

God's Providential Care
Romans 8:28
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In Romans 8:28-31, Paul said, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Everyone knows Romans 8:28. It is one of the greatest verses in the Bible. You don't even have to quote the verse; you can just say, “Remember Romans 8:28.” And we know immediately what it says. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” It contains the promise of a soft pillow for troubled hearts.

If you have a troubled heart, I pray this verse and the Spirit of God would become a soft pillow for you to lay your weary head and heart upon; that all things are working together in your life for your good and for God's ultimate glory.

When we become believers in the Lord Jesus, we have a new help, a new hope and we have the Holy Spirit in our hearts. And we also come into a new knowledge; we learn that God is working in our lives for our good and for His glory. So notice verse 28: “And we know...”

There is a great, parallel passage I want you to make note of: Philippians 1:6, which says, “...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

These two verses go so well together. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” and “...being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

Have you ever started something and didn't finish it? Maybe you joined the gym. And that's all you did—join the gym. You never went to the gym, you never exercised at the gym. I've met people who say, “Oh, I remember that gym.”

“How often do you go?”

“Well, I became a member three years ago, but I haven't been yet.”

So we start something with great intentions, but we don't follow through. Many times we start a book. I have a stack of books on my nightstand. I'd start to read and get a few chapters in but I

haven't finished it. We don't finish what we begin.

Aren't you glad that God isn't like that? Aren't you glad that God doesn't start working in your life and then say, "Aw, put him on the shelf. I'm getting tired of this person. He's not changing very quickly." No; God continues what He has begun.

You can know that if God has saved you by His grace, He will begin to sanctify you by His Spirit into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. And one day He will glorify you. You've been justified, you are being sanctified and one day you will surely be glorified in heaven in the presence of the Lord.

I want to look at verse 28 as my main focus. I want to give you five facts about God's providential care. When I use the word "providential" or "providence," it is a word that does not appear in the Bible. It is a word that describes that God is watching over. God is sovereign. Running through this entire passage is the sovereignty of God.

I have no problems with the fact that God is sovereign. He does whatever He so wishes. And God sovereignly, providentially takes care of me, His child. The Bible is very clear that our Father watches over us, and He takes care of us.

The first fact of the five about Romans 8:28 is that we have a certainty of His care. It is in the phrase, "And we know..." The word "know" is the Greek word "oide," which means "an intuitive, deep, experiential, heart knowledge." We know intuitively. We have an understanding as God has revealed Himself in His Word that "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." So this is a believer's blessed assurance: "And we know..." This is not just Paul's opinion; it is God's Word.

I believe God's Word is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God. Do you believe that? I believe that every word is given by the breath of God. He used human authors, but He superimposed on the human authors the very words that they wrote. So they were the words of God. When we read these verses, we are actually hearing God speak to us. We are hearing God's Word. So it's as simple as believing God's promises in His Word that I can know something.

Now we don't know everything; as Christians, there is a lot we do not know. In verse 25, there is the phrase, "We do not see." We don't see everything clearly. And verse 26 has the phrase, "For we do not know." In John 13 when Jesus was in the upper room with His disciples, He was going to wash Peter's feet. But Peter objected to having Jesus wash his feet. Then Jesus told Peter, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7). What a great expression.

Many times we don't know what God is doing at the time, but we will know afterwards. When we get to heaven, we will know as we are known when we see Jesus face to face and we will understand. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). We must walk by faith and not by sight.

Notice that it doesn't say we see, it doesn't say we feel, it doesn't say we understand; it says "We know." How do "we know"? How do I know that God is working for my good and for His glory? The answer is by faith. The object of my faith is God and His Word.

And we must take God at His Word. When Abraham and Sarah were past the age of bearing children, yet God promised them that they would have a child, and it would come through Sarah. So Abraham didn't look at the deadness of Sarah's womb. He didn't look in the mirror and say, "No way, José!" He looked at God (Genesis 15:6). And he realized that "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

So we have to be careful that we don't look in the mirror and look to ourselves. And we don't look at our own resources. Rather we look to God, even as Abraham trusted God. He answered Abraham's prayers, and He will fulfill His promise, when we focus on God.

Verses 28-31 primarily focus on God. It does make reference to us loving God, but the tenor of the passage is God. It's a God-centered text. Our focus must be on God, if we are going to have this certainty that God is taking care of us.

God's Person—we mediate on God's love, mercy and His attributes; God's promises, which is His Word—the Bible is the Word of God, God cannot lie, so the Bible cannot lie, and we must take God at His Word; and God's power—"There is nothing too hard for You" (Jeremiah 32:17).

We meditate on God's purposes. We know God and we trust God. We meditate on God's promises, which we find in the Word of God. We believe the promises and we act on the promises. And then we rest in God's power; God can do all things.

So, number one, we have the certainty of God's care. Someone put it in a poem:

"I know not where His islands

Lift their fronded palms in air.

I only know I cannot drift

Beyond His love and care."

I am so thankful that I cannot drift beyond God's love and care; that God doesn't say, "Oh, no; I just lost him! He just got a little too far out, and I can't reach him!" No; God's arm is not too short and His ear not too heavy, that He cannot save (Isaiah 59:1). You can never drift beyond God's love and care. He is the Good Shepherd who goes out into the hills looking for His lost sheep (Luke 15). I like Peter's passage where he says, "...casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). "Your care" is your anxieties, your worries, your fears.

Number two, we have the extent of His care in verse 28 in the phrase "all things." And "all things" means "all things" in the Greek. There are no qualifications or limits. Every event of our

lives—whether what we call good or what we may call bad—is under His loving, beneficial, sovereign control.

If you look back at Romans 8:17-18, you'll find the statement, "We suffer with Him." So we will go through hard times, through what seems to be difficult periods. In verse 18 we see the words, "the sufferings of this present time." And verse 23 says, "We ourselves groan within ourselves." We suffer with Him, we suffer in this time and "We ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

So every disappointment—even bereavement, loss, illness, children who cause us pain, loss of wealth and health, lack of fruit in Christian service—are all under His providential care. We need to rest in that.

Jesus said, in Matthew 6:26, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" The next time you are discouraged about provision in your life, go bird watching.

I remember seeing this little sparrow one time with a big French fry in its beak. I gotta pay for those; they get them free at fast-food restaurants! They just scoop them up!

God provides for birds, and God will provide for you. He said, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Go out and look at the flowers. "Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?" (Matthew 6:28-30). God will take care of you. "All things" means "all things."

In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Paul says, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." We may call our circumstances bad, but God will use it for good and for His glory.

Number three is the fact of the harmony of His care. It's in the phrase "work together." It means independently or individually a circumstance may be bad or not good, but God mixes it together, and brings out good. William Barclay translates this verse as, "We know that God intermingles all things for good to them who love Him and are called according to His purpose." I like that translation.

Some Greek scholars believe that the phrase, "God" and "in" should be inserted in verse 28, so it would read, "And we know that God, in all things, works them together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." I think that should be in there.

God is behind the scenes working. God is in control. We must think in terms of God's love and providential care in watching over us. And God works them together for good.

Consider baking a cake. I don't bake cakes but I eat them. If you were going to make a cake

from scratch and you took the individual ingredients and ate them separately, it wouldn't be good. It would be bad. But when you mix the ingredients together and bake it in the oven, out comes a beautiful, tasty cake.

Thank God for baked goods! I like baked goods. But don't give me any! When I'm in the store, I have to stay away from the bakery. I can smell a donut shop 100 miles away! Do you remember Winchell's Donuts? Praise Jehovah! They were awesome! Whatever happened to Winchell's?! But you couldn't eat the ingredients separately; you had to mix them together.

So God mixes our circumstances all together—what we would call good and bad—put it in the oven, keeps His eye on the temperature, and it all works together for good.

God is continuously, purposely and lovingly working. Trust Him. He cares for you.

The great St. Augustine said, "God, rather than not allowing evil to exist, chose to bring good out of evil." God is in control; God knows what He's doing, and we must rest and trust in Him.

Number four is the results of His care. I like this. What are the results of God's providential care in our lives? Verse 28, "for good." God is working for our good. We may not see it, feel it or understand it, but we must trust Him by faith. And God works not only for our good but for His glory.

What is the good God is working in my life? The answer is that God is working to make you more like Jesus. This is where the context of Romans 8:28 is important; you have to read verses 29-31. "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..." This is God working in the hearts and lives of His children, conforming us to the image of Jesus. "...that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified."

Notice that these verses are in the past tense; it's a done deal. In experience, there was still future glorification, but in God's economy, what begins in grace and God's foreknowledge ends in glory.

There are five links in a chain that cannot be broken in your salvation that I want to point out. The first link is "foreknew," in verse 29. This word "foreknew" is not the same as God's omniscience. God knows everything, and God knows the beginning from the end (Revelation 22:13). But it is a word that conveys the idea of God setting His love upon you. It is the same concept used in the book of Genesis where it says, "Adam knew Eve, his wife" (Genesis 4:1). It means that they were intimate with one another as husband and wife. So God "foreknew" you; He set His love upon you.

I believe this is the equivalent of where the Bible says that God chose you. You didn't choose Him (John 15:16). We don't understand that. I wouldn't have chosen me! But God chose me. So you are chosen or foreknown.

The second link in the chain is “predestined.” People get real freaked out over this term. They think God predestines people to hell. He does not. God does not predetermine to send people to hell. If you go to hell, it’s because you refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, you refuse to repent and trust Him as your Lord and Savior. So you can’t blame God.

But if you go to heaven, God had predetermined, after He set His love upon you or foreknew you, what He would do with you. That’s really all the word “predestined” means. It means “to determine beforehand” what He would do with you, once He saved you. Here is what He would do with you: that you would “be conformed to the image of His Son,” verse 29.

So we have salvation from sin’s penalty—I’m justified; and we have salvation from sin’s power—I’m being sanctified; and one day we will have salvation from sin’s presence—I’ll be glorified. And all these links in the chain are unbreakable, because they were actually put together by the hand of God. God foreknew me, God predestined me and He’s conforming me “to the image of His Son.”

The third link is that God “called” you. If you are a Christian, God foreknew you, God predestined you and God called you, verse 30. The call is in time. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to convict you, to woo you. Sometimes we say “to draw you” to Jesus Christ. All of a sudden you begin to see you’re a sinner and need God. It’s like a switch went on in your heart and mind. It’s the Holy Spirit speaking to you.

That’s why the Bible says, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Hebrews 3:15), because God is calling you, and if God calls you, you must come to Him in faith and in obedience. Repent of your sin and believe in Jesus Christ. You were saved in time when you were called, and you believed in and received Jesus Christ.

The fourth link is, “Whom He called...He also justified.” You have been justified. The word “justified”—the first half of the book of Romans is how God justifies the unjust—is a forensic term which means “to declare to be made righteous.” God justifies the unrighteous based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. It’s not God making you practically righteous; it’s God making you positionally righteous before a holy God. You were justified the moment you believed in Jesus Christ after He called you.

The fifth link is that you are glorified, verse 30. God foreknew you, He predestined you, He called you, He justified you and you will be glorified. This is the third phase in our salvation: being justified, sanctified and then glorified. One day we will be glorified. The moment you begin to comprehend that “God saved me by His grace [Ephesians 2:8-9], foreknew me, predestined me, called me, justified me and I’m going to heaven!” how it thrills your heart. How exciting is that! What God has begun in your life, God will complete. God is working to make you like Jesus.

The following quote is by Oswald Sanders. He said, “Every adverse experience, when rightly received, can carry its quota of good. Bodily pain and weakness causes us to feel our frailty.

Perplexities reveal our lack of wisdom. Financial reverses point up how limited our resources. Mistakes and failures humble our pride. All these things can be included in the term 'good.'" I like this quote.

Remember Paul's thorn in the flesh, in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. He said because of "the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me." Have you ever thought about who gave him that thorn? I believe that "thorn" was some kind of physical suffering, physical pain.

Why would God give Paul pain? Because Paul had been elevated to paradise and heard and seen things that were unimaginable. God knows how to balance our lives. Because of that paradise experience, He had to give Paul a painful experience. It was given to Paul "lest [he] should be exalted above measure." "A messenger of Satan" was allowed to "buffet" Paul. He said He "pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me."

Have you even been there? "O Lord, take this pain away! O Lord, please heal my body! O Lord, please meet my needs!"

The Lord didn't take away the thorn and the pain in Paul's side. Instead He said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient..." I like that "...for you." So Paul said, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me....For when I am weak, then I am strong." It drove Paul to the all-sufficient grace of God.

Number five in the facts on Romans 8:28 is the object of His care. This is where most people get this text really messed up. They basically say, "All things work together for good" and stop right there. No, it does not!

By the way, this text does not mean if your car breaks down, you're going to get a better one. No; you may have to ride a bicycle. This doesn't mean if something bad happens to you, God is going to give you something better immediately. Rather it means that God is working and using it for your good, to make you more like Jesus. It's an eternal good; that one day you will be like Jesus. You need to keep that perspective.

The text doesn't say that all things work for good; it says that "All things work together for good..." And the object of His care? Two things: "...to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." This promise is for the child of God only. It's not for the unbeliever or non-Christian; it's for the believer, the child of God.

It is part of our responsibility to love God. Up to this point in Romans, Paul has been talking about God's love for us. Now he turns a corner and says if you love God, then it will "work together for good"; for your good and God's glory. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

As I was thinking about this point, I prayed for you as a church, for you as our congregation. I

prayed, “God, no matter how hard life gets, no matter how deep the difficult trials and sufferings and adversity in their lives, help them to love You with all their heart, soul and strength and mind.” If you do that, you’ll be okay. I didn’t say you wouldn’t suffer; I said you’d be okay—as long as you love God. Never stop loving God.

When Job went through his hardships, he said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). So don’t stop loving God. If you love God, it’ll take all the poison out of the pain. It’ll take all the bitterness out of your heart. And God will be able to accomplish His purpose. Rightly received, it will carry its quota of good if you surrender to God and love God.

Notice also that the second qualification is if you are “the called according to His purpose.” If you are a child of God, you’ve been called according to His purpose; not your purpose. It’s not your ideas or plans but God’s. And if you love God “with all your heart...soul...and strength,” then it will “work together for good.” So He called us by His love and grace, and He’s fulfilling His purpose in our lives.

Going back to verse 28, “We know.” How do we know? Because God has promised it in His Word. It’s called the Bible. It has “exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4). Resting on the promises of God.

Think of Jacob as an example of this whole truth in Romans 8:28. Joseph was gone, Reuben was disgraced, Judah was dishonored, Simeon and Levi had broken his heart, Dinah, his daughter, was defiled, Simeon was now in prison, his beloved Rachael, his wife, was dead, famine threatened the family and then came the demand from Egypt that Benjamin must appear before the Egyptian governor before any supplies would be released. Old Jacob wept and said, “You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me” (Genesis 42:36).

As I read that I think, Jacob, no! Turn the page of the story! Just go to the next chapter of your life! Jacob was asking, “God, why are You punishing me?! God, what are You doing?! Why is Your hand so heavy upon me?!” Little did he realize that God had a plan; that God was going to provide for them, that God was going to multiply them, that God was going to bring them out in the exodus of Egypt and make them a mighty nation, that God would give them His laws and through them send the Messiah. God had a purpose.

When we think that everything is against us—no; God is for us. Verse 31 says, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Think of Joseph, the son of Jacob. He was hated, despised, rejected by his brothers. Can you imagine Joseph in a group-counseling, therapy session? “So, Joseph, what’s your problem?”

“Ah, no big deal; my brothers just sold me as a slave. Then I was lied about, thrown into prison, was forgotten, but God raised me up, provided for me and took good care of me. God was with me.”

When Joseph had his brothers kneeling before him in Egypt, he had the authority and power to punish them and put them in prison, but he said to them, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20). Isn't that beautiful?

Men may conspire evil against you, but if you're a child of God, He will bring good out of it. I think of the Cross of Jesus Christ. If you look at it from a human perspective, you would say, "That's bad! Jesus was crucified!" But He died for our sins, was buried and rose from the dead so we could have life. He took that horrible, evil Crucifixion and brought good out of it.

Many are familiar with the story *The Hiding Place*, written by Corrie ten Boom. It is a book that talks about her experience in World War II in Holland when they hid Jews from the Nazis. Her father died in a Nazi concentration camp, and her sister, Betsy, died. Corrie was released and traveled around sharing about God's love, provision and goodness.

In her meetings, Corrie would hold up an embroidered bookmark. She showed them the bottom of the bookmark with the tangled threads and different colors that didn't seem to make sense. She said, "Often life is like this, looking at the bottom of an embroidered bookmark." Then she would turn over the bookmark, and on it were embroidered the words "God is love."

So many times we're looking at the underside, but we need to look at God's side. He is a God of love. Someone put it in a poem called *The Divine Weaver*:

"My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colours
He weaveth steadily.

Of't times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned."