christ, then we can be excited about our birthdays, too because we can be excited about what we are becoming. If we realize that we are becoming more like Him with every birthday, then we can act like kids again about our birthdays. If we build our hope on becoming like Christ, on the inward process, not the outward process of suffering, then we can take heart, and not lose heart, even in the midst of suffering.”

How does this gradual process of conformity to Christ occur? Later Paul tells us it is “by the renewing of our mind” (Rom. 12:2) through the Word of God and in another epistle by the continuing walk in Spirit (Gal. 5:25), we are being gradually changed into the likeness of Christ. This is a description of progressive or gradual sanctification.

2 Corinthians 3:18 speaks of our progressive sanctification:

“**But we all** (all God’s children), **with open face beholding** (reflecting) **as in a glass the glory of the Lord** (viewing the moral glory or beauty of Christlikeness in us as we would view ourselves in a mirror), **are changed** (transfigured) **into the same image from glory to glory** (from one manifestation and degree of His moral glory or beauty or likeness into another), **even as by the Spirit of the Lord**” (through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit).

It seems that the believer himself “reflects” the glory of the Lord just as the face of Moses reflected the glory of the Lord. This view fits most favorably with Paul’s imagery. The



“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

2 Corinthians 3:18

obvious point is this, there is no experience in the Christian life that will reproduce Christ's image in a moment of time. It is a process, not a crisis we pass through in a moment's time. We don't have to climb a mountain to get to Christlikeness! It happens gradually within us as the Spirit manifests Christ's life and character to us (Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 3:10). Also, it is not like the fading glory of the law (2 Cor. 3:7), but an ever-increasing glory and radiance of Christ's beauty is being created in us and through us by the Holy Spirit's transforming grace.

We can become distracted in life and look away from the goal of becoming like Christ. In the famous picture "Chariots of Fire," you might remember the great runner Abraham. He had won many races. His coach held him to a strict discipline. But he finally lost one of the races because he looked to the side. Just as he was about to finish the race he looked to see where the competitor was. His coach said to him, that look cost you the race. He was not single minded on the finish and the prize that lay ahead. In a similar way, we must keep focused on the finish line as we run the race (Heb. 12:1-2). We need to keep looking unto Jesus and desiring to be more like Him as we head toward the finish line – final glorification.

Another Christian man shared this:

"One of the chores that I enjoy doing is washing my car. Like to see that dirt disappear. Like to see the shine of a freshly washed car. Like to shine up the tires, make the chrome sparkle, clean all the fingerprints and dog nose prints off the windows. Finish washing it. Park in front of house, stand off at a distance and admire the finished product."

Beloved, our glorification is the finished product! Glorification is the end to which everything is working. It is the time when we will shine and glorify God with our redemptive bodies. We are already on the highway and traveling along life's pathway becoming more like Jesus (progressive sanctification) and someday we will reach the final goal (perfect sanctification). The "good" is not our personal happiness, pleasure, temporal advantage, a better set of circumstances, material success, meaningful work, a nice place to live, our well-being, or self-esteem. The good is Christlikeness or our moral transformation into the image of Christ. The "good" (Rom. 8:28) is directly linked to God's "purpose" (Rom. 8:28) for each believer which is explained in Romans 8:29-30, mainly our transformation into the

image and likeness of Christ, which was purposed in the past, which extends to the present, and ultimately into eternity.

The Biblical viewpoint and understanding of “good” refers to our conformity to Christ. I think the greatest problem with Romans 8:28 is that our good and God’s good are not always the same. Let me put it plainly. God is at work in your life making you like Jesus Christ. He has predestined you to that end. He is at work in your life making this happen. Therefore, anything that makes you more like Jesus Christ is good. And whatever it takes to make you more like Jesus is good.

So, it is in the providence of God that we learn more in the darkness than we do in the light. We gain more from sickness than we do from health. We pray more when we are scared than when we are confident. And everything that happens to us such as the tragedies, the unexplained circumstances, and even the stupid choices we make, all become intertwined together in the weaving process of God’s loving and eternal purpose. In fact, God will not give up even when we do!

“You can know beyond all doubting,
In the trial you're passing through,
That our God's great love and mercy
Is at work for good in you.”

Believers are called in accordance with a settled plan and purpose of God which was created in the past counsel of the Godhead. Paul teaches that this purpose of God comes down out of eternity past like a great steamroller. Don’t think you can stop it. In fact, you had better get on board and ride it through by faith! God has a general and overriding purpose for us when we are pass through trials. It’s to become more like Jesus! How do we make sense out of suffering? We remember what God is doing through suffering – making us more like Jesus! How do we pass through the valley of trouble? We retreat to His grace (2 Cor. 12:9) and know that Christlikeness is God’s overriding purpose for the troubles that we pass through in life.

Pritchard shares this:

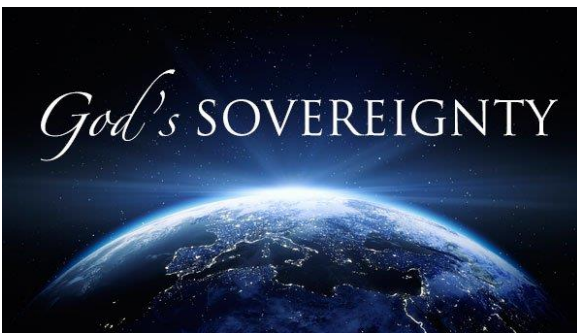
“God is at work in your life. Right now, you are rough and uncut, and God is patiently chipping away at you. But remember this: He will never intentionally hurt you. In the end, you will look like the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Yes, we will be trophies of His grace! Speaking of trophies, I have a large softball trophy out in my man cave. The reason the trophy is important to me is not because of the value of the trophy or how pretty it is. When I look at that trophy, my mind goes back to my softball days when our team won the trophy.

A trophy is supposed to direct your mind to somewhere else. Do you know what is supposed to happen when you are being conformed to the image of Christ? People in your office, or your friends, or your family, everyone you are around is supposed to see you and have their mind directed someplace else, which is to Jesus! All things in relation to your life are designed to make you more like Jesus so people in your company, in your business, and in your life will ask, “What is different about Johnny?” And you will be able to say that Johnny has a relationship with Jesus Christ.

- In what areas of your life have you seen evidences of Christlikeness?
- What are some areas of improvement?
- Can you rest in what God is doing with your life at this particular time?
- How can you reflect Christ in your present life and situation?
- What ways can you demonstrate that Romans 8:28 is working in your life?

IV. Through God’s sovereignty and providence.



Romans 8:28 is based upon the truth of God’s sovereignty which means God is the supreme authority and super power in the universe and everything is under His control. It’s also based upon His providence which means He moves everything in the universe according to

His plan. The fact that God is working all things together for our good speaks to the providential work of God in the events of our lives.

George Zeller explains it well:

“The comforting truth of this verse is based especially on one attribute of God--HIS SOVEREIGNTY. If all things work together for good (all events, all circumstances, all trials, all happenings, etc.), then it follows that God must be over and must control all things. This is not fearful fatalism and determinism. This is the wonderful fact that an ALL-WISE, ALL-LOVING, JUST GOD is in complete control of all things!”

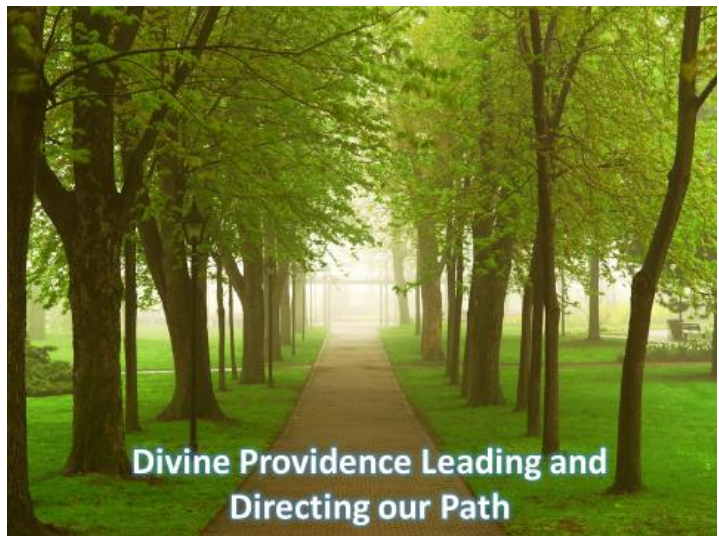
This is why we as believers can say with confidence:

“When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say,
“It is well, it is well with my soul!”

Why can a Christian come to this conclusion? It’s because he knows that God in His sovereignty and providence is somehow guiding the events of his life. He can rest in God’s purpose.

The fact that all things “work together” for God’s children is an act of the providence of God. Providence speaks of the law of Divine Intervention, which means the providential movement of God in this world and in our own personal lives, caring and providing for us (Ps. 24:1; Matt. 5:45; 6:33), as well governing the events of our lives (Isa. 45:5), while bringing to pass His primary purpose in our lives which is Christlikeness (Rom. 8:28).

God has a great working purpose connected with our lives and all of life’s events pass through His providential hand. The providence of God does not mean that God forces



or makes people do evil things and overrides their human will. It means that He allows and orchestrates everything to happen in order to bring about His purposes in a fallen world. The Bible teaches that because of God's providence, we can know that all things work together for good, both good and bad. God's providence is His gracious oversight of the events of the universe, which include the events associated with the life of God's children.

God's providence or oversight flows out of His sovereignty and means that He superintends the course of events which are directly related to our personal lives, sometimes by directly causing them (infections, natural disasters, accidents, etc.), while at other times indirectly causing them to happen (sinful hardships brought upon by the devil and the lives of others). This means that in the masterplan of God, everything is working under God's control. There are no accidents or blind chance when it comes to God superintending the events of our lives. Romans 8:28-30 teaches us that everything happens for one main reason – to make us more like Jesus! God is working through our circumstances to mold us into the moral likeness of Jesus Christ.

John Phillips said:

“Like the cogs in an intricate piece of machinery, all things work together for good to the called of God for the simple reason that God's purposes cannot be thwarted. Although we may not see it now, everything will one day be seen to fit into God's perfect plan.”

Psalm 33:11 speaks of God's unfailing purpose:

“The counsel (purpose) of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

Proverbs 19:21 speaks to the same matter:

“There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel (purpose) of the LORD, that shall stand.”

These Bible verses teach that God never changes His purpose, whatever it might be. In other words, His decrees (efficacious or permissive) are never frustrated, and His ways are always accomplished. The plan of the Lord is carried throughout generations, age after age, because it is settled and sure in Heaven. This means that

God brings certain events into our lives, sometimes directly by His own hand, and at other times permissively through the hands and events caused by others. But nevertheless God still allows them to come to pass to bring about His purpose for our lives which according to Romans 8:28-30 is to ultimately produce Christlikeness in our lives and ultimately bring Him glory.

Psalm 115:3 declares God's sovereignty and providence:

"But our God *is* in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

Psalm 135:6 similarly states:

"Whatsoever the LORD pleased, *that* did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places."

God is the sovereign Controller and supreme power in the universe who brings about His will. Romans 8:28 reminds us of God's sovereignty and providential supervision over all the events of our lives. Nothing happens by chance in relation to our lives. Everything occurs under God's supervision and direction. God is in charge! Sometimes He allows events to happen in our lives which are the result of living in a sin-cursed and fallen world.

Bakers Evangelical Theological Dictionary explains the providence of God in this way: "Simply put, providence encompasses every aspect of the created order. From beginning to end, from heaven to earth, from animate to inanimate, from individuals to nations, from hours to ages, from weeds to wheat, from birth to death, from catastrophe to calm — everything is within the loving presence and involvement of the heavenly father. In his wisdom, power, righteousness, and love he is hastening slowly to work out his own eternal purposes for his own glory and for our eternal good."

God is also working out His plan with our lives which should cause us to reflect Christlikeness in our daily living.

Jeremiah 29:11

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you (this personalizes God), saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil (this is God's promise that all things do

work together for our good – not for our evil), to give you an expected end” (a hopeful end which is God’s providential purpose coming to pass in our lives).

For the Jews, the promise was given that after 70 years of captivity they would return to the land and experience hope and peace (Jer. 29:14). This was God’s “expected end” for them and it was a good thing! In a similar way, God’s purpose is designed to always produce something good in our lives (Rom. 8:28) and we know as New testament saints this goodness is Christlikeness.

Does God think of us today like He did with Israel? Yes, I believe that He does (Jer. 1:5; Ps. 132:1-6). It is amazing to contemplate that God thinks about me! His thoughts do not revolve around “I’m going to get you” but “I am going to bless you.” By way of application, God’s desire is to get us to be obedient to Him, so He can bless us, and so we can experience peace in our lives instead of the calamity that is related to disobedience. God is not out to get us but to bless us. This means there is no need to be afraid or discouraged. The doctrine of God’s sovereignty and providence over our lives should produce humility in our minds and hearts in view of His infinite greatness and unfailing purpose connected with our lives.

“Our God is far greater
Than words can make known
Exalted and holy, He reigns on His throne.
In infinite splendour He rules over all
Yet He feeds the poor sparrows
And He knows when they fall.

His power is great and will ever endure
His wisdom is peaceable, gentle and pure
But greater than all these glories I see
Is the glorious promise that He cares for me.

He rides the wild heavens
He strides through the sea
The high mountains tremble
To hear His decrees.

His voice with great thundering
Sounds from above
But to His own children
He whispers His love.”

1 Chronicles 29:11-12

“Thine, O LORD, *is* the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; thine *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all.”

Yes, our God reigns! This has been called God’s macrocosmic or universal kingdom. He is control of everything that happens in the world and universe. As the sovereign God, He is superintending the events of America and our world, and even more importantly, He is bringing to pass His ordained events for our own personal lives, either directly or indirectly, but the hand of a sovereign God is involved with all of it. We are not a speck in the cosmos that God is uninterested in. He is very interested in our lives and wants us to get on board with His purpose.

On the front porch of his little country store in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln and Berry, his partner, stood. Business was all gone, and Berry asked, “How much longer can we keep this going?” Lincoln answered, “It looks as if our business has just about winked out.” Then he continued, “You know, I wouldn’t mind so much if I could just do what I want to do. I want to study law. I wouldn’t mind so much if we could sell everything we’ve got and pay all our bills and have just enough left over to buy one book—Blackstone’s Commentary on English Law, but I guess I can’t.”

A strange-looking wagon was coming up the road. The driver angled it up close to the store porch, then looked at Lincoln and said, “I’m trying to move my family out west, and I’m out of money. I’ve got a good barrel here that I could sell for fifty cents.” Abraham Lincoln’s eyes went along the wagon and came to the man’s wife looking at him pleadingly, her face thin and emaciated. Lincoln ran his hand into his pocket and took out, according to him, “the last fifty cents I had” and said, “I reckon I could use a good barrel.”

All day long the barrel sat on the porch of that store. Berry kept chiding Lincoln about it. Late in the evening Lincoln walked out and looked down into the barrel. He saw something in the bottom of it, papers that he hadn't noticed before. His long arms went down into the barrel and, as he fumbled around, he hit something solid. He pulled out a book and stood petrified: it was Blackstone's Commentary on English Law.

Lincoln later wrote, "I stood there holding the book and looking up toward the heavens. There came a deep impression on me that God had something for me to do and He was showing me now that I had to get ready for it. Why this miracle otherwise?"

God is sovereign and on some grand scale He ordains and allows every event to happen in our lives. And ultimately He does this to shape us, grow us, and make us more like Christ.

Isaiah 46:9-11 declares:

"Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken *it*, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed *it*, I will also do it."

Behind all the acts of God in this world, including our own personal lives, lies His sovereign eternal purposes. We must believe in spite of the hardships of life that we must face. Theologians call this the *permissive decrees* of God which occur in a sin-fallen world. God *orchestrates* and *allows* all events to occur in a world cursed by sin and many of these things touch our own lives – sickness, pain, broken homes, abuse, abortion, poverty, earthquakes, plagues, etc.

Ephesians 1:11 speaks directly to God's saving purpose for our lives:

"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated (to His saving inheritance for our lives – the glories of salvation, Heaven, and most of all to

glorification or Christlikeness) according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

God’s sovereign and saving purpose for our lives is to ultimately make us like His Son Jesus Christ. This is what we are specifically talking about in Romans 8:28. Whatever other providential purposes God DIRECTLY brings into our lives (efficacious decrees - by his own immediate agency) or ALLOWS to come into our lives (permissive decrees - those events he has permitted others to bring upon us) are designed to bring about His ultimate purpose for our lives – Christlikeness (Romans 8:28-30).

Most of us look upon contrary circumstances as intruders into our lives, obstacles in the path blocking our progress and we must somehow conquer them, remove them, and get them out of the way. We sometimes conclude that we need to get victory over our circumstance. But let me change one word in this. It’s not about getting "Victory OVER Circumstances." It’s about getting “Victory THROUGH our Circumstances.” This is because God uses the challenging circumstances of our lives as the means to mold and reshape us, so we might become more like Christ.

God’s ultimate goal is for us to be like His Son, Jesus Christ. Today God is ordering and superintending the events our lives so we can progressively reach this goal. Of course all things do not automatically and immediately work themselves together for our good, but through time we can see the sovereign guidance of God that is the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of our life.

God’s providence does not mean that we never make mistakes in life, never make wrong decisions, never go down the wrong path, and never allow sin to have the upper hand at times in our life. What it means that through all of this, God can still on some grand scale superintend (without forcing or superimposing His will on us) the events of our lives and work them together for good, which is to make us more conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

“O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer;
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I’ll forfeit all of earth’s treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart."

- Have you surrendered to God's sovereignty over your life?
- Have you been resting in God's purpose or resisting God's purpose for your life in some particular area of your life?
- In what ways can you evidence Christlikeness through the event that God allowed to come to pass in your life?
- How can you apply Romans 8:28 to your family situation, your marriage, and your recent accident or medical emergency?

V. Through our faith in God's promise.

In 1799, Conrad Reed discovered a seventeen-pound rock while fishing in Little Meadow Creek. Not knowing what it was made of, his family used it as a doorstep for three years. In 1802, his father, John Reed, took it to a jeweler who identified it as a lump of gold worth about \$3,600. Who knows that it would be worth in today's currency. This lump of gold, which was used as a doorstep for three years in North Carolina, is one of the biggest gold nuggets ever found east of the Rockies.

Now think of this. Until its composition was determined, its value was unknown. In a similar way, until the composition of our faith is determined (what it is really made of), its strength is unknown. God allows trials in our lives, not to hurt us, but to strengthen and prove our faith in Him and make us more like His Son Jesus Christ.

Paul does not say that "We hope all things work together for good" but "we know" that they do. This is not conjecture or surmising. This is not "perhaps so, maybe so, or likely so." Faith says "we know" that God has a specific purpose for the trials, the complexities we face, and mysteries of life. His purpose is to make us more like Jesus in our character, obedience, and overall living. We should know beyond all doubt that every aspect of our lives is in God's hands and will be divinely used by the Lord to make us more like His Son.



2 Timothy 1:12 speaks of this same certainty: “For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for 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.”

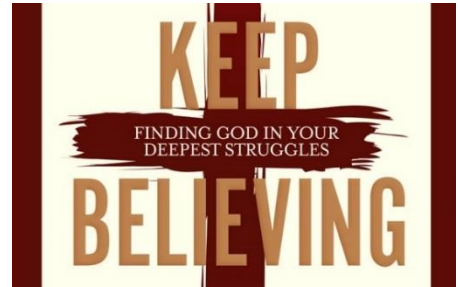
The phrases “I know” and “we know” carry the meaning of absolute certainty and great confidence. Tragically, many Christians throughout the history of the church, including many in our own day, refuse to believe that God guarantees the believer’s eternal security or that our salvation is secure through the promise of God. But God says we can know that all of God’s saving purpose will come to pass in our lives, which includes the promise of eternal life and ultimately conformity to Jesus Christ, since He planned all of this in eternity past (Rom. 8:29-30).

Since this is true, we must learn to look above our troubles and trials in faith, realizing that in the grand scheme of God’s purpose, we can become more like Jesus when passing through our trials. We can know through faith that God’s promise of working all the events of our lives together for good is absolutely true. It takes faith to experience Romans 8:28 in our personal lives.

Dr. F. B. Meyer once said:

"On an occasion, if any promise of God should fail, the Heaven would clothe themselves with sackcloth. The sun, the moon, and the stars would reel from their courses. The universe would rock. And, a hollow wind would moan through a ruined creation the awful message that God can lie. But, thank God, while many may lie, God cannot lie. He abides faithful."

Keep the faith! We must keep believing! To “know” (Rom. 8;28) means an absolute and positive knowledge which one has beyond any doubt. It refers to that which was to be common knowledge of the Christian, a settled intuitive knowledge which the Holy Spirit makes real. God Himself has placed the knowledge of this verse in our hearts. We can “know” this, not just academically but experientially, by faith, as we pass through the trials and sufferings of life. We know that God’s saving purpose is coming to pass to make us more like Jesus.



Charles Spurgeon used to say:

“I do not need anyone to tell me how honey tastes; I know.”

Of course, we don’t know all the intricate reasons why certain things happen. We don't know why babies die or why cars wreck or why planes crash or why families break up or why good people get sick and suddenly die. But this we do know - God is at work in our lives and He has not forgotten us! We do know God is making us more like Jesus, but to the rest of God’s sovereign workings in the world and in connection with our own lives, we can only say this: “We will understand it better by and by!”

Job lost his family, fortune, and fame. But in the end he could say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job 13:15). That is the kind of faith in God that we need today. We know that He is going to make things work out for good because He’s the One who is energizing and moving everything according to His purpose.

“God never moves without purpose or plan.
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the LORD, though your testing seems long.
In darkness, He giveth a song.

O REJOICE IN THE LORD!
He makes no mistake.
He knoweth the end of each path that I take!

For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.”

Of course, today the gold that is produced in our lives is Christlikeness. Trials should build Christlike character and virtues in our lives.

It was during the San Francisco earthquake many years ago that a saint of God walked out into the scene of destruction and debris and actually smiled. A friend asked her, “How can you smile at a time like this?” Her reply was, “I rejoice that I have a God who can shake the world!” How wonderful to be able to face life—and death—unafraid. Like Job, this woman could face death realizing that God was unraveling His purpose for their lives and they were right in the middle of it!

Our part is to submit to the sovereignty of God. In faith and surrender to God’s purpose, we can say, “It is Well with My Soul.”

Charles Spurgeon again states:

“Submit cheerfully. There is no affliction that comes by chance. We are not left to the misery of believing that things happen independent of a divinely controlling power. Not a drop of bitter ever falls into our cup unless the heavenly Father’s wisdom places it there. We dwell where everything is ordered by God. Whenever adversity must come, it is always with a purpose. And if it is God’s purpose, should I wish to escape it?

“We have this blessed assurance that ‘All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose’ (Rom. 8:28). Adversity can be viewed as a healing medicine and not a deadly poison. Thus without a murmur, drink it all and say with your Savior, ‘O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.’”

Have you ever looked at how many times the expression “by faith” occurs in Hebrews chapter eleven?

Verse 4 – “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain”

Verse 5 – “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”

Verse 7 – “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”

Verse 8 – “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.”

Verse 9 – “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as *in* a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise.”

Verse 17 – “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*.”

Verse 20 – “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.”

Verse 21 – “By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, *leaning* upon the top of his staff.”

Verse 22 – “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”

Verse 23 – “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw *he was* a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.”

Verse 24 – “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”

Verse 27 – “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”

Verse 29 – “By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry *land*: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.”

Verse 30 – “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.”

Verse 31 – “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.”

The common denominator of the lives of God’s saints should be faith, a growing faith, a dynamic faith, and enduring faith. And yes, we need to possess a strong faith in God’s purpose for our lives which is to produce Christlikeness in us and through us as we pass through the sufferings and trials of life. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.” We know this and accept this by faith. The knowing is more than just a head knowledge but a heart acceptance that God knows what He is doing and we can trust in Him.

It was reported of John Wesley that one day he was walking with a troubled man who expressed his doubt as to the goodness of God. He said, “I do not know what I shall do with all this worry and trouble.” At that moment Wesley saw a cow looking over a stone wall. “Do you know,” asked Wesley, “Why that cow is looking over the wall?” “No” said the man who was worried. Wesley said: “The cow is looking over the wall because she cannot see through it. That is what we must do with our wall of trouble - look over it and above it and beyond it. But looking over your troubles does not mean overlooking their reality. When we have arrived at the place where we can look over our troubles, we have arrived at the place where we can live above them.”

Even when we accept the statement that “all things work together for good” we sometimes find it difficult to understand this side of glory. Often we must simply believe it, express faith in what God tells us, and take our burden to the Lord and

leave it there. Only when we “know” (Rom. 8:28) by faith that God is working His purpose, which is to make us into the likeness of His Son, can we look above and beyond our trials and troubles in life. The secret is knowing it and really believing it!

The story is told of a father whose son was killed in a terrible accident. He came to his pastor and in great anger said, “Where was God when my son died?” The pastor thought for a moment and replied, “The same place he was when His Son died.” This might be viewed as the final piece of the puzzle of Romans 8:28. The Heavenly Father knows what we are going through for He, too, has been there. He watched his own Son die. Therefore, we can say with the apostle Paul, “We know that all things work together for good.”

We know, not because we have all the answers, but because we know Him, who understands suffering, and who can therefore in His infinite wisdom (Col. 2:3) weave all the tragic events of our personal lives together to produce Christlikeness in us and through us. Our part is to believe that a loving, merciful, and understanding God who treats us with compassion, as He weaves together His unfailing purpose for our lives, which often includes intense suffering and disappointments.

- Has your faith remained strong as you pass through God’s unfailing purpose for your life?
- How can you strengthen your faith in view of the changing events associated with your life?
- Can you honestly say that you know that God has a plan and purpose in everything that happens to you?
- Are you ready to remain rooted in your faith and reflect Christlikeness in your character and conduct while passing through your difficulties and trials?

Have you ever read or watched the fairytale called “Alice in Wonderland?” I think some Christians are living an “Alice in Wonderland” kind of life. By this I mean that many Christians have lost a sense of the purpose they have in life, the purpose God has called them to. Christians without goals are a little like Alice in the fairy tale “Alice in Wonderland.” In a conversation between her and the Cheshire Cat, Alice

asked, "Would you tell me please, which way I ought to go from here?" The cat said: "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." Alice then said: "I don't much care where I go," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat. This is why you should never trust a cat!

As Christians, we should care about the direction that God wants us to move and go in life. We should be deeply concerned about His purpose for us that is clearly outlined in Romans 8:28, which is to become more like Christ in our character, conduct, and course of living.

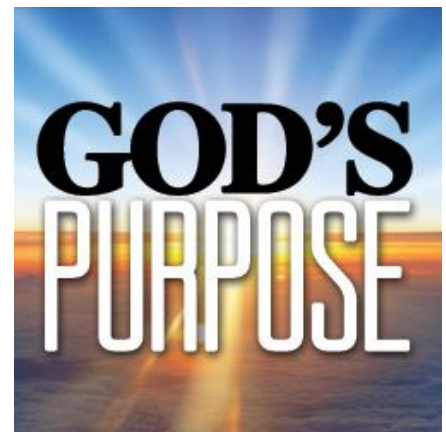
VI. Through God's unfailing purpose.

This point reflects the title of our study. We need to stress this in a separate section simply because of the importance of God's purpose in relation to our daily living. We also want to highlight some important verses that bring out this ultimately and unfailing purpose of God for our lives.

Isaiah 14:27 declares:

"For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul *it*? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"

God's purpose always come to pass in the way that He has planned. We have seen this already when studying about God's sovereignty and providence. According to Romans 8:29, God's unfailing purpose is something that was confirmed by God in eternity past when He predestined or planned that we will be perfectly conformed to Christ and glorified. This will occur at the Rapture. Until then, Romans 8:28 reveals that God's unfailing and ultimate purpose for His saints is to produce the blessing of Christlike attitudes and transformation in our daily lives, which is but a foretaste of the final goal and glory that awaits us which is glorification and perfect conformity to Christ (Romans 8:29-30).



2 Corinthians 1:20 also declares:

“For all the promises of God in him *are* yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”

In other words, all of God’s promise are true and will come to pass in the way He has said. God’s unfailing eternal purpose (Christlikeness) will come to pass in our lives. It is taking place gradually today and will culminate in our exact conformity to Christ at the Rapture. But today God promises that the events we pass though in our lives are designed to produce Christlikeness in our hearts and lives.

When that eminent servant of God, Mr. Gilpin was arrested to be brought up to London to be tried for preaching the Gospel, his captors made fun of his frequent remark, "Everything is for the best." When he fell from his horse and broke his leg, they were especially merry about it. But the good man quietly remarked, "I have no doubt but that even this painful accident will prove to be a blessing."

The Bible says that “All things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). So what is the “good” toward which all things are working? We spoke of this already. Within the immediate context, Paul undoubtedly is reflecting on our final salvation which is glorification or Christlikeness (Rom. 8:18, 30). This means that whatever is happening in our lives today which causes us to become more like Jesus Christ is designed to bring us closer to this goal. Of course, any purpose that God has is not an afterthought. It is a forethought. It is something that God prearranged and planned (Rom. 8:29-30) which means He will bring all the events of our lives together in order to fulfill His supreme goal or purpose – Christlikeness. As Louis Talbot said, “This is God’s plan of the ages!”

What God promised is that He has in eternity past conformed us to the exact moral and spiritual image or likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ (“conformed to the image of his Son” – vs. 29). But we have not arrived yet (Phil. 3:13). As God’s children and pilgrims, we are traveling toward this ultimate goal and slowly and progressively becoming more like Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). God does not merely intend to do something for us. He is now doing something in us (Gal. 2:20). What is happening in our lives today as Christians is a real Christlikeness, reflecting His graces in every aspect of daily living.

- Are you bitter toward God because of something you think He caused or allowed to happen?
- Have you ever been disappointed with God that He did not give you something that you asked for and thought you should have?
- Have you ever been angry with God because He allowed something to happen to you or a loved one that you knew He could have prevented?
- Have you ever resented something about your physical appearance - the physical features you were born with that God gave you?
- Have you ever been upset with God because a situation did not turn out the way you wanted it to?

If any of these questions are true, and for most of us at least some of them are, there is a truth that you need to treasure, a fact that you need to frame, a principle that you need to ponder and it is this: NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS, GOD ALWAYS ACTS IN YOUR BEST INTEREST. Of course, this is seen in Romans 8:20-30. God uses all the events of our lives, the good and bad, to make us more like Jesus Christ, to make us more forgiving, more loving, more gracious and kind, more patient, and more calm and peaceful. This is God's unailing purpose for us.

The stated purpose is defined in Romans 8:28 and described in Romans 8:29 as conformity to Christ. This reminds us that until we get there (perfect conformity to Christ), God does use every event that comes into our lives (good and bad), as a constant reminder and teaching lesson of His eternal and ultimate purpose or goal He has for us, which is to make us like Jesus Christ. Each trial and event that we pass through in this life is designed to make us more like Jesus Christ and is to be viewed as a step toward the final goal (glorification or perfect Christlikeness).

We live in a sighing, sobbing, suffering world. But we can be sure that a better day is coming for God's saints! God has given us the guarantee in eternity past that something will come to pass in the future.

Romans 8:23 once again looks ahead to this final goal of Christlikeness which is God's unailing purpose that will come to pass for each one of our lives: "And not only *they*, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit (the

regenerating, baptizing, and filling ministries of the Holy Spirit), even we ourselves groan within ourselves (inwardly sighing and longing for our future glorification), waiting for the adoption (the future and outward display of God's adopted children), *to wit*, (to make known) the redemption of our body" (when our bodies are redeemed or set free from all sin, sorrow, pain, and imperfections).

God is going to take us from groaning to glory! Our spirits and souls have already been redeemed, and our bodies will be redeemed at the time of the Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13–18). The redemption of our bodies is another way to speak of the glorification of our bodies. Both redemption and glorification, as they relate to our future, mean and anticipate the same thing, which is to experience perfect Christlikeness, both inwardly and outwardly, in a new body that is sinless, painless, and deathless. God's purpose will not fail! We will be exactly like Jesus someday!

But until we get to the end (perfect conformity to Christ), we must pass through the many events that God allows to come into our lives, which are designed to gradually increase our Christlikeness.

Ephesians 4:13 reveals God's unfailing purpose:

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith (UNITY), and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man (MATURITY), unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (CONFORMITY).

This verse also speaks of God's unfailing purpose. It reveals the goal of the spiritual gifts of the pastor-teachers and evangelists. They are given to the church for the spiritual growth that brings unto into a greater conformity to Christ, until we finally receive our glorified bodies and perfect Christlikeness. The dangers related to the Christian life can be summarized as immaturity, instability, and gullibility (Eph. 4:14). But through the teaching and preaching of God's Word, we should be growing and maturing in our Christian lives. Paul was looking at the church as a whole, made up of all true believers, being united together, gradually growing and maturing together until it reaches spiritual maturity.



There is both a present and future emphasis in this verse. Paul is teaching that we are all traveling on the road of sanctification and Christlikeness today but at the same time we are moving toward the final goal (perfect Christlikeness). The idea of a “perfect man” and the “fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13) speaks of maturity and conformity to Christ. This fullness, this

Christlikeness, is that which belongs to Christ and that which is imparted by Christ for “of this fullness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16) and “the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:23). The Christian life is the Christ-life and we are to live out His life through us until we are conformed to the exact image of God’s Son. It would be wise for all of us to cry out with John, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

Richard Strauss said:

“God is not trying to produce successful Christian business people who can impress the world with their money and influence. He is not trying to fashion successful church leaders who can influence people with their organizational and administrative skills. Nor is He trying to fashion great orators who can move people with persuasive words. He wants to reproduce in His followers the character of His son—His love, His kindness, His compassion, His holiness, His humility, His unselfishness, His servant attitude, His willingness to suffer wrongfully, His ability to forgive, and so much more that characterized His life on earth.”

How long will this growth process continue? The answer is until the Rapture, the time when we are perfectly conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Today there is a “measure” of this Christlikeness which we should experience and demonstrate but in the coming day the full measure! Paul’s is teaching that at one point, when the Rapture occurs, we will then reach perfect unity and the perfection of spiritual development. Today conformity to Christ is occurring gradually in our lives but it will ultimately be finalized at the Rapture when we are completely and forever conformed to the exact moral likeness of Jesus Christ. God’s children are pictured

as being on a journey moving toward this ultimate goal. We are progressively becoming more like Christ, some more than others, but there is coming a day when we will be exactly like Christ, when we receive a new redemptive body and are glorified, mirroring the exact moral likeness of the Son of God.

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 also brings together both the now and the future of God's unfailing purpose: "**For which cause** (because of God's strengthening grace and thanksgiving in our hearts – vs. 15) **we faint not; but though our outward man perish** (the body), **yet the inward man** (our heart where God communicates to us, communes with us, and controls us - Eph. 3:16) **is renewed day by day** (PRESENT CHRISTLIKENESS - made to grow, made new with strength and vigor resulting in God's purpose of progressive sanctification and Christlikeness occurring in our lives). **For our light affliction** (when compared to the magnificence and greatness of our future glory), **which is but for a moment** (our afflictions in this life are temporary and transitory), **worketh for us** (producing, accomplishing, bringing to pass) **a far more exceeding** (surpassing and immeasurable – beyond our imagination) **and eternal weight of glory**" (FUTURE CHRISTLIKENESS – the honor, magnificence, resplendent beauty which refers to our final glorification and perfect conformity to Christ, our redeemed body and spiritual likeness to God's Son, which far outweighs in its greatness, magnificence, and spectacular beauty, any trials and suffering that we pass through in this life).

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 explains that God's strengthening grace that He gives us every day revives or rejuvenates our hearts as we pass through hardships and sufferings. But Paul also teaches us that God's life-sustaining grace or strength comes into our hearts as we look ahead to our future glory. Our future Christlikeness encourages and strengthens our hearts today as we pass through our fiery trials. We are going to get a perfect body and perfect moral resemblance of Christ.

What we will be in the future helps us deal with what we are facing in the present. God strengthens us today (day by day and with each passing moment!) by pointing us to eternity, the time when we will be conformed to the image of Christ, possessing a perfect body that is without pain, without sin, and without disease.

1 Corinthians 15:54

“So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

In Hebrew, the word for glory (2 Cor. 4:17) is derived from the verb to be heavy, which means the Jews would see a play on words, even though it was veiled by the Greek. Our glory is something that has spiritual weight attached to it, which means that it is far greater, more magnificent than our present-day sufferings. When we look at our present sufferings, they are trivial in comparison to the magnificent, splendor, of our redemptive body and glorification that we will experience in the future.

Paul is teaching that our future glorification (perfect Christlikeness) is something that is viewed as weighty or increasing in its greatness and magnificence. The sense is this. The more we pass through our present sufferings in this life, the greater and better the future looks! The future looks better all the time! It gains more weight, gains more magnificence, gains more wonder and amazement, as we pass through trials and reflect on the consummation of our Christlikeness, in a redeemed body, living with Christ in Heaven.

Moorehead comments in this way:

“A little joy enters into us while we are in the world; we shall enter into joy when there. A few drops here; a whole ocean there.”

What this means is that our future glory, our glorification and perfect Christlikeness in a redeemed and sinless body, far outweighs any suffering that we could experience in this life. This means we must keep our focus on the future to help us deal with the present. Remembering the future (our sinless, painless, and deathless body) has a direct impact on how we react to trials today, or when we pass through times of suffering. Our reaction should be that what we are experiencing today is insignificant to the spectacular future that awaits us!

Romans 8:18 says something similar:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are not worthy to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

In other words, there is no comparison to what is happening in our lives today (suffering) with that is going to happen when we get our new bodies and become like Jesus. This is amazing! All of our heavy, continuous burdens, and trials are said to be “light” when compared to the spiritual “weight” of our glorification (our redemptive body – our Christlikeness). This means that our suffering that we are experiencing today is nothing in comparison with the glory and greatness that we will experience when we are with Jesus and are like Jesus! On the scale of greatness, our future far outweighs anything that we pass through in this life, including pain and suffering. Keeping this mindset and perspective will give us courage and a proper attitude when passing through our sufferings in this life.

Think of what 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 is saying. Let it grab hold of your heart today. Even when our outward circumstances are dire and seemingly hopeless from our perspective, God is progressively purifying and renewing our inner beings (Christlikeness) in preparation for our final glorification, the ultimate good of someday being exactly like Jesus! He is giving us spiritual strength and vigor to go on by giving us a proper perspective on the future. We might be decaying physically but we don’t have to be decaying spiritually but continually developing in our Christlike character and living as we look toward the final goal and greatness of our glorification.

2 Corinthians 4:18 concludes with these words of hope: “While we look not at the things which are seen (our present state of suffering in our bodies and our sinful departures from Christlikeness), but at the things which are not seen (our perfect conformity to Christ in an eternally redeemed body that is



**“the things which are
seen are temporal ”
(2 Cor. 4:18)
Suffering and Sin**

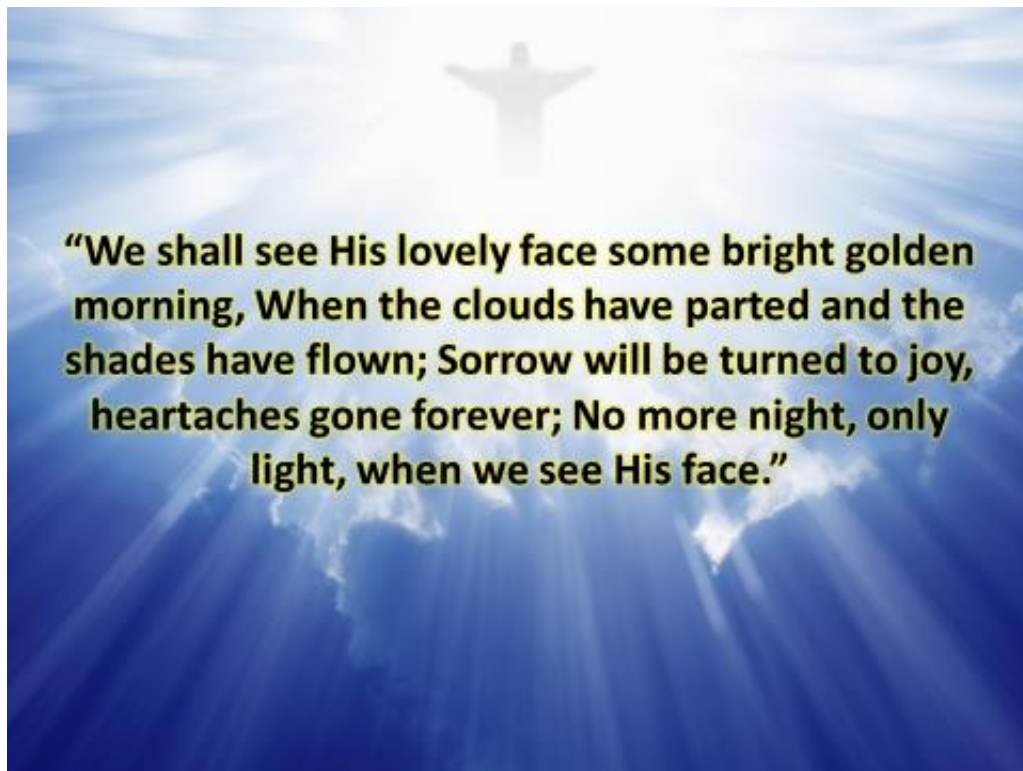


**“the things which are
not seen are eternal”
(2 Cor. 4:18)
New Body &
Glorified State**

sinless, painless, and deathless): for the things which are seen *are* temporal (our pain and suffering related to sin and evil in this life); but the things which are not seen *are* eternal” (those things which relate to our new bodies, our perfect moral likeness to Christ, and to all the rich blessings we will experience in our perfected glorified state).

1 John 3:2 states the grand finale of God’s unfailing purpose:

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God (as a result of the new birth - 1 John 1:12), and it doth not yet appear what we shall be (physically and spiritually – referring to our present state of existence in our bodies with all of our failures and sufferings): but we know (like Romans 8:28 - we know”) that, when he shall appear (in the Rapture), we shall be like him (our full transformation or final glorification both spiritually and physically); for we shall see him as he is (when we gaze upon Christ’s moral perfection and beauty, we will do so having the same moral perfection and beauty in our redemptive bodies).



All of this will occur at the coming of Christ for His beloved Church. When we see Jesus at His appearing, we will be instantaneously transformed into His eternal

moral likeness and also be liberated from the sufferings related to our present earthly bodies. At the moment we meet Jesus, we will be free from the possibility of defilement and sin and also be released forever from all sickness, sorrow, and death.

What a glorious moment and day this will be! We will be transformed spiritually (a sinless life) and physically (a painless and deathless body) and therefore reflect the likeness of the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Of course, the physical does not refer to an exact physical resemblance of Jesus but to experience the same physical blessings Christ possesses in a resurrected and eternal body. We will be like Christ morally and physically in the sense that we will possess a body like His – a sinless, painless, and deathless body that will exist throughout the eternal ages of time.

Philippians 3:20-21 portrays the transformation like this:

“For our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look (eagerly wait with expectation) for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (the Rapture and Christ’s return for His Church): Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body (His resurrection body which was sinless, painless, deathless), according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (our transformation into perfect Christlikeness will be accomplished by the same divine power which the Lord will later use to bring the world and entire universe under His authority and power during the Millennium).

What a glorious day it will be! And it could happen today! In the next moment!

“It could happen in a moment, In the twinkling of an eye
It could happen in a moment he could split the eastern sky.
Though our hearts will feel unworthy yea how happy we will be,
When the saviour comes from Heaven when his blessed face we'll see!
I am listening every moment, for the mighty trumpet sound
What a time we'll have together, when the saints will leave the ground!
All our toiling will be over! All our sorrow and its pain!
It could happen in a moment Jesus Christ could come again!”

This is God's unfailing purpose!

- Are you connected with God's unfailing purpose for your life?
- How has Christ been working in your own heart and through your life?
- What improvements can you make when it comes to demonstrating Christlikeness in your daily life and routine?
- Do you possess within your heart the blessed hope of the Rapture and your future conformity to Christ? Is it a daily expectancy and longing in your heart?
- Have you been allowing God to minister and heal your inner spirit even through your outward body may be racked with pain and discomfort?

An airline company was disturbed over a high percentage of accidents so they decided to eliminate human errors by building a completely computerized plane. "Ladies and gentlemen," came a voice over the PA during the initial flight, "It may interest you to know that you are traveling in the world's first completely automated and computerized plane. Now just back and relax because nothing can go wrong....go wrong....go wrong....go wrong....."

We sometimes wonder how "when things go wrong," that this can somehow be used by God to bring about His purpose to make us more like Christ. But the time when things go wrong is the time when God can really begin to work in our hearts and lives and bring about change or transformation into Christlikeness.



I recall touring the Toyota plant when we were in Lexington Kentucky. I was amazed to see how large the assembly line was for these cars. Everything in the assembly line was perfectly synchronized. As the cars would pass through the line, the individual parts would be added

to the cars, whether it was engine parts, seats, electrical wires, or windshields. As the cars moved through the assembly line, the employees would together to bring about a brand new Toyota Camry. It took perfect synchronization or working

together to bring about the finished product. In a similar way, God is synchronizing or working together all the events of our lives together to bring about the character of Christlikeness in us and through us. This is what we have been studying about in Romans 8:28-30.

VI. Through God's mysterious working.

Let's reiterate our main thesis in this study. Paul states God's purpose in Romans 8:28 and then defines it in Romans 8:29-30 as the time when we will be conformed to the exact likeness of Christ's image at the Rapture of the Church. But what is the connection of the future with our present lives?

GOD'S PURPOSE STATED:
"All things work together for good"
(Romans 8:28)

GOD'S PURPOSE DEFINED:
The **GOOD** of **CHRISTLIKENESS**
(Romans 8:29-30)

Paul is teaching that everything that is happening in our lives today ("all things" – Romans 8:28) is working together to gradually move us toward this future and ultimate goal of glorification (perfect Christlikeness). Paul is teaching in Romans 8:28 that the purpose of Christlikeness is progressively coming to pass in our lives today as we move closer to the Rapture. God is weaving all the events of our lives together to bring us closer to this final and ultimate goal. This is why we can conclude that everything that makes us more like Jesus is good for us ("all things work together for good") In fact, everything is designed to bring about the goodness of Christlikeness in our hearts and lives as we move toward the final goal.

"All things work together"



Yes, "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). This speaks of the mysterious working of God on the believer's behalf to bring about His supreme, unfailing purpose which is to make us more like Christ. The word "work" (Romans 8:28) comes from "sunergeo" (the Greek word) from which is derived the English term synergism,

which is the working together of various elements to produce an effect greater than, and often completely different from, the sum of each element acting separately. In Romans 8:28, it is actually God's providential power and will, not a natural synergism of circumstances and events in our lives, that causes everything to work together for good. The illustration of weaving, forming fabric by interlacing threads together is one way to look at how God intertwines all the events of our lives to produce the primary goal of Christlikeness.

No matter what happens in our lives as His children, the providence of God uses it for our temporal as well as our eternal benefit which is to make us more like Christ. God has a mysterious way of bringing about His sovereign purposes, even as we pass through the storms related to suffering and sin. In God's providence, sometimes He saves us from tragedies and sometimes by sending us through them in order to draw us closer to Him and make us more like Jesus.

“God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
Deep in unfathomable mines,
Of never-failing skill;
He fashions up his bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.”



Deuteronomy 8:15-16 reminds us the wilderness journey of God's people: "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, *wherein were* fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where *there was* no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee (their faith and obedience to God), to do thee good at thy latter end."

This sounds like the Old Testament Romans 8:28! Difficult as the tests were, the Lord was a good teacher because He had a wonderful future for His people. For us today, God does us “good” in and through us both now, as we become more like Christ, and also in the future when we are glorified and perfectly like Christ.

John MacArthur remarks:

“The Lord did not lead His people through forty years of difficulty and hardship to bring them evil but to bring them good, the good that sometimes must come by way of divine discipline and refining.”

Yes, God in His own mysterious way uses “all things” to bring about His transforming purpose in our lives, which today is to make us more like Christ. The primary reference of “all things” is probably looking back to the “sufferings of this present time” which refers to bodily weakness and pain, the physical ailments of our bodies, and likely other kinds of emotional and psychological suffering (Rom. 8:18-27, 35). But there is a greater or wider application. If God works these sufferings together for our good (Christlikeness), then He certainly weaves all the events of our lives together for our good, both the good and the bad, the sad and the happy, the hard times and the easy times, and the defeats and the victories. Trials, temptations, tests, sin and evil – nothing is left out. Paul is not limiting the “all things” to only suffering but to every event that happens and to every detail that touches our daily living.

Charles Hodge states:

“Of course, this does not mean that events besides afflictions do not work together for the good of Christians, but merely that the apostle is speaking here about the sufferings of believers.”

Apparently on some grand scale and in accordance with God’s providential plan, all the events of our lives, even the suffering that might be the result of sin, evil, and persecution for Christ can in the end somehow be used by God to bring us into greater conformity to Christ. God works all of them together for our good and His glory. Think of a weaver carefully interlacing strands of colored thread into a preplanned pattern. This is what it means when Paul states that “all things work together for good.” God is weaving all the events of our lives together and sees

them as being part of His sovereign purpose and plan for our lives which is to make us more like Jesus Christ. This is the perspective we are to have during the times when life hurts and we are passing through a low point.

We must remember that God is getting us ready, slowly preparing us for what lies ahead! All the events associated with our lives (the good, the bad, and the ugly) are seen as God's way of bringing us closer to the end result (perfect Christlikeness). God uses our present circumstances to ultimately bring about more spiritual fruitfulness, sanctification, and more Christlikeness in our lives, which is one step closer to the end goal (John 15:2, 5, 8).

It would seem that God reminds us of the future (perfect conformity to Christ – Rom. 8:29) as a way of helping us focus on the present, what He is doing with our lives today, preparing us for our final glorification when we “shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

So, before we get to the end (perfect Christlikeness at the Rapture), which is a goal that God has mapped out for us in eternity past, we can know or believe that all the events of our present-day lives are providentially used by God to slowly bring us toward this ultimate goal.

Philippians 3:14

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

a. Our passion

Paul is talking about becoming more like Christ in this section of Scripture. This “mark” or goal is sanctified Christlikeness. It looks back to “this one thing I do” (vs. 13). There is one thing we should invest our lives in and that is becoming more like Jesus! Christ-centered living, victory, and transformation means we are to live closer to Christ and be more like Christ in our everyday living. We must stay in hot pursuit of this single purpose and goal. This should be our passion in life.

The verb “press” (diōkō) describes vigorous, concentrated pursuit. God has called us to press on – not give up! It's always too soon to quit!

At the foot of one of the Swiss Alps is a marker honoring a mountaineer who fell to his death attempting a steep ascent. The simple brass marker gives his name and this brief epitaph: 'He died climbing.' The epitaph of every Christian should be that they died climbing the upward path as they lived out a Christ honoring life of sanctification.

"I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

b. Our prize

The mention of the "prize" is likely a reference to our reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim 4:7-8). Someday we are going to stand before Jesus Christ and be examined for how we have run the race down here on earth. There is a race to win and a prize to obtain! As we become more like Jesus and keep living a sanctified life that resembles the life of Jesus, we can be sure that there will be great reward at the end of our journey.

c. Our privilege

The word "high" speaks of an upward or heavenly calling that comes from God. This word refers to the northern quarters of the heaven and can denote God's call from Heaven which is to follow the goal of sanctification and Christlikeness for each one of our lives. In other words, in order to receive this reward (prize) we should strive to live in accordance with our calling, which is to live in a sanctified Christlike manner every day of our lives. We have a call from Heaven! Do you sense this call in your heart today? This call is to be more like Jesus Christ, to reflect Christ in our everyday attitudes and conduct. To live a Christlike virtuous life.

Some conclude that the "high calling" (upward calling) may be a reference to the Rapture of the church, the time when we receive the heavenly summons and are caught up to Heaven. It's during this time when we will receive the prize that we have earned for being like Jesus Christ.

Actually both the heavenly call to Christlikeness and the Rapture calling work hand in hand. This is because we do have a call from Heaven to live Christlike and someday we will experience a call to Heaven where we will be conformed to the exact image of Christ. However, it seems best to understand this section of Scripture as teaching that God wants us to follow His heavenly or this upward call and goal for our lives which is to be like His Son.

1 Thessalonians 4:3

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.”

Sanctification is Christlikeness. It’s when we seek to mirror the life of Christ in every area of our lives.

Philippians 3:20-21 looks ahead to the time we reach the final goal:

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

There is coming a day, at the Rapture, when we do reach the final goal of Christlikeness. We will receive a redemptive body that will perfectly mirror Christ’s moral and physical likeness. This means our bodies will be transformed like Christ’s resurrection body and we will also at this time resemble Him in all of His moral perfections and beauty. What a glorious moment, goal, and destiny awaits us! We will reflect Jesus Christ in a perfectly transformed body and His life will be flawlessly mirrored in our lives.

Until we get to this final goal, we can KNOW that everything happening in our lives today is working toward God’s ultimate goal for our lives in the future – Christlikeness. God is mysteriously synchronizing all the events of our lives to bring about this goal in our lives. The mass of events occurring in our lives which seem to be without point do have a purpose. Every event associated with our lives as God’s children should be viewed as “a means to an end” to get us to be more like Jesus Christ. Everything that happens is wrapped up in the eternal purpose of God. Even

the negative in this life is seen to have a positive purpose in the execution of God's eternal plan which is to mold us into the likeness of His Son.

One Christian man said:

"If you are an egg, your affliction will make you hard-boiled and unresponsive. If you are a potato, you will emerge soft and pliable, resilient and adaptable. It may sound funny to God, but there have been times when I have prayed, 'O Lord, let me be a potato.'"

Our sufferings that we pass through in life might seem to be spiraling out of control and have no meaning attached to them. But this is not the case. Life is not the random mess which it may sometimes appear. We do not always understand what God is doing nor do we necessarily welcome it. Nor are we told that His work is for our comfort. But we can know that in all things God is working towards our supreme good.

We need to reiterate that God in His own mysterious way uses "all things" to bring about His transforming purpose in our lives, which today is to make us more like Christ.

Pastor Steven Cole comments:

"Whether it's a minor irritation at work or a major, life-changing catastrophe, you can trust God to use it in His sovereign purpose to conform you to the image of Christ. There is no comfort in the view that God is not sovereign over the terrible things that happen to us. But there is great comfort in knowing that the sovereign God is working all things together for good for His people."



The "all things" include things that we think should be left out. When Paul says "All things work together for good," that seems too inclusive for us. All things? We might go far as to say that "some things" work together for good. But Paul says "all things." Even death for the believer is good for it takes him into the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 5:8; Ps. 23:6).

Steven Cole again writes on the all things of Romans 8:28:

“It includes big catastrophes—tornadoes, tsunamis, wars, plane crashes, and terrible accidents. But it also includes the relatively minor frustrations of life—daily hassles, problems at work, car trouble, traffic jams, relational problems, and discouraging situations.”

But, what about sin? Does sin work together for good to those who love the Lord? Remember that there is nothing intrinsically good about any sin and the acts of our sinful rebellion can never produce any goodness (Matt. 7:18). But God can even work together our sinful departures from Him and turn them around for our good, when He convicts us, chastens us, and brings us back to Himself, resulting in greater zeal for Him and newfound spiritual growth. Not even our sins can ultimately thwart God’s purpose of sanctification and Christlikeness from coming to pass in our lives.

As a father, I found no joy in spanking my children. There are times I cried with them. But God disciplines us so that we might share His holiness.

Hebrews 12:10

“For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness.”

God does not discipline us and afflict us because He enjoys making us miserable. On the contrary, God desire only to bless us. But sometimes, the best kind of blessing that we can receive is a trail that will make us stronger and more Christlike in our character. God’s chastisement can be compared to a remedial tool for producing Christlike holiness in our hearts and lives.

Psalm 119:67 reflects this same truth:

“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”

Psalm 119:71 reiterates:

“*It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*”

Have you ever said this? It takes a lot of faith to say that your affliction was for your own good because of how it brought you back to God and His way for your life. One

Christian man said, “God gave me cancer to bring me back to Himself.” Yes, God can even use our sinful departures in life to bring affliction upon us, in order to bring about good in us.

Donald Barnhouse summarizes well:

“And one must never be drawn into the logical fallacy of thinking that this makes God a partner in sin, or that He condones sin in any way. God could never have worked with the human race if He had not worked with them as sinners. We are sinners, and the whole pattern of the life of each of us is made by the interweaving of the acts of our Adamic natures and the results of those acts.”

- ✓ Does “all things” include the worst that happens to us? Yes.
- ✓ Does “all things” include the things that hurt us deeply? Yes.
- ✓ Does “all things” include the times when we are heartbroken? Yes.
- ✓ Does “all things” include the times when we sin and backslide in our Christian life? Yes.
- ✓ Does “all things” include the times when we doubt God? Yes.
- ✓ Does “all things” include the times when we stray from God? Yes.

Of course, God can also cause the sins of other people to work for our good. If we are seeking to live a godly life in Christ, seeing a sin in others will make us hate and avoid it more (Prov. 4:15; Eph. 5:11; Titus 2:11-12). Evil as it is, sin can bring us good by stripping us of our pride and self-sufficiency which is yet another step toward greater Christlikeness. When people sin against us, we can also react by exhibiting Christlike character and conduct toward them, God can work the grace of forgiveness in our hearts.

In the midst of all these things, whether it’s sin, evil, and tragic events, God is always at work. He is never deterred by us or anyone else. In fact, nothing happens to us outside His control. There are no mistakes and no surprises with God. God can bring about His purpose in our lives even when we can’t. God does it even when we many not believe it!

Now don’t conclude that sin will in some way better your life and in the end result in goodness. This is a sadistic way to look at Romans 8:28. It’s like saying, “Gluttony

or overeating is not right but pass the mashed potatoes so I can see God work everything together for good.” You are fooling yourself when you think this way. It’s like saying, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound” (Rom. 6:1). or in this case, “Shall we continue in sin that good may abound.” A thousand times no! If we go out and “sin it up” we will pay the consequences for our sins and they will be hard and difficult for “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov. 13:15).

If we conclude that we can highhandedly sin so we can “let God bring good out of our life” then we are sadly mistaken and are probably not part of “them that love God.” Sin does not bring blessing but heartache and misery on different levels and in different ways. The truth that Romans 8:28 is conveying is that when we do find ourselves backslidden and away from God, and experiencing the hardships related to sin, He can convict us, get us to repent and confess our sins, and begin to change us into the likeness of Jesus.

God can use “all things” (disease, discouragement, disappointments, depression) to bring about His unfailing purpose with our lives. He can take the bad things and use them, in His own providential way, to bring us back to Himself and create a Christlike spirit and character in our lives.

Adrian Rogers said:

“Sweet things do happen and sorrowful things do happen. I want to tell you, my friend, that Satanic things do happen. You say, what about what the devil does? Does that work together for good? It does. You see, the devil himself—though he doesn't desire to and though he doesn't want to—gives glory to God. The Bible says that, God makes even the wrath of man to praise him (Ps. 76:10).”

Yes, God’s magnificent beauty or glory of His character is revealed and shines brightly when it is seen against the backdrop of sin, which reveals ugliness, wickedness, and uncleanness. Yes, “all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28) even when something might not be intrinsically good, since God can weave together all the events associated with our lives to ultimately bring about Christlike change and transformation in our lives.

We have all heard an orchestra, which involves many different kinds of instruments, playing a lovely piece of music. The various instruments are all playing the same piece of music even when there are changes in the speed, loudness, and rhythm. Well, in the same way God orchestrates all the events of our lives, good and bad, sweet and sorrowful, Satanic and godly, sinful and holy and somehow keeps working out His sovereign purpose in our lives. Like an orchestra of instruments with their varying speeds, volumes, and rhythms playing together to create one musical piece, God is also bringing together all the events of our lives to create one theme and message - Christlikeness in our hearts and lives.

Yes, all things really do work together for our good. In a similar way, Ephesians 1:11 says that God “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” in relation to His saving program, which includes His ultimate predestination purpose to make us like Christ. We must take this to heart today. God knows what He is doing and nothing in connection with our lives is spinning out of control. It’s actually under God’s control and He providentially allows everything in our lives, even our sinful departures from Him, to be used as a tool to bring us back to Him and make us more like Jesus.

Again, we should understand that the bad things and tragic things that happen to us are not good in and of themselves. A bad marriage, a terrible car accident, a disobedient wife, a worldly husband, rebellious children, a divorce, or a diagnosis of terminal cancer is not good. Being a procrastinator is not good. Becoming angry and verbal with someone, perhaps swearing at them, certainly is not good. Developing worry and anxiety over the future is not good.

We shouldn’t call these types of things good or pretend that they’re good. But God can use all of these things to teach us valuable spiritual lessons that we must learn and work out the good of Christlikeness in our hearts and lives. David’s sin with Bathsheba shows that sin always results in adverse consequences for us and for others. But God can forgive and deliver us from our failures and sins, begin to change our lives, and make us more like Jesus Christ.

So even our failures can ultimately be used by God to bring about change in our hearts and result in new acts of transformation and Christlikeness in our lives.

Romans 5:20 reminds us that “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” which means that when sin overtook our lives, God used this spiritual calamity to bring us to our knees, save us, and begin to change us into the likeness of Jesus. This is true even within the Christian life. God can turn around our sinful and backslidden condition, when the message of grace touches our heart and impacts our lives, resulting in new Christlikeness and godliness (Titus 2:11-12).

We must acknowledge that God works all of the events of our lives together for our good and His glory, even our sinful departures and Satanic attacks that we might face in life, when we grow through them and allow God to transform us. One Biblical example that God works all things together for good is found in 2 Corinthians 12:7. Paul said "there was given to me a thorn in the flesh" and then notice what he said next, “the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

God apparently wanted to humble Paul. He did this by allowing the devil to become His messenger, His errand boy, and even His servant. Of course, this doesn't mean that the devil meant it for good. This doesn't mean what the devil did was good. This doesn't mean a thorn in the flesh is good. But we discover that God takes everything that He ordains for our lives and allows to happen to us, in order to ultimately work it together for our good. This is exactly what happened to Paul. He was the apostle who was broken, humbled, and hurt. But, he said, “when I'm weak, then I am strong.” You see, God gave him added grace and this grace made him greater than he ever could have been and more like Jesus than he ever could have been. Yes, even satanic things (the devil's attacks upon our lives) work together for good to those who love God!

In Paul's case, the good that came out of his physical trial was humility and relearning the need for God's strengthening and enabling grace. Paul's trial resulted in the decrease of himself and the increase of his faith in God's strengthening grace in his life. Paul's trial resulted in greater Christlikeness.

“Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?
Got any mountains you can't tunnel through?
God specializes in things thought impossible.
He does the things others cannot do!”

God's grace is so vast, so amazing, and so great that Stuart Briscoe once said "It's like putting a 747 in a Volkswagen!"

God will make a way! God's way is a DELIVERING way.

1 Corinthians 10:13

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*."

God's way is also a DIRETIONAL way. The way of God is sometimes different than what we expected and even a better way!

Proverbs 3:5-6

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

Have you ever doubted God's ability? Have you ever sat down and wondered and said to yourself: "There's nothing more He can do for me!" If we have said this to yourself, then your God is too small.

Sam Gordon said:

"When we look again, and again, we are staggered with amazement that our God can! He can do it! Nothing is too hard for him. You name it and so long as it tallies with his character and corresponds with his will, he can do it. When we are at the end of ourselves, we are only then at the beginning of God."

Yes, God can bring the good of Christlikeness out of our lives when we learn the amazing wonder of His sustaining grace and grow in our faith in God's power and sufficiency.

Here is another Biblical example of God working all things together for our good. Jesus taught Peter that he would deny Him, but at the same time Jesus said, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not..." (Luke 22:32). And, then he said, "...and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). Jesus was

telling Simon that what he would do was bad. It would be terrible. But Jesus was also saying to him, "I know that you're going to come out on the other side. And, even the sin that you committed is going to be used as a platform to help and strengthen others." Isn't this wonderful? Isn't it amazing how God mysteriously works all things together for good? Of course, the ultimate good that Romans 8:28 is talking about is our conformity to Christ. And Peter certainly exemplified Christ's life when he was strengthening the brethren.

One woman said to another man, "I got married." He said, "That's good." "Uh" she said, "but my husband is not good looking." "Oh," he said, "that's too bad." She said, "He's very rich though." "Oh," he said, "that's good." "But he's very stingy," she said. "Oh," he said, "that's bad." "But," she said, "He did build us a big house." "Oh," he said, "that's good." "But it burned," she said. "Oh," he said, "that's bad." "But he was in it," she said. The man didn't know what to say after this comment!

Here is the point. We look at our circumstances and sometimes we say this is good, then it's bad, then it's good, and then it's bad. Dear friend, we must wait till God is finished and we will see that everything in some way has been working together for our good because God uses all the events of our lives to make us more like His Son. God is ultimately going to win and make our lives into something beautiful.

“All things work for our good
Though sometimes we don't see
How they could.
Struggles that break our hearts in two
Sometimes blind us to the truth.

Our Father knows what's best for us
His ways are not our own.
So when your pathway grows dim
And you just don't see Him,
Remember you're never alone.

God is too wise to be mistaken,
God is too good to be unkind.
So when you don't understand,

When don't see His plan,
When you can't trace His hand,
Trust His Heart.

He sees the master plan
And he holds our future in His hand,
So don't live as those who have no hope,
All our hope is found in Him.
We see the present clearly
But He sees the first and the last,
And like a tapestry He's weaving you and me,
To someday be just like Him.”

God’s unfailing purpose is ultimately going to come to pass for our lives. Instead of fighting it, yield to it and let Jesus change your life. We need to get our eyes off the waves and get your eyes on God's mighty tide! Remember the same God that programmed the planets to draw the tide back and forth is the same God that controls the course and events of your life. He is the same God that controls this universe! This does not mean that our decisions and actions are not interwoven into this grand purpose. God has so orchestrated His sovereign purpose that it does not leave out our own decisions, departure’s from God’s will, and downfalls that we have brought upon ourselves. What it means that God’s purpose to make you more like Christ will not fail as you pass through your Christian life, even when you fail God.

“I've had many tears and sorrows,
I've had questions for tomorrow,
There's been times I didn't know right from wrong.
But in every situation,
God gave me blessed consolation,
That my trials come to only make me strong.
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to trust in Jesus,
I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all, through it all,
I've learned to depend upon His Word.”

Through it all, there will be little steps and sometimes giant steps that will bring you into greater moral conformity and likeness to Jesus Christ. One thing is certain, whatever we pass through in life, we can be sure that God will somehow use it to bring Christlike transformation into our lives.

There are a lot of people who don't realize that sometimes Martin Luther had fits of depression, despondency, and despair. He would get in a blue mood. He would go in his study or in his basement and stay there day after day. He would not want to see anybody. He would feel depressed and melancholy. This man who had great faith would go down into the depths of despair.

His wife would try to cheer him and help him but she couldn't. One day his wife, whose name was Katharina, tried to bring him out. She couldn't so she thought she would shock him. She put on a funeral dress. It was black. She put on black gloves. She put on a black hat and a black veil. She was totally dressed in black as if she were going to a funeral. And, then she walked into the room where he was. And, Martin Luther said, "Why Cathy, who has died? Who has died?" "Oh," she said, "Martin, haven't you heard? God is dead." He said, "Cathy, that's blasphemy." She said, "It is. And, it's blasphemy for you to live like God is dead also."

We know that God works all things together for good, even when we might pass through a time of depression. During these times, God can help us to see that He is greater than our depression, that He can change our emotional life around, and bring our lives into greater conformity to Christ. There is the true God in Heaven, and whether you can understand it or not, He works everything together for our greater good - Christlikeness.

All things! Yes, all things mysteriously and meticulously work together for good. Getting caught at every red light when driving through the city is for our good. Following a slow driver is for our good. Getting rained on when you are trying to mow the lawn. These experiences teach us Christlike patience. A cranky boss at work, a bad day, a grouchy mother-in-law, or experiencing the hurt that comes from someone gossiping about you helps us work on developing Christian character, forgiveness, and Christlike attitudes.

Suffering and pain, sunshine and rain, good and bad times, sweet and sorrowful things, sinful and satanic things, simple and big things, all things work together to those who love God. Everything can bring us to a point and place that causes us to become more like Jesus Christ. Yes, God can use “all things” to work together to bring about His unfailing purpose of Christlikeness in our lives. In fact, God can even use little things.

I think of Pharaoh, who was the mighty king and ruler of Egypt. He decreed that all the little baby boys should be put to death. But little Moses was hidden in the bulrushes. Exodus 2:6 says, "the babe wept" Just a little weeping baby. What good could come out of it? You will remember that Pharaoh's daughter heard the baby crying and her maternal instincts took over. She found that little baby and she raised him. He became mighty Moses that led the children of Israel out of Egypt and defeated mighty Pharaoh. And, what caused it? One of the simplest and little events - a baby's cry. A little baby. Yes, God can even use small things and simple things to bring about His purpose for our lives. “And we know that all things work together for good” and the good that Romans 8:28 is referring to is Christlikeness in our character and conduct of life.

It's not that things by themselves work together for good. The cause is that God Himself does it, He works them together for our good. It takes the providential hand of God to bring them together and work for our spiritual benefit. You see, what God does not directly cause, He still overrules, even Satan's temptations (Matt. 6:13). God is the One who brings order out of confusion and harmony out of discord. His providence is what makes everything that happens in relation to our earthly lives to bring about His unfailing purpose.

Some Christians quote Romans 8;28 verse too glibly or superficially, without any forethought. But this is an amazing revelation about God's sovereign work taking place in our lives.

John Mitchell said:

“I may not understand everything that comes into my life, but I know that God, in His wonderful grace and love, can take the most outlandish things, the finest detail of the greatest sorrow and suffering, and make that work together for my good and

for His glory. He has me on His heart, and if I murmur against circumstances, I am acutely murmuring against God. In fact, I have heard Christians blame God for certain things. Don't blame God. We are His workmanship, and He never stops loving us and conforming us to the image of the Savior."

Ephesians 2:10

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus (our position in Christ) unto good works (our practice in the Christian life), which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

The workmanship of this verse means that through the new birth God has made us into a new creation in view of our position in Christ through which we have received His life and nature. As a result, we are to progressively become more like Jesus Christ in our everyday living ("unto good works") as we work out what we already are and possess in Christ. We are not saved as the result of good works, but good works are the result of our salvation. This is what Paul and James teach.

Our hindsight is often pretty good. When we look back over our life and recall certain experiences, we can often see how God used these experiences for our ultimate good. We didn't enjoy what we went through at the time, but now we thank the Lord that He used them to make us more like Jesus Christ and bring glory to Himself.

When a cowboy applied for an insurance policy, the agent asked, "Have you ever had any accidents?" After a moment's reflection, the applicant responded, "Nope, but a bronc did kick in two of my ribs last summer, and a couple of years ago a rattlesnake bit me on the ankle." "Wouldn't you call those accidents?" replied the puzzled agent. "Naw," the cowboy said, "they did it on purpose!"

This story reminds me of the Biblical truth that there are no accidents in the lives of God's children. There are only appointments. God has a purpose for everything occurring in our lives which ultimately is to produce Christlikeness in us. Joseph's life gives an illustration of how God works everything together for good. If you would read the story of Joseph, you would find that he was betrayed by his brethren. He was put into a pit and left for dead. And, then brought out of that pit

and sold into slavery. After he was sold into slavery, he was cast into prison. He was maligned and ridiculed. And, his brothers did it to him, those who were closest to him.

Consider Joseph's reaction to all of this in Genesis 50:20

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive."

The terrible things that happened to Joseph were actually used by God to save the children of Israel from famine and death (Gen. 45:5-8). God worked them together for ultimate good. Joseph interpreted a difficult experience that had seemed like a great calamity as something which was good. He had been thrown into a pit and then sold as a slave. This was a great test of his faith, and from the human standpoint it appeared to be a tragic case of injustice, not a providential means of blessing. But Joseph later learned that "God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). This is what Romans 8:28 is teaching us. God desires to bring about "good" (conformity to Christ) through all the events that we pass through in our lives, even when we are in the bottom of a pit with no way out!

Samuel Brengle was a worker with the Salvation Army in Boston many years ago. As he passed by a saloon, some men threw a brick at his head. Their aim was good, and Brengle nearly died. As it was, he spent eighteen months in recovery. During this time, he wrote a little book entitled *Helps to Holiness*. Thousands of copies were published.

After he was able to begin preaching again, people would often thank him for the book. He would respond by saying, "If there had been no little brick, there would be no little book." His wife saved the brick and had Genesis 50:20 engraved on it: "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

Jeremiah 24:5 speaks of something similar:

"Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for *their* good."

The Babylonians came in and took them out of their land. And, God had them put into a foreign country as captives. But, why did God say he did it? Had God forsaken them? No. God said, "I did it for their good." Yes, even the discipline of God upon our lives is for our good and can certainly result in good. Yes, God can use chastisement for our own good. It breaks us and brings us back to our spiritual senses and gets us back on the path marked right. The end results can bring us to the place where we will surrender to God, give Him first place in our life again, and become more like His Son, Jesus Christ, in our obedience, character, and concern for the lost.

We learn from the life of Joseph and the children of Israel that all of our suffering has a good purpose behind it and Romans 8:28 reveals this unfailing purpose is to make us more like His Son, Jesus Christ. To me, this truth is both exciting and encouraging. I am reassured to realize that no matter what someone might do to harm me, the Lord is able to turn it into my benefit and His glory. When we are discouraged because of distressing circumstances, we can rejoice in God's wisdom, power, and sovereignty. Romans 8:28 is still true. God is working all things together for our good.

In a sermon, Randy Alcorn mentioned Scott and Janet Willis, who were driving behind a truck when a piece of metal flew off the truck and punctured their gas tank, causing their minivan to explode. They escaped, but six of their children burned to death in the inferno. Alcorn interviewed them 14 years later and they both affirmed that in spite of their great loss, God's goodness and sovereignty are now more precious to them than before.

He also mentioned Joni Eareckson Tada, who was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident at age 17. Because of that accident, she has had a powerful ministry with disabled people. But now, in her sixties, she has breast cancer. She told Randy, "I've had a ministry to disabled people for many years. But now I have a ministry to people with cancer!"

Do you believe that God is working all your trials together for your ultimate good and for the good of those to whom He has called you to serve? Are you passing

through the deep waters of trial and disappointment? Does everything seem to be going against you? These apparent misfortunes are not accidents. The Lord allows such things for His ultimate purpose to make us more like Jesus. So, patiently trust Him. If you know the Lord, someday you will praise Him for all of it.

“What looks like just an accident
When viewed through human eyes,
Is really God at work in us--
His blessing in disguise.”

Of course, the greatest illustration of Romans 8:28 is found in the life of Christ and His terrible sufferings. He was denied, betrayed, falsely accused, wrongly tried, found guilty though innocent, scourged, beaten, mocked, spit upon, and finally crucified on the cross. Did any good come out of this? Yes, it was the greatest good of all for Christ's sufferings and death worked together to provide salvation for all mankind (John 3:16). This means that even in the most sinful deed ever carried out by men, God had a purpose and a plan (Rev. 13:8) that He was accomplishing (Acts 2:23).

God certainly knows how to work together the evil events, conspired by man, and turn them around for good. The cross is the greatest example of this! We should reflect on this when we are passing through difficult times of suffering and heartache. We can realize that God can use our times of suffering to bring about His purpose for our lives which is to make us more like His son Jesus Christ. Have we been using our trials and tribulations to create Christlike attitudes and characteristics in our hearts and lives?

A man found a cocoon of the emperor moth and took it home to watch it emerge. One day a small opening appeared, and for several hours the moth struggled but couldn't seem to force its body past a certain point. Deciding something was wrong, the man took scissors and snipped the remaining bit of cocoon. The moth emerged easily, its body large and swollen, the wings small and shriveled.

He expected that in a few hours the wings would spread out in their natural beauty, but they did not. Instead of developing into a creature free to fly, the moth spent its life dragging around a swollen body and shriveled wings. The constricting cocoon

and the struggle necessary to pass through the tiny opening are God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings. The "merciful" snip of the scissors was, in reality, cruel. Sometimes the struggle is exactly what we need and God knows this. We pass through the suffering related to affliction and other circumstances because God wants to use it to make us become more like Jesus Christ.

Those who know they are on the path of God can rest as they walk through the dark valley and give thanks to God. When we know that God is bringing His unfailing purpose to pass for our lives (Christlikeness), while we suffer through the trials and tribulations related to life, we can actually give thanks for all things because of the Christlike transformation they can bring about into our lives.

Ephesians 5:20

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We cannot get to the place of “Giving thanks always for all things” until we first “know that all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). Anyone can be thankful for sunshine, but it takes the power of the Spirit to be thankful for the storms of life. As we realize what God wants to do in and through our lives, as we pass through trials, we can give thanks for the trials. They may be hard to bear but we can be sure that the Christlike fruit that comes from them will be precious. Knowing God’s eternal purpose to make us into the likeness of His beloved Son, we can lean to give thanks for all things that occur in connection with our lives – the good and the bad.

2 Corinthians 4:15 says something similar to Romans 8:28:

“For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.”

Yes, we can say “thank You Lord” for allowing trials to come into our lives when we accept them from ultimately coming from His providential hand and use them as a way to enhance our transformation into Christlikeness.

“Thank you, Lord, for the trials that come my way.
In that way I can grow each day as I let you lead,

And thank you, Lord, for the patience those trials bring.
In that process of growing, I can learn to care.

I thank you, Lord, for the victory that growing brings.
In surrender of everything life is so worth while.
And I thank you, Lord, that when everything's put in place,
Out in front I can see your face, and it's there you belong."

Yes, God is working everything together for our spiritual good. He wants us to be more like Jesus!

Raymond Ortlund writes:

"The hand of God is at the helm. He's steering us through the storms of life toward home, toward a safe haven. And He takes care to order all the events of our lives right now to speed us on our way there. This is what we call Providence--God's overruling hand at work everywhere in a fallen world. The Providence of God is clearly taught from one end of the Bible to the other. And our confidence in the Providence of God is a faith so bold, so demanding, so unapologetic, that we cannot believe it without being transformed. Either all things work together for our good, or nothing makes sense. So let's be bold about it. Let's either be transformed Christians or bitter skeptics, because we cannot just sort of believe Romans 8:28. We either believe it or we doubt it. There is no middle ground."

Remember once again that our knowing in Romans 8:28 ("we know") is not a mere intellectual fact stuck in our brain but is ultimately an expression of faith. By faith we are confident that God will never disappoint us and somehow bring good out of the trials and tragedies of our lives.

I read a story about a shipwreck. When the sole survivor reached a small, uninhabited island, he prayed for God to rescue him, but help didn't come. Eventually he built a hut out of driftwood for protection from the elements. One day he returned from scavenging for food and found his hut in flames, the smoke rising into the sky. Angrily he cried, "God, how could You do this to me?" The next morning, he was awakened by rescuers. "How did you know I was here?" he asked.

"We saw your smoke signal," they replied. In a similar way, God can turn a tragedy into a blessing – the blessing of Christlikeness.

“The trials we are going through
Can be misunderstood
Unless we realize that God
Works all things for our good.”

1 Peter 1:7 reminds us:

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”

In short, trials and suffering increase our faith (growth in Christlikeness) and they are used by God to bring us reward and honor when Jesus returns for His children in the Rapture.

Gold is one of the most valuable materials on earth. It has been used for centuries as money, but it also has many uses in industry, manufacturing, and even space flight. One of the traits that makes gold so useful is that it can be shaped and formed so easily. In fact, a single ounce of gold can be flattened out to cover three hundred square feet. But gold ore dug out of the ground contains many other elements that must be removed prior to the gold being useful. This is what Peter is talking about. The refining process for gold involves intense heat. Gold melts at a temperature of almost two thousand degrees Fahrenheit. That incredibly high temperature is required for gold to be ready to be used.

The Christian life involves much the same process. Sometimes we are surprised when “bad things happen to good people.” But the Scripture tells us that fiery trials are part of God’s refining process for our lives. Rather than griping or complaining when trials come, we should rejoice as we think of the end result they will produce - Christlikeness.

- Are you ready to acknowledge that God is using your present trial which you are passing through to produce the good of Christlikeness in your life?
- Looking back, can you see how God was moving in your life to bring about greater Christlikeness in and through your life?
- What is your response to God's discipline in your life?
- Have you been striving to experience Christlike transformation in your life while you are passing through suffering?
- How can you allow your present circumstance, whatever it might be, to produce Christlike obedience, virtues, and character changes in your life?
- Have you surrendered to the mysterious working of God in your life?

VIII. Through abandoning our misguided ideas about God's purpose.

In about 512 B.C., as Darius I of Persia led his armies' north of the Black Sea, the Scythians sent him a message comprised of a mouse, a frog, a bird, and five arrows. Darius summoned his captains. "Our victory is assured," he announced. "These arrows signify that the Scythians will lay down their arms; the mouse means the land of the Scythians will be surrendered to us; the frog means that their rivers and lakes will also be ours; and the Scythian army will fly like a bird from our forces."

But an adviser to Darius said, "The Scythians mean by these things that unless you turn into birds and fly away, or into frogs and hide in the waters, or into mice and burrow for safety in the ground, you will all be slain by the Scythian archers." Darius took counsel and decided that the second was the right interpretation, and beat a retreat!

How we interpret things is important and this is especially true of the Bible. If we do not interpret the Scriptures correctly, understanding their context, grammar, historical and literal meanings, then we are going to arrive at conclusion that do not support what the Bible is actually teaching. This is true regarding the Romans 8:28 verse that we have been studying about. This is a common Bible verse that is seen on plaques or wall hangings. But we must remember that some of the most popular Bible verses that we see everywhere are often the most misinterpreted.

In our next point, we are going to discover some of the misinterpretations and therefore misunderstandings of Romans 8:28. If we miss the true teaching of Romans 8:28 and arrive at a faulty conclusion what this text actually means, then we will set ourselves up for disappointment, delusion, and follow debunked theories which are allegedly based upon Romans 8:28.



There is a word of caution. We don't want to abuse what Paul is teaching here. As we have repeatedly confirmed, the Biblical viewpoint and understanding of "good" refers to our Christlikeness and conformity to Christ (Rom. 8:29-30). We need to be very cautious that we do not presume upon Romans 8:28 by using it as a scapegoat for our own sinful actions and

disobedience. Sometimes we try and plug our own misguided ideas into Romans 8:28 so that we can condone our own lifestyle of sin and disobedience.

For instance, some might conclude, "Yes, I'm going to sin, but God will bring good out of it." Or some others might conclude, "God can take what is intrinsically evil, remake it, and turn it around for His good and glory." Of course, this is not what Romans 8:28 is teaching. The word of caution is that we can abuse Romans 8:28 and in one sense consume it upon our lusts!

Let's reflect on some of the faulty thinking or reasoning related to Romans 8:28.

There are six points of caution.

A. We can sin willfully and have a good result.

To believe that all things do work together for our good and benefit should not allow us to conclude that we can therefore sin willfully and reap good benefits from sinning. It is a false pretense to conclude that I can engage in premarital sex or many

other sins and reap good things from this sinful relationship. No, you will reap the whirlwind and a hard life.

Hosea 8:7

“For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up. “

This expression was a well-known proverb that emphasizes the futility of Israel's alliances with false gods and foreign nations. From a moral perspective, Israel is pictured as sowing or planting the wind (something that is vanity and worthless – referring to their idolatry and pagan alliances), which would yield a crop of destruction, which is further symbolized as the whirlwind of coming judgment (the Assyrian army).

When we do bad things, we get bad results. Don't follow the line of reasoning that says we can do bad and still have good results.

Romans 3:8 reveals this twisted philosophy: “Let us do evil, that good may come? This is not what Romans 8:28 is teaching. Romans chapters 6 and 7 clearly reveal that we should never sin so that God's grace can abound. God forbid! Romans 8:28 doesn't mean we can live any way we choose and God will fix our messes and good things will then result. Just the opposite is true. The Bible teaches that we reap what we sow.

Galatians 6:8

“For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

When you sow to the flesh, you don't get good results! It is misguided thinking to believe that we can knowingly do what is wrong and still get good spiritual results in our lives. God does not work this way! He might turn a bad life around and produce Christlikeness in it, but He will not give you spiritual results when you are living in open rebellion and sin and being disobedient to Him. Don't presume upon God's grace!

One grown man shares this story:

"I remember in high school when I didn't manage my time well and my father stayed up VERY late in the night helping me finish a paper. Though I had written the paper out longhand, only he could type fast, so the poor guy was up most of the night making up for my poor use of time.

That is a bittersweet memory for me. Part of me wished he'd said, 'Sorry son, you're going to have to bite the bullet on this one.'" But the other half of me was very blessed to see my dad's skill AND sacrifice, so I might NOT fail the class. Watching him type, I remember thinking: 'Look at my dad's love for me, that he stays up and helps me even though he's got to wake up early.' Of course he would have been more than just in saying, "Sorry son...".

Later on, after seeing my own fallacy, I apologized to God on a late Saturday evening, for I felt that I had presumed upon my father's kindness. The same can be true for Christians. We can misconstrue, misinterpret, and misapply Romans 8:28 to get our own way in life. But in doing this, we presume upon our Heavenly Father's kindness.

We cannot experience the good of Christlikeness (Romans 8:28) when we are willfully sinning against God.

B. We can bypass God's will and miss God's best for our lives.

This builds upon the previous point. As we have seen, we should never think that we can somehow bypass God's will and still get good results within our Christian life. When we make wrong decisions, which are out of God's will, we can sometimes fool ourselves into thinking that there will be no consequences or repercussions for these decisions. Even though God can turn our life around and make something good out of it (developing Christlikeness in us) after we have departed from His perfect will for our lives, we need to remember that we can miss God's best for our life and what He ultimately wanted us to do. Missing God's will means missing God's best for our lives.

Yes, there is hope even after we make wrong decisions and move down a wrong path, but we must always remember that our failure to follow God's will for our life can cause us to miss many of God's intended blessings that He wants to bestow on our lives (Lev. 28:3-10).

Proverbs 3:9-10

"Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

In other words, when we bypass God's will for our lives, we miss on God's true blessings. So, don't use Romans 8:28 as an excuse to bypass God's original will and direction that He wants you to take (Eph. 5:17). Romans 8:28 should never be used as an excuse for disobedience. Remember that it's always better to do God's will for in being obedient to God, this is when God showers His spiritual blessings upon our lives.

Psalm 1:1-3

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

James 1:25

"But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

We cannot experience the good of Christlikeness (Romans 8:28) when we knowingly and willingly bypass God's will for our lives.

Elisabeth Elliot told of her brother Thomas Howard. Her mother allowed him play with paper bags that she had saved, if he would promise to put them away afterwards. One day she walked into the kitchen to find them strewn all over the

floor. Tom was out at the piano with his father singing hymns. When confronted, he protested, "But Mom, I want to sing." His father stated, "It's no good singing God's praise if you're disobedient."

Knowing we are disobeying God, outright rebellion, or bypassing God's will mean that sincere worship and the true blessing from the Lord is shut down. It's far better to obey and experience the multitudes of God's blessings that He wants to shower upon our lives on a daily basis.

C. We claim everything is good when things work to our advantage.

There is a story about a Christian student who has having trouble with his finances and needed to take a morning class so he could work in the afternoon to earn money to help pay his bills. It happened that the morning class became full, so the computer put him in an afternoon class. This meant that he would not be able to work in the afternoon and it was going to put him further behind on his bills. But he decided to attend the afternoon class. It turned out that a very attractive girl also attended that class who had a wealthy father. They dated and eventually married and her dad paid for all of his school bill! So, all things worked together for good for this Christian. Is this what Romans 8:28 means? Well, the answer is NO. This is because the "good" is related to Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29-30). It's not talking about getting our college paid off. Be very careful that you do not misrepresent what Romans 8:28 is teaching. God does not mean that in the end everything works to our advantage and turns out okay.



We should also remember that all things working together for good does not mean that everything turns out okay or works to our advantage in the end. That all things work together for good does not mean there is always a happy ending! We do not live "Little House on the Prairie" lives where everything turns out good at the end of the story. There may not be a ticker

tape parade ending to our trials and suffering in this life. We need to be realistic about this.

Sometimes the events of our lives do bring about good results, as was the case with Joseph. But not everything necessarily ends well. We don't always get good results in relation to our personal experiences and the events associated with our lives. We cannot always stamp a "good" ending in relation to all the things that come into our lives.

Revelation 2:13

"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is*: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth."

Our trials do not always have a good ending. Once again, we must remember that the good ending is not what Paul is talking about. What he is referring to is the good that is related to spiritual growth and being more conformed to the likeness of Christ.

1 Peter 5:10

"But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while (passing through hard times), make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*" (pursuing Christlikeness).

Growth and sanctification results in Christlike living and this is the good that comes out of suffering and all the events associated with our lives. But Christlikeness does not mean that we will always have a good ending to our trials and difficulties that we face in life.

There was a time when our old church roof was damaged by hail and we got a free roof replacement through our insurance company. The roof we had was getting old so the roof replacement by the insurance was something good! However, we cannot apply Romans 8:28 to this particular event. Of course, there are other acts of God's providence occurring behind the scenes (Ps. 84:11), but this was not a Romans 8:28 occurrence, since this text only deals with the "good" related to

Christlikeness – not a good ending for our church roof! Beware of misusing this Bible text outside its intended purpose which is the goal of Christlikeness.

Kent Hughes cautions us to remember:

“Romans 8:28 does not mean, as is commonly thought, that ‘everything will turn out okay in this life.’ It means, rather, that everything will work out for our ultimate good.”

We should not always expect to get a good ending.

The prosperity teacher, Joel Olsteen, said this about Romans 8:28:

“Those difficulties and challenges are merely stepping stones toward your brighter future. Be encouraged today because God has a plan for you to rise higher. God has another door for you to walk through.”

Olsteen identifies the “good” of Romans 8:28 as a brighter future and a better door for us to walk through. In other words, the good is that God will make us prosper and wealthy. Of course, there is no Biblical basis for Olsteen’s promise that God always has a better door for us to walk through. In fact, His Word promises that life won’t always be happy, rich, and full—sometimes we’re meant to suffer (1 Peter 4:12). Once again, the “good” of Romans 8:28-30 is Christlikeness – not cash or conformity to Christ – not carnal prosperity. In His providence, God is sovereignly orchestrating all events according to His will, for His glory and our good. But we’re not guaranteed that all our struggles will be turned into blessings. Sometimes God will rescue us from tragedies; other times it’s our suffering that brings about His desired result of Christlikeness.

We should not believe Romans 8:28 is teaching that every difficult experience we pass through will ultimately lead us to something good or better in this life. It is true that God uses suffering to build Christian character in us, conform us to Christ, and prepare us for final glory. But He does not promise that our suffering in this life will always and eventually lead to something good like a better paying job (after losing a job) or complete recovery from cancer after being diagnosed, or total healing from arthritis. Many times we must still moan and groan in our bodies (Rom. 8:23)

as we long for our final redemption. Nevertheless, even among our moans, we can still become more like Jesus.

Here is the point. the “good” that Paul is speaking about is not a materialistic, selfish, carnal, better way of life, or the fulfillment of our own personal wants, wishes, ideas or even our worldly ways (James 3:15). God does not declare that He works all things together to make Christians healthy and wealthy.

Douglas Moo correctly states this about Romans 8:28:

“The difficulty comes when we wrongly interpret ‘good’ from a narrow and often materialistic perspective. From God’s perspective, ‘good’ must be defined in spiritual terms.”

We will not experience the good of Christlikeness (Romans 8:28) if we think that we will have a good ending.

D. We cannot expect to correct all the wrongs of the past.

Romans 8:28 is not to be used as a magical rabbit’s foot that corrects all the wrong things you have done and turns them around into something good in the end. Everything does not turn out good when you are disobedient to God, when you do not raise your children properly, or when you make wrong financial decisions. As already mentioned, we do reap what we sow (Gal. 6:8) which means we cannot always correct the wrongs of our past.

In other words, we should not believe that Romans 8:28 teaches we can undo our past, all of our wrong decisions, our past failures, sins, our acts of disobedience and somehow make everything good and better. Romans 8:28 gives us the promise that we can produce Christlikeness in our lives – it is not teaching that everything in our past will be fixed and made better. We don’t have to live in the past (Phil. 3:13) and defeated by it, but at the same time we cannot for the most part undo the past.

We will not experience the good of Christlikeness (Romans 8:28) if we think the good that God promises is to fix every wrong that we have done in the past.

E. We must realize that good things happen when we are obedient to God.

At this point, we must also reflect upon the reality that all things are not good and many things can be prevented! In other words, if we use Romans 8:28 to justify our disobedience, believing that God will somehow bring good out of our bad decisions, then we are forgetting that we can prevent many bad things from happening to our lives, if we would choose to practice obedience to God. If we want the spiritual blessings of God upon our life, then we must obey God instead of using Romans 8:28 as a scapegoat to do wrong.

“Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.
Doing exactly as the Lord commands, doing it happily.
Action is the key, do it immediately, joy you will receive.
Obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.”

Romans 8:28 is not encouraging you to go out and sin and see the good that God can bring out of a wrecked life. Again this is a rather sadistic way to look at Romans 8:28 and certainly has nothing to do with what Paul is teaching. The Bible commands you to not sin (1 John 2:1; John 8:11) and to experience the greater good that God can bring out of an obedient, surrendered, and victorious Christian life!

Romans 6:1-2

“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

Do not think for one moment that all kinds of good things (the spiritual blessings of God) are going to be showered upon your life when you are disobedient to God. This is not the teaching of Romans 8:28. And remember that many things can be prevented from happening when you are obedient to God. Good things happen when you are obedient to God! This is how we experience God’s spiritual blessings in our lives and this is how we experience true Christlike development.

We will not experience the good of Christlikeness (Romans 8:28) when we are disobedient to God.

F. We cannot turn evil into good.

The “all things that work together for good” which are related to Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29-30) is not the same thing as reclaiming an evil culture for good and God’s glory. And yet there are many who misuse and misinterpret Romans 8:28 so they can engage in questionable activities that do not honor God and His holiness.

For instance, some suggest that God can use the genre of rock music and turn it around for good and His glory. In other words, some conclude that the sound of Secular Rock Music can be turned into Christian Rock Music and that this is something that God works together for His good, glory, and spiritual use. They base this conclusion on Romans 8:28. But we must remember that Christian Rock Music is a sound and style of so-called music used in Satan’s kingdom, but many suggest that it can somehow become good and acceptable, when Christian words and good ideas are placed beside this same type of rock beat, rhythmic confusion, and sound.

My intent in this study is not to debate contemporary or modern rock music. But some have tried to make the case that Romans 8:28 is the verse that approves of Christian Rock Music. They claim that God can redeem what was once bad and make it good. After all, they say, “God works all things together for good.” This is a misrepresentation of Romans 8:28. The Bible clearly reveals that righteous and wholesome things cannot come out of those things that are unrighteous and abominable in God’s sight (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Job 14:4; Lev. 10:10). Satan’s kingdom cannot be turned around and united with God’s holy purposes since Satan’s and God’s purposes represent two incompatible realms of existence. Many Christians will tell you that the musical style which was originally used to promote sex, drugs, and rebellion suddenly becomes good when different words are placed beside it. This is an unbiblical ideology. Romans 8:28 is not promoting this type of worldly philosophy, since the good represented in Romans 8:28-30 is Christlikeness – not transforming Satan’s kingdom into God’s kingdom as some suggest today.

The greatest problem with Romans 8:28 is that what we think might be good and what God declares as good are not always the same. We tend to call something good that God does not. Our thinking and focus on what is good can become misguided and misconstrued by our own fleshly desires and wants.

We will not experience the good of Christlikeness (Romans 8:28) if we think we can change evil into good. As stated above, God reclaiming an evil and sinful culture and using it for His glory is an unbiblical analysis and misunderstanding of Romans 8:28.

This is a misguided philosophy for several reasons.

1. God's Word and Spirit are used to change people.

We must remember that God always uses the truth and the Holy Spirit to change the lives of people, not a perverted culture, such as a particular genre of music, a genre that should be labeled as "worldly music" that mimics cultural rebellion (John 15:3; Ps. 119:105; Gal. 5:18; 22-25). Those things which reflect cultural rebellion do not sanctify people. God's truth and Spirit are the only way people can be sanctified (John 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18). Trying to mix the two is forbidden in the Bible (2 Cor. 6:14-17) because they are two incompatible realms and systems that oppose one another. Mixing truth with rebellion leads to mixed results, many of which are unsanctified and carnal.

During our college days, we pulled a trick on one of our roommates. He had made some coffee and put it on the counter. We poured the sugar out of the original container and put salt in its place. After a while, the fellow came back to his coffee. He thought he was pouring sugar into the cup but it was actually salt. As you would expect, when he tasted the coffee, the mixture was not good! The same is true regarding the mixture of a sound created for rebellion with truth that was given for sanctification. It is not a good mixture. Remember that God hates a mixture!

2. Good things do not come out of bad things.

We must also understand that the Bible does not teach that bad things can be made good (good things come out of bad things) or that God can use anything by simply turning it into something that is good. This is a total distortion of Paul's teaching and the entire teaching of Scripture. Good things only come out of good things (the Bible, truth, righteousness, holiness, etc.)

MERGE *4 Good*

?

The genre of Rock Music = a sound created to promote sex, drugs, lies, and rebellion against God **MERGES into...**

Christian Rock Music = using the same type of sound to promote Jesus, salvation, and Christian living

Job 14:4 - "Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one."

2 Corinthians 6:14 - "for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

Job 14:4

"Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one."

Leviticus 10:10

"And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean."

2 Corinthians 6:14

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

These verses are self-explanatory. God is not pleased when we attempt to merge the unholy with the holy. God does not redeem what is intrinsically bad. He replaces the bad with good but He does not use the bad in any way. Sin is not good in itself; it is the very opposite of what is good. The two can never be wedded. This means that God cannot redeem pedophile behavior and make it good? God cannot redeem crack, cocaine, and pornography and make it good? This whole argument breaks down when using it with the alleged redemption of secular Rock Music and turning it into Christian Rock Music. God cannot and does not redo or change the character of rebellion and sin by making it into something that is good and acceptable (Habakkuk 1:13).

Isaiah 5:20 warns of this practice:

"Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"

This is what many do when they misunderstand and misinterpret Romans 8:28. God does not redeem sinful things and make them into good things. This is an absurdity! Of course, God redeems our suffering in life by turning our lives around and making us more Christlike. He can even redeem our sinful departures for our good, when we are convicted and turn away from them, and begin walking in the Spirit as the result of God's intervention into our lives. But God does not redeem our sin, which is intrinsically evil and turn the sin into something that is good. It is very important to recognize that God does not use sin or any kind of rebellion for good in the sense that it can be turned into an instrument of His righteousness.

God does not turn sin into righteousness. God does not change sinful things, sinful behaviors, and musical rebellion into something that is good. This goes against God's character of holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Just because God can take the various circumstances of our lives and work them together for our good does not mean that God actually uses sinful things to create good things. Some Christians can become very good at trying to justify their sin! We must remember that our sin is NOT good but what God can do after the fact can be good! He can make us more like Jesus! This comes through the process of sanctification.

Oswald Chambers

“Sanctification means intense concentration on God's point of view. It means every power of body, soul, and spirit is chained and kept for God's purpose only. It will cause an intense narrowing of all our interests on earth, and an immense broadening of all our interests in God. Are we prepared for God to do all in us that He separated us for?”

I must be very clear on this point. Romans 8:28 is not talking about changing evil into good (redeeming the bad) but is teaching that the particular events associated with our lives, including sin and suffering, can be used to draw us back to Christ and once again cause us to become fruitful and Christlike in our living (Ps. 23:3). This is what Romans 8:28 is teaching. It's saying that the Lord uses sin to ultimately bring the good of Christlikeness into our lives when we are brought to our knees in

repentance and seek cleansing, forgiveness, and restoration in our Christian life (James 4:8).

Simply stated, the “all things” which are good is not referring to the things that we reclaim from an evil culture, create, and then claim are good, such as Christian Rock Music and other acts of cultural rebellion. The “good” refers to the events of life, such as suffering, evil actions plotted against us, and other sinful atrocities, that God permits or allows to come into our lives by His sovereign purpose. The “good” has nothing to do with transforming evil into good.

Plugging our own methodology and mindset into the Romans 8:28 text in order to bring about our goals and purposes, which are *allegedly* good, is totally foreign to this text. It is an exegetical fallacy of the worst sort! The “all things” of Romans 8:28 which “work together for good” have nothing to do with transforming rock music into Christian music, turning tattoos into a witness for Christ, or adopting the lifestyles of a degenerate culture and unregenerate people to get the Gospel to them. It is talking about God transforming His people into Christlikeness through the events that He providentially allows to come into their lives.

God does not promote any sin, but He can in some sense use our sinful or evil departures that we pass through in life for our good, when we experience God’s chastening and conviction, repent of our sins, accept forgiveness, and begin a new life of transformation. However, Paul is not claiming that the evil itself can be turned around and become good and then be used to affect us in a positive and spiritual way. Romans 8:28 is not assuming that evil is good and good is evil (Isaiah 5:20).

We cannot redeem sinful things and actually make them good for “what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Cor. 6:14) and “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?” (Job 14:4). But we can learn from our sinful mistakes and God can use them as way to bring us back to Himself, through His chastening hand and conviction, so we can once again become Christlike in our character and conduct.

We must remember that all the changing events of our lives which ultimately make us more like Jesus do work together for good. Even when we must pass through the

hard times because of our wrong and sinful choices, God can use these times as a means to bring us back to Himself and create more Christlikeness in our lives.

Again, the Biblical fact that all things work together for good does not mean that everything we do is good or that all of our decisions are good. By our own decisions and actions, we may have created a hard and difficult way for ourselves, which in itself was not a good path to follow, especially when it involves sin ("the way of the transgressors is hard" - Prov. 13:15). As a result, we must reap the consequences of our wrong choices whether it's God's heavy conviction or the adverse circumstances that are created because of our choices.

We cannot wiggle out of this. Sin is never good and the results of sin are never good. Nor can anything good come about when we deliberately sin and do wrong. If anything good happens, it's because of truth and righteousness (Ps. 119:30). This means that what we do is not always good and the results are not always good (and sometimes cannot be made right!) but the end or final result can bring us closer to Christ and His likeness when we yield to God's chastening hand for "afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). In this way, the suffering associated with sin can also work together for our good, when we repent of our ways and allow God to change us (Rev. 2:5).

The story is told of a new bank president who met with his predecessor and said, "I would like to know what have been the keys to your success." The older gentleman looked at him and replied, "Young man, I can sum it up in two words: Good decisions." To that the young man responded, "I thank you immensely for that advice, sir, but how does one come to know which are the good decisions?" "One word, young man," replied the old man. "Experience." "That's all well and good," said the younger, "but how does one get experience?" "Two words," said the elder. "Bad decisions."

We have all made some bad decisions and pass through difficult circumstances that we have sometimes created for ourselves, or others might have created for us. But God can and does use all of the events of our lives, even our bad decisions, to

somehow teach us important lessons, and sometimes hard lessons, to ultimately bring us to the place of transformation and greater Christlikeness.

Hellen Keller once said:

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it."

This is especially true for the Christian life who sees God working behind the scenes to bring about His ultimate good in his life which is to be more like Jesus.

A mature Christian once remarked:

"Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my experience, has been through affliction and not through happiness."

Yes, God can use affliction, suffering, disease and all kinds of hardships to crack us and conform us to the image of His Son.

A famous evangelist told the following incident: I have a friend who in a time of business recession lost his job, a sizable fortune, and his beautiful home. To add to his sorrow, his precious wife died; yet he tenaciously held to his faith -- the only thing he had left. One day when he was out walking in search of employment, he stopped to watch some men who were doing stonework on a large church. One of them was chiseling a triangular piece of rock. 'Where are you going to put that?' he asked. The workman said, 'Do you see that little opening up there near the spire? Well, I'm shaping this stone down here so that it will fit in up there.' Tears filled my friend's eyes as he walked away, for the Lord had spoken to him through that laborer whose words gave new meaning to his troubled situation.

You see, God is shaping us down here, preparing us for the great eternal day when we will receive a new body and be like Christ forever. Romans 8:28 is speaking of conformity to Christ – not conformity to our ways and ideas. As we have seen, some Christians are prone to pervert texts such as Romans 8:28. If our lives are comfortable, or if we have wealth and good health, then we conclude that

everything is working together for our good. But this is not the good that Paul had in mind, and it is not the goal of the Christian life.

In the midst of all the distortions of Romans 8:28, we don't want to miss the central teaching. The amazing miracle that Paul presents in Romans 8:28 is that in spite of our sufferings, our hardships and difficulties, in spite of the wrecks we have made of our lives, and sometimes of the lives of others, we can come to the point where we repent toward God and begin to change our life, make better decisions, and start to remold and reshape our lives, so that we can be more like Jesus. This was certainly true after we became a Christian. Jesus touched us and began to make something wonderful out of the spiritual wreck that we made of our lives.

“In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.”

Let's reconfirm what we have been discussing. Paul likened this “good” of Romans 8:28 to Christlikeness in character and conduct – not to a large bank account, a perfect bill of health, our own comforts in life, or what we might think is good according to our own warped thinking or ideas. In other words, we must be very careful not to interpret “good” in a selfish, carnal, or even materialistic fashion.

The “all things” or everything that touches the life of a Christian are used by God for our good, but the good he is talking about is an ultimate spiritual good which is Christlikeness (“conformed to the image of his Son” – vs. 29). The goodness is not referring to the thinking or mentality that says, “I won the lottery – God is good” or “I have finally divorced my wife – God is good.”

This is a perverted and heathenistic mentality of what Paul is teaching. Our prideful, perverted, and selfish thinking regarding God's goodness is not what Paul is talking about. Only our Christlikeness is good which is what Paul is driving at in these verses. Thank the Lord that the goodness of Christlike transformation can follow an extended period of sinful living and wrong choices because of the saving touch and sanctifying work of God in our hearts. God can revive us from where we have fallen

in our Christian life and begin to make us more like Christ, giving us something worth living for!

“Life was shattered and hope was gone,
Crushing the load that I bore;
Then out of the depths I cried,
‘O God, give me something worth living for!’
Something more than my yesterdays,
More than I had before;
Something more than wealth or fame,
He gave me something worth living for!

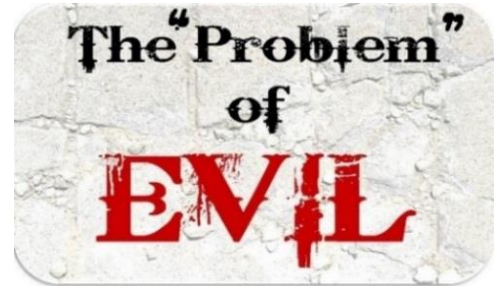
- Have you misinterpreted Romans 8:28 for your own end or goals in life?
- Are you ready to reexamine any cultural compromises in your life?
- Have you been misled by the philosophy that everything always has a happy ending?
- Have you been bypassing God’s will for your life and making excuses?
- Are you presuming upon God’s grace?

J. Wilbur Chapman often told of the testimony given by a certain man in one of his meetings: ‘I got off at the Pennsylvania depot as a tramp, and for a year I begged on the streets for a living. One day I touched a man on the shoulder and said: “Hey, mister, can you give me a dime?” As soon as I saw his face I was shocked to see that it was my own father. I said: “Father, father, do you know me?” Throwing his arms around me and with tears in his eyes, he said: “Oh my son, at last I’ve found you! I’ve found you. You want a dime? Everything I have is yours!” Think of it. I was a tramp. I stood begging my own father for ten cents, when for eighteen years he had been looking for me to give me all that he had.’

This is really a summary of what God wants to do for each one of His children. His supreme goal in saving us is to give us everything that we need in life, supplying us with His grace and virtues, so that we can be more like Him. We must remember today that God has given us the fullness of His spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3) so that we can experience Christlike sanctification in an increasingly wicked culture.

IX. Through understanding how God works.

Under this point, we must consider the topics of sin, evil, and how they related to God's nature and purpose. We have explained this already to some extent, but let's meditate on this again and reconfirm some important matters that are related to God and evil in the world. To begin with, Romans 8:28 does not say that God actually *causes* all things to happen, period.



Nowhere in Scripture do we read that God, who is infinitely holy (Lev. 11:44), causes sin or evil, or that He is the instigator of the evil actions of people and Satan. He *permits* these things, but that is much different from *initiating* them. When the Bible teaches that God creates evil (Isaiah 45:7), it means that He is ultimately in charge or sovereign of all that happens by His providential oversight of His creation, but it does not mean He the source of evil or instigates moral evil and becomes the author of sin (James 1:13-14). What God permits (war, drug addiction, child molestation), He is often said to create.

What does all of this mean in relation to Romans 8:28? It reminds us that when sin and evil are in some form experienced in the believer's life, we should not conclude that these are part of the "all things" that God directly causes. We must understand that the actual causes related to sin come from Satan, the sin nature, the sinful choices of people, and the consequences of living in an evil and sinful world.

God is not the direct cause of evil or sin, but Romans 8:28 says that God brings good (Christlikeness) out of all things, even those things which He has not directly caused. Yes, even the evil and sinful acts committed against God's children or those sinful acts committed by God's children can still be used by God as a way to ultimately produce Christlikeness in the Christian life. How can this be? This goodness or Christlikeness occurs when God, due to the sins of His people, chastens His people and brings His children to the place of repentance, inner healing, and begins to transform their lives in new and exciting ways.

Of course, when reflecting on God's purpose of producing Christlikeness, we must once again realize that sinning willfully to experience more of God's grace and goodness in one's life is absolutely reprehensible (Rom. 6:1-2). On the other hand, Paul does not say "almost everything" is good, which means that God can use evil and our sinful departures from Himself as a tool to ultimately bring us back to the Lord and produce more Christlikeness in our lives. The evil things that God uses for the good of His people may be divided into three categories: suffering, temptation, and sin. I must confess that it is difficult to understand how evil, sin, temptation, and sorrow could possibly qualify as working for our good. In an otherwise perfect world they wouldn't. But we live in a fallen world and find ourselves, more often than we would wish, caught up in some sinful failing and departure from God's will, which in itself, must be understood as damaging to our spiritual life.

But let us reflect again on Paul's meaning here. When we extend the application that "all things" do include the sufferings or hardships that come into our lives, which may also be related to our own sinful living, then how can these work together for our good? The answer is that God uses these times of spiritual defeat to eventually bring us out of them, by showing us His grace, forgiveness, and newfound victory, which results in revival, obedience to Christ, and representing Christ in our character and conduct. Of course, the various sins we commit and the consequences of these sins, with all of their negative impacts upon us, both spiritual and physical, are not good. Sin is never good. It is a transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4). Furthermore, the direct results of sin are never good (Prov. 13:15; James 1:15).

All the evil and tragic events which cause suffering in our lives, such as hardships that stem from our own sins, or which might come upon us because of the sins of others, sufferings that come through a life-debilitating car accident, a stroke, heart attack, child abuse, or if we develop cancer, are not good.

Let me reiterate what I've stated before. Romans 8:28 does not teach that all things are good but that they work together for our good. In a similar way, Paul exhorts believers to give thanks "in every thing" (in all circumstances) - not necessarily for them (1 Thess. 5:18). Not every event in itself is intrinsically good, it may actually be evil, but the effect or impact it has on our life can be both useful and helpful in

working greater conformity to Christ in our daily lives. Not everything is good. In fact, to call evil good is a grievous error under any circumstances. We are not to call evil good (Isa. 5:20).

What Romans 8:28 is teaching is that for those who love God (God's children) no evil can befall them which God cannot use for their Christlike growth and His glory.

A man is walking on a mountain road when he came upon an Indian lying in the middle of the road with his ear to the ground. The Indian was muttering in broken English, "Truck, Chevy truck, Chevy pick-up truck-large tires, man driving, German shepherd in front seat, loaded with firewood, California license plates, UBA123." The man was astounded and said to the Indian, "You can tell all of that by just listening to the ground?" The Indian said, "No, truck ran over me thirty minutes ago!"

Life is a lot like this. We do not always see what is coming, and when it does, it sometimes runs right over us. No matter how hard you try to avoid physical problems by taking your vitamins or legal problems by being honest, you are bound to be hit with something sooner or later. Life sometimes hits us when we are not expecting it. Paul was hit by illness at one point in his life. He never saw it coming.

2 Corinthians 12:7 is worth repeating:

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

In this case, God allowed a demon to inflict a malady on Paul's body in order to keep him from developing pride because of all the visions and revelations that God had given to him and not to others. In this case, the evil was used by God to bring about the Christlike character development of humility (Phil. 2:5). God in His infinite wisdom knows how to take evil and use it for our spiritual good. This was illustrated in Joseph's experience ("ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" – Gen. 50:20).

Suffering at the hands of wicked and evil people can teach us many things. It can teach us to hate sin like Christ did (Titus 2:11-12). Personal suffering at the hands of evil men, as Christ experienced (Acts 2:23) will also teach us more about the wickedness of sin and can cause us to develop a holy hatred against it (Amos 5:15).

John MacArthur again comments:

“Suffering helps us see and hate our own sin. Sometimes it is only when we are mistreated, unfairly accused, or are debilitated by illness, financial disaster, or some other form of hardship that we come face-to-face with our temper, our self-satisfaction, or our indifference to other people and even to God. By helping us see and hate our sin, suffering is also used by God to drive it out and purify us. ‘When He has tried me,’ Job said, ‘I shall come forth as gold’ (Job 23:10).”

Suffering for Christ is designed by God to help us identify to a limited extent with Christ’s suffering on our behalf and to conform us to Him (Phil. 3:10; Gal. 6:17). Again, this is yet another way that “all things” work together for our good. When we willingly submit our suffering to our heavenly Father, it can be used by Him to mold us more perfectly into the divine likeness of Christ.

God also uses the evil of temptation as a means of bringing good to His people. Just as suffering is not good in itself, neither is temptation. But, as is the case with suffering, the Lord is able to use temptation for our benefit. Temptation should drive us to our knees in prayer and cause us to ask God for strength to resist it and be victorious over it (Matt. 6:13). Temptation causes the godly believer to flee to the Lord for protection and reconfirm his faith in God’s Word (Ps. 119:11).

Temptation can also increase the believer’s desire and longing for his final deliverance when he will be like Christ (Rom. 7:24–25) and with Christ (Phil. 1:21–24). Yes, God can even use sin as a means of bringing good to His children. This would have to be true if Paul’s statement about “all things” really does mean “all things.” Even more than suffering and temptation, sin is not good in itself, because it is the total opposite of what is good. But God can even use our sins to bring about His greater and primary purpose of making us more like Christ.

As already mentioned, God can cause the sins of other people to work for our good. If we are seeking to live godly, seeing a sin in others will make us hate and avoid it more (Ps. 119:104; Prov. 6:16) even as Jesus did (Heb. 7:26). Evil and sinful actions committed against us will also help us to become more like Jesus when we learn to love our enemies as Jesus taught (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:33). The sins and evil things committed against us will also give us opportunity obey Paul's admonition to do good unto those who seek to do us harm (Rom. 12:19-21). As mentioned already, the personal sins that we commit will cause us to be chastened with God's conviction and sometimes chastisement, which is designed to bring about holiness, newness of life, and character transformation (Heb. 12:10-11). This is the supreme good for which God causes our sin to work.

John MacArthur concludes:

"Through suffering of all kinds and for all reasons, we can learn kindness, sympathy, humility, compassion, patience, and gentleness. Most importantly, God can use suffering as He can use few other things to bring us closer to Himself."

1 Peter 5:10 reminds us how evil and suffering, even the suffering related to persecution for being a Christian, can bring out Christlikeness in our lives: "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*."

In answering the problem of evil, John MacArthur comments in this way:

"Although the truth is often difficult to recognize and accept, the Lord causes even evil things to work for our good. It is these less obvious and less pleasant channels of God's blessing that Paul here seems to be emphasizing—those things among the 'all things' that are in themselves anything but good. Many of the things that we do and that happen to us are either outright evil or, at best, are worthless. Yet in His infinite wisdom and omnipotence, our heavenly Father will turn even the worst of such things to our ultimate good."

Again, this means that even our sinful or evil departures that we pass through in life can be used to turn us back to God, obedience, and spiritual growth or transformation (Ps. 119:67, 71). Even times of failure (although not good in themselves) can be changed into times of fruitfulness through God's intervening

chastening hand (Heb. 12:6) and pruning process (John 15:2). Sinful departures in the life of the Christian can be changed into times of repentance (Rev. 2:5) and sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3-4). In this way, all things work together for our good.

Roy Laurin once again comments:

“One event, isolated and separated from all other events in your life may seem evil, but, as a result of this agreement, all the events result in a common purpose of good. Just as it is in the seasons, cold and heat, snow and rain, frost and sunshine work together out of seemingly opposite spheres to produce a harvest of good fruits.”

Ron Lee Davis similarly writes:

"The good news is not that God will make our circumstances come out the way we like, but that God can weave even our disappointments and disasters into His eternal plan. The evil that happens to us can be transformed into God's good."

We must remember that God sees the big picture; He has a master plan. For this reason, all things can and do work together for our good, even in a fallen world of evil, sin, temptation, tragedy, and sorrow. God uses these things to reshape us, reconfirm our faith, revive us, and redirect our lives to ultimately make us more like His Son.

“I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way:
But I was none the wiser
For all she had to say.
Then I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne’er a word said she;
But Oh the lessons I did learn,
When Sorrow walked with me.”

God can even use our sorrows or down times in life and work them together for our good. Tears are a language God understands and He uses our tears to bring about His eternal purpose of conforming us in a greater way to His Son’s likeness.

Daniel Wallace sums up the understanding of "good" when he writes:

“When we read Romans 8:28 in its context we can give a positive answer to the questions of pain and suffering in the world. We may see nothing good come of misery and disaster in this world, but this world is not all of reality. There is an ‘until’; there is a place beyond the horizon of what our senses can apprehend, and it is more real and more lasting than what we experience in this mortal shell. God is using the present, even the miserable present, to conform us to the image of his Son. If we define the good as only what we can see in this life, then we have missed the whole point of this text.”

As we pass through trials and suffering related to our present lives, we should have the one consuming desire to be like Jesus. “This one thing I do ... I press toward the mark (the goal of Christlikeness) for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:13-14). Or as the hymn writer said:

“I have one deep supreme desire,
That I may be like Jesus.
To this I fervently aspire,
That I may be like Jesus.
I want my heart His throne to be,
So that a watching world may see
His likeness shining forth in me.
I want to be like Jesus.”

Romans 8:28 is one of the most beloved verses in the Bible. Many of God’s seasoned saints could give testimony to this fact. If you were sick, this verse was like medicine to your soul. If you lost a loved one, these words somehow carried you through. Maybe you were crushed and beaten by some difficult trial and this verse gave you hope to go on.

Nevertheless, there are some Christians who might secretly doubt the promise of this verse during times of stress and trials because their faith is weak. They hear this verse quoted, and instead of it being a balm to their soul, it seems like a mocking, cruel joke to them. They might say, “What do you mean by good?”

Sickness is not good. Murder is not good. Divorce is not good. Suicide is not good. The death of a child is not good.

Of course, this verse is sometimes misused by well-meaning Christians who throw it in the face of those who are suffering, as if it could answer every detailed question to suffering and life in general. It also uses as a theological replacement for grieving with those who are hurting. When Romans 8:28 it is misused in this way, it produces an effect that is opposite of what Paul intended.

I was talking to a Christian man one day who shared with me a very sad story. He spoke of the day his son was crippled in a car accident. He was in the hospital with his wife mourning over the whole ordeal when a Christian, likely well-meaning, threw out Romans 8:28 before the grieving parents. Of course, Romans 8:28 was true, when it came to the paralysis of his son, but instead of weeping with the parents, the Christian man, at inopportune time, took the Romans 8:28 approach and failed to communicate the first message these grieving parents needed – mercy and love. Romans 8:28 sometimes must come later after the grieving process (Rom. 12:15). Sometimes it's better to say nothing than to speak of things we know nothing about!

As we reflect on sin, evil, how can these things really be good and fulfill God's purpose? The general answer is given in Romans 8;29 in that they will ultimately help us to become more like Jesus Christ. They are taking us closer to the intended goal, even when we don't think so, or believe so.

Ray Pritchard explains "good" by asking:

“Is Paul saying, ‘Whatever happens is good.’ No.

Is he saying that suffering and evil and tragedy are good? No.

Is he saying everything will work out if we just have enough faith? No.

Is he saying that we will be able to understand why God allowed tragedy to come? No. What, then, is he saying? He is erecting a sign over the unexplainable mysteries of life—a sign which reads ‘Quiet. God at work.’”

“He's still working on me
To make me what I need to be
It took him just a week to make the moon and stars
The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.
How loving and patient He must be
'Cause He's still workin' on me.”

Pritchard closes by saying:

“We are not called to praise God for evil, sin, and death. But we can praise God for the good he can work in the darkest days of life. Romans 8:28 is not teaching us to call evil good or simply to smile through the tears and pretend everything is OK. But it is teaching us that no matter what happens to us, no matter how terrible, no matter how unfair-our God is there. He has not left us. His purposes are being worked out as much in the darkness as they are in the light.”

A story is told of the poet Cowper who was subject to fits of great depression. One day he ordered a cab and had himself driven to London Bridge. Soon a sense fog settled down upon the city. The cab driver wondered about for two hours and then admitted that he was lost, though he had been in the business for many years.

Cowper asked him if he thought he could find the way home. He said that he did and in an hour landed him at his door. When asked what the fare would be, he mentioned a sum, but said that he felt that he ought not to take anything as he had no filled his order. Never mind, said Cowper, you have saved my life. I was on my way to throw myself off from London Bridge, and he gave him double the usual fare. Cowper then went into the house and wrote the hymns that bears the lines which we have previously quoted in part in this study:

“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill

He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

1 Samuel 3:18

"It *is* the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good."

Eli took the news that Samuel gave to him submissively. In other words, He rested in God's sovereign work and way even when it involved God's judgment upon the house of Levi. Have you surrendered to God's way and will for your life? ("let him do what seemeth him good").

"Would you have Him make you free, and follow at His call?
Would you know the peace that comes by giving all?
Would you have Him save you, so that you need never fall?
Let Him have His way with thee."

There are some mysteries in this life which God calls us to leave unresolved. Sometimes we try and explain everything, thinking that we have the detailed answers to why God allows something to happen. Sometimes in our zeal to protect God's character, we try to explain why bad things happen to good people. This is almost always a bad idea! We don't need to protect God. He can take care of Himself. It is enough to know that we love Him, that He loves us, and that that He is there for us. It's enough to realize that God is still on the throne, and by His providence, He is orchestrating the events of our lives to bring about His unfailing purpose, which is to make us more like His Son.

Philippians 3:10

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."

A car's rearview mirror shows you only what is behind you. If you don't watch the road in front of you but only stare into the mirror, you will be headed for an accident. You can't make any progress staring in a rearview mirror. However, in front of the rearview mirror is a much bigger piece of glass—the windshield. In a similar way, we need to focus our attention on what lies in front of us, because where the Heavenly Father is taking us is much greater than what we have left behind. As we keep "looking unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2) we will become more like Jesus, even when we pass through the trials of life, since the Father uses trials to make us more like Jesus. Too many people are bound by yesterday. They are looking in the rearview mirror. They're shackled by their past mistakes or poor choices. Remember, you should always learn from yesterday but never live in yesterday. We must keep looking unto Jesus and allow His example and faith to make us more like Him, as we pass through the challenges and deep sorrows of life.

X. Through sighting some examples of all things.

We have learned from this study that God designs our trials to work for us and not against us (Rom. 8:28). This is because they are to make us more like Jesus Christ! We will not always understand how the things we



EXAMPLES

experience work to the good of Christlikeness, and we certainly will not always enjoy them. But we can know, accepting by faith, that nothing comes into our lives that God does not allow and use for His purpose to produce Christlikeness in us and through us.

The Bible teaches that God can use whatever we pass through in life to bring about the goal of Christlikeness. Let me share with you some examples to help us better understand what Paul is teaching. In a providential way, God can use “all things” to accomplish this purpose. When Paul means “all things” this would include such things as:

- the good and bad,
- evil and holy,
- right and wrong choices,
- tragic and joyful events,
- hard times and easy times,
- living with depression or living without depression,
- defeat and victory,
- emotional stress and emotional well-being,
- young age and old age,
- tears and happiness,
- testing and non-testing,
- stress and no stress,
- encouragement and discouragement,
- temptation and non-temptation,
- backsliding and faithful living,
- sad times and happy times,
- sickness and health,
- conflicts and peace,
- abuse and kindness,
- sorrow and gladness,
- financial gain and poverty,
- pain and comfort,
- trials and triumphs,

- fears and bravery,
- assurance and confusion,
- joy and sadness,
- sweet and bitter,
- weakness and strength,
- difficult days and uplifting days,
- foes and friends,
- calmness and stress,
- pressures and ease,
- good situations and bad situations,
- sinful and non-sinful,
- sufferings and comforts,
- hope and hopelessness,
- failures and victories,
- life and death.

All of these different experiences in life can bring about God's ultimate and unfailing goal in our lives which is Christlikeness.

God uses all of these things and in His grand plan somehow weaves them together for our good, which is to bring about His life-transforming purpose in our lives, ultimately causing us to be more like His son in our character and conduct which is the end goal that God has in mind (Rom. 8:29).

Philippians 1:6 gives us this wonderful promise:

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you (salvation from the *penalty* of sin = the past aspect of our salvation) will perform *it* (salvation from the *power* of sin = the promise present-day sanctification) until the day of Jesus Christ” (salvation from the *presence* of sin = glorification and perfect Christlikeness).

Yes, everything can be for our good, even when it seems like everything is against us. God reminds us that when life is working against us, He is working for us! God is at work in our lives!

William MacDonald comments on God's good work in our hearts and lives:

"It may not always seem so! Sometimes when we are suffering heartbreak, tragedy, disappointment, frustration, and bereavement, we wonder what good can come out of it. But the following verse gives the answer: whatever God permits to come into our lives is designed to conform us to the image of His Son. When we see this, it takes the question mark out of our prayers. Our lives are not controlled by impersonal forces such as chance, luck, or fate, but by our wonderful, personal Lord, who is 'too loving to be unkind and too wise to err.'"

Romans 8:28

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose."

George Zeller gives this illustration of all things working together for our good:

"There are many ingredients that go in to making a cake, and many of these if taken by themselves are not good tasting (not everyone enjoys eating raw eggs, or flour or shortening, etc.) but if you put all of the ingredients together



they all work together to make a great tasting cake (the end product). So God takes both the bitter and sweet, the hard and easy, the bad and the good, and works them all together for good."

In other words, just as a cook combines ingredients to make a tasty dish of food, so God mixes together the circumstances of life in such a way as ultimately to bring good to us. Of course, this is only made possible because all things work together with the Spirit's (Rom. 8:27) and with the Heavenly Father's providential assistance (Rom. 8:29-20).

Here is another illustration. When a person is ill and goes to a doctor, he usually writes out a prescription for medicine, which is then taken to a pharmacist. The liquid we then receive from the pharmacist may be disagreeable to the taste, but it is for the sick person's good. So all things, all the events associated with our lives,

even the bitter and disagreeable things that God allows to reach us, are all for our good. "All things work together for good to them that love God."

Recently I toured the Toyota factory in Kentucky. What you see are giant buildings that cover many acres. Day and night the trucks bring in the raw materials and various component parts of an automobile-the engine parts, the wheels, the chassis, the frame, the outer body, the windshield, the instrument panel, the seats, the carpeting, and so on. All of that goes into the plant and becomes part of the assembly line. At the end of the line a new Toyota Corolla rolls out. Over time something beautiful is created.

Paul is saying that our experience in our Christian life is like this. Over time something beautiful is created!

Ray Pritchard remarks in this way:

"God begins with the raw materials of life, including some parts that seem to serve no good purpose. Those materials are acted upon by pressure and heat and then are bent and shaped and joined together. Over time something beautiful is created. Not by accident, but by a divine design. And nothing is wasted in the process. That is how we must look at life."

Yes, God can use the ups and downs of life, the good and bad, the suffering and ease of life to bring about His ultimate purpose for our lives which is to become more like Jesus. God has an eternal purpose that He is working out, and we who are Christians are a distinct part of this purpose. We see in Romans 8:28-29 the blueprint of what God is doing with us and will do for us someday.

Laurin again states:

"Because we are in His purpose, shade and shine, joy and sorrow, good and bad lose their apparent identity to become ultimately blended into the harmonious purpose for good."

“Life's uncertainties may haunt me,
Foolish fears may try to taunt me
Till my heart is filled with doubt and dread;
He who set the planets spinning
Sees the end from the beginning
He will keep me through the days ahead.

God knows all about tomorrow
He can see beyond today;
Be it filled with joy or sorrow,
He has planned it that way.

So I do not fear the future,
On His promises I stand;
God knows all about tomorrow
For He holds it in His hand!”

Things do not happen by chance but by divine appointment. And the work of the sovereign God miraculously weaves all the events of our lives together for our present and eternal good – Christlikeness. There is no limit and no exception to this promise of our text. All things work together for our good. The scale has been turned in our favor for “All things are for your sakes” (2 Cor. 4:15) and one reason is because they are working together for your good - Christlikeness.

“What tho’ the way be lonely,
And dark the shadows fall;
I know where’er it leadeth,
My Father planned it all.
The sun may shine tomorrow,
The shadows break and flee;
‘Twill be the way He chooses,
The Father’s plan for me.”

God will often interrupt our own plans to bring about His plans and purposes that He has ordained to come to pass in our lives. The hard times may not seem “good”

but you can be certain that a lot of good comes out of them for they are designed to make us more like the Master.

- Have you yielded to the Master's way, even if it's a hard and difficult way?
- Are you going to allow your personal trials to make you bitter or better?
- Can you give some illustrations how certain events in your life can result in Christlikeness?
- Are you really determined to become more like Jesus and reflect His character and conduct in your life?

There is a Christmas story that illustrates how God can take a tragic event and work it together for good. This can be used as an illustration of how God works together the difficult times of our lives for our own good, which is to make us more like Christ (Romans 8:28-30).

It was Christmas Eve in Oberndorf, Austria, in 1818. Joseph Mohr, the vicar of the church, had written a new song for the Christmas Eve service and the organist Franz Gruber had set it to music. But the organ in the village church broke down. So Gruber grabbed a guitar and accompanied Mohr in the first-ever rendition of "Silent Night." The story doesn't end there, however. When a man came to fix the organ, Gruber tested it by playing the new song.

The repairman liked the song so much that he took a copy of it back to his own village. There, four daughters of a village glove maker learned the song and began singing it in concerts all over the region. Because of that faulty organ, this new Christmas song "Silent Night" blessed people all over Austria—and eventually the world.

For the Christian life, we know that all things work together for good and the ultimate good is to make us more like Jesus Christ. Good things, such as transformation, character building, obedience, and conduct that reflects Christ can come out of suffering and tragedy, or when things break down in our lives! When things break or when plans change, how should we respond? Often we fret and worry because we don't have the control we would like to have. That's when we need to step back, trust God, and wait to see how He is going to use the situation

for His glory and our good. The secret is to rest in God's providential way which He has allowed to come to pass in our lives and use it as a platform to bring about His ultimate and unfailing purpose, which is to make us more like His Son Jesus Christ.

The changes in our lives may not give the world something as remarkable as "Silent Night," but because God is in charge and is changing our life into Christlikeness, we can be sure that "All is calm, all is bright."

