

All Things Working Together For Good

Romans 8:28

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In Romans 8:28 Paul says, “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.” If you are a child of God, you not only have a new life, you have a new relationship, you have a new hope, you have a new help, but tonight in Romans 8:28, we begin the section of a new knowledge and that runs from verses 28-30. Paul says, “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.” As Christians, we have absolute assurance of God’s, and I’m going to call it, providential care. The word providence is not in the Bible, but the concept is from Genesis to Revelation. We can be sure, as God’s people, of God’s providential care—that every circumstance of our lives are under the control of an all-wise, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving Father in heaven. That ought to just bring joy to your heart. If you are His child, nothing can come into your life but what has to be filtered through your Father who is in heaven. Every hurt, every pain, every heartache, every situation, every circumstance must be filtered through and under the control of God your Father who is in heaven.

Paul, in Philippians 1:6, another verse that I would use to parallel with Romans 8:28, says, “Being confident...,” (Romans 8:28 says, “And we know...,”) “...of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Have you ever started a project and never finished it? I have. I’ve got something that still really bothers me. When I was a teenager, I promised my mom that I would paint the house. I got it half painted and went surfing. I’m not exaggerating, for years and years the house was half painted. I just said, “That’s what you call the half-paint look. It’s a new style, you know, you just paint half the house.” I’ll be honest with you, when I get to heaven I’m going to have to apologize to my mom. “Mom, I’m sorry I never finished painting that house for you.” Maybe you start to read a book...I do this all the time, you start to read a book and you poop out about halfway through, or you have a project, or you say, “I’m going to go to the gym four days a week,” and you go about once a year. You set out to do something and you never finish. I say that because God doesn’t do that. When God starts something, God finishes it. Amen? And, “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” What begins with grace will end in glory. The beginning of grace is the end of glory. What God starts in your life, God will complete. God will bring you to glory, and you can rest in that. All the way through Romans...it opens with no condemnation, ends with no separation, and in between there is no defeat. We are in a marvelous section of the book of Romans that you don’t want to miss the next few Wednesday nights.

Paul introduces us to five facts about God’s providential care, verse 20. If you’re taking notes, I want you to write them down. This isn’t just a cutesy little outline or a great little homiletic way to divide it up. These are essential points from the text that, if you get them, will transform your life. The first fact of God’s providential care, and by the way, providential care means that God

is ruling and reigning and working in your life; that God is providentially overseeing, guiding, protecting, and watching over your life. The first fact I see is its certainty. Write that down. We can be sure and certain that God is providentially caring for me. This is seen in the phrase, verse 28 (all these points are drawn from verse 28), "And we know..." stop right there. What is it that we know? "...that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." You know there are things that we don't know, but this is something that we do know. If you back up in the text, in verse 26 he says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." He's speaking about the sufferings that will lead to the glory, and at the end of this section, he comes into verse 28, "All things..." including the sufferings. One of the problems that we have in this world right now is that we're limited with knowledge, we don't always know God's will, and we don't always know how to pray according to the will of God, but we have a "helper." It's the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit groans within us. Now we're groaning, but it's a joint participation of the Spirit of God working in the child of God, groaning according to the will of God.

I'll never forget...my dad is just a great, great man of prayer, and he's still alive. He's still with us. He's 90 years old, but he's just a man of prayer. There were so many times that I would listen to him praying. He would stop saying words and start to cry and just groan and agonize before the Lord. I'm sure that a lot of those groans were for his son, that God would work in his son's life. As a matter of fact, during my wayward years, my dad went away to a men's retreat, like the ones we have, and he tells me the story. After my conversion, he says that a group of men went up on a mountain, and they all banned together and began to pray for their prodigal sons. I was one of them, and God answered their prayer. I'm here today because of those prayers. So, if you're a mother or a father and you have a prodigal son or daughter, the Holy Spirit groans. He groans within you and you intercede from your heart, but what a neat thing to know that He comes along to help me in my weaknesses; and you don't know how to pray, you don't know what you should pray, but He's helping you.

There is something we do know. "...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 can't tarry too long on this point, but I want to point out what he doesn't say. He doesn't say we see. He doesn't say, "...and we see all things working together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." Have you ever been going through a difficult time and you've actually said, "God, I don't see what You're doing? I don't see how any good can come out of this? I don't see why You allowed it. I don't understand. I don't know. Lord, I just can't comprehend." That's because we walk by faith not by sight, and even though we can't see all things working together for good, we can know. Notice he doesn't say, "and we feel all things are working together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose." We can't see what God is doing, and we don't always feel God working. I've been there a thousand times. "God, I can't see! I can't see what good can come out of this. I don't see Your purpose or Your plan. God, I don't feel You. I don't sense Your presence anymore in my life, and I just feel that You're so far. I don't sense Your peace or I lack the joy of the Lord, and I don't feel all things," but we do know all things. There's a vast difference. You say, "Well, how

do we know all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose?" The answer to that could be quite lengthy, but let me give you a couple of quick points.

We know that because God's person. God is the one working all things together for good, and God is good. Amen? If everything that comes into my life must be filtered through God, and I believe God is good, God can allow nothing in my life but what it will serve a good purpose for my good and for His glory. When I face a reversal or an opposition or a seemingly tragedy, or I don't see or feel what God is doing, I fall back on what I do know—that God is good and I can trust Him. The second way that we know that all things work together for good is, again, God's promises. God has given us His Word, and the Bible tells me that all things work together for good. I believe it—God said it, I believe it, that settles it. Amen? So, I know that He's a good God, and I know His Word is true and He can be trusted and relied upon. The third answer is, of course, based on that, is that we know by faith. That's the simple answer. We know by faith because we trust His person and we rest in His promises. Someone said,

I know not where His islands lift

Their fronded palms in air;

I only know I cannot drift

Beyond His love and care.

How good that is! Even if you're in the hospital or you've lost employment or you have a rebellious teenager, God is in control and you can rest in Him and know for sure.

The second thing I see about God's providence in this verse is the extent of His providential care. This is a given, but it says in verse 28, "all things." I looked up that phrase in the Greek and you know what it means? It means all things. Isn't that awesome? All things actually means all things. Every event of our lives is under His beneficent sovereign control, even our suffering, as he mentions back in verse 17. He says, "...if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Even our groanings, verses 23 and 26, when we groan, it is all according to His will and He is working all things. Bereavement, illness, disappointment, children who cause us pain, lack of fruit in Christian service...everything comes under this heading "All Things." I love what Oswald Sanders said. He said, "The circumstances of the Christian's life are ordained of God. There is no such thing as chance. Love refuses to believe that God is not interested in every detail of life. Everything is permitted and designed by Him for His wise purposes. He will not cease His supervision for one moment," and to that I say—Amen and Amen and Amen!

Jesus said it like this, "Not one sparrow falls to the ground but what God knows about it," right? Someone said, "God attends the funeral of every sparrow," and guess what? You are of more value than many sparrows. The Bible says not one hair falls from your head but what God takes note of that. Some of you old timers make it very hard on God. He looks at your head

and just goes, "Zero." You used to have waves and now all you have is the beach. I want you to know as those hairs disappeared, your saying, "Yeah, it's easy for you to say, Pastor John," every hair that comes off your head God actually changes in His calculator. He punches the number and knows how many hairs are on your head. It's really a figure of speech for saying, "God is concerned about every detail of your life." So, whatever it is that's bothering you right now, God is in control. It's part of His providential care. All things literally means all things. We don't need to be afraid, God is in control.

Let me mention the third aspect of God's providential care. It says in verse 28 that they work together. Notice that little phrase, "work together." You need to understand that individually, separately, and by themselves these "all things" may not be working for good, but God is able to take everything of your life and He homogenizes it. He blends it and He works it together for your good. Now, lest I forget, I think it's a little later in my message this evening, but let me make this clear, "all things" includes what we would call bad things. Like I said, bereavement, loss, pain and disappointment, lack of fruit in Christian service...whatever it might be that saddens our hearts, that would be included in "all things," but what God does is takes all these "things" and works them together for our good and for His glory. Now, something by itself may not be what we call "good," but when God is working it together He produces good out of it. In other words, rather than not allowing evil to exist, God chose to bring good out of evil. We know that God intermingles "all things" for good to those who love Him.

One of the best illustrations, and there are many, is that of cooking. I'm not a cook by any stretch of the imagination, but you people that take ingredients, raw ingredients, like maybe when you make a cake. You blend the flour, the sugar...I don't even know what goes in a cake, okay. I should've done a little research on my illustration, but you know, you take all this stuff and blend it together. You pop it into the oven, bake it, and out comes a delicious cake. I know the eating part, I don't know the cooking part. If you were to just take raw flour and throw it in your mouth, SPIT or take some other ingredients that you use for making a cake and try to eat it separated from the rest of the ingredients and baked in the oven, it would be horrible! Life is full of these bitter experiences, but when God puts them together in our lives, blending it and working it together, and then puts it in the oven, it comes out for our good.

He's working continuously and He's working purposely, and I believe that He's working seasonally—there are seasons to life. You know, if our lives were all summer, then it would not be that great. I love the fall. If I could pick the time of year, my favorite is autumn or fall and even winter, way over summer. I just persevere through the summer, and I can't wait for October and November to come. What a blessing that is, but did you know your life is like seasons? You say, "If life is like seasons, I'm living in Barstow in August all year round!" I don't believe that. I believe that God has seasons and periods to our lives where He teaches us, makes us, shapes us, and molds us in these periods of our lives. I believe that as a Christian, every stage and phase of your life is marvelously and beautifully controlled by the providential care of God.

Let me give you my fourth point tonight from Romans 8:28 about God's providence, that is, the

results of His providential care. The results of God's providential care are seen in that little phrase "for good." "And we know that all things work together..." next phrase, "...for good." Why is God working in my life? Not to destroy you, not to ruin you, not because He's mad at you, not because He hates you, but He wants to make you like Jesus Christ. One of the most important things for you to understand is once you become a Christian, you begin a lifelong process known as sanctification. The goal of sanctification is likeness to Jesus. You will not be perfectly like Jesus until you are glorified. It starts with justification, we get this in Romans, we are declared righteous; then it moves into sanctification, we live righteously; and then into glorification. That's when we're free from sin, we're in the presence of God, and we're perfectly like Jesus Christ.

The goal of sanctification, and what God is doing in your life tonight, is trying to make you like Jesus. If you were to come up to me tonight and say, "Pastor John, I don't know what God is doing in my life. I don't know what God's will is for my life." I can give you the answer. Do you know what it is? He's working in your life to make you like Jesus. Do you want to be like Jesus? I want to be like Jesus. There's a big gap between me and Jesus, and I've got a long ways to go, but to be like Jesus—to see how He sees, to feel how He feels, to live the way Jesus lived. That's my prayer, and only the Holy Spirit can produce that in my life. For that to happen I have to spend time in the Word, I have to spend time in prayer, and then God has to allow suffering, sorrow, difficulty, and sometimes even misunderstanding, rejection, bereavement, loss, pain and other disappointments because He's molding, shaping, chipping and trimming. For some of you He's dynamiting. "Why am I always going through suffering and difficulties?" Because you've got a lot of stuff to blow up in your life. There's a lot of rough corners that need to be knocked off, and the sooner we surrender and yield to Him, the sooner He can mold us, make us, and shape us.

Look at verse 29. He says, "For whom he did foreknow..." this is next week's study, "...he also did predestinate to be conformed..." here it is, "...to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be..." that you might be, "...the firstborn among many brethren." That is what God is doing in your life. We want to know, who do I marry? What job do I get? How many kids do I have? What kind of car to buy? Jesus is concerned about making you like Him. God is working to produce Christlikeness in your life. Here's another quote, one of my favorites by Oswald Sanders, he said, "Every adverse experience, when rightly received..." catch that, "...rightly received can carry its quota of good. Bodily pain and weakness cause us to feel our frailty. Perplexity reveals our lack of wisdom. Financial reverses point up how limited our resources are. Mistakes and failure humble our pride. All these things can be included in the term 'good.'" Paul said, "God gave me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of satan to CLAP buffet me." Theologians have been perplexed since Paul wrote those words. What specifically was the thorn in his flesh? The answer. We don't know. I just thought I'd share that with you. You thought, "Oh. He's gonna tell us what the thorn was." We don't know. I think, fittingly, so that we could all identify with it. Paul's thorn was some weakness in his flesh, but God gave it to him.

God gives only good gifts. Now, in the context, we know why God gave it to him. We don't

know what it was, but we do know why God gave it to him. Do you know why God gave it to him? To keep him humble. You say, "Well, I'm not interested in being humble. I'm interested in being comfortable." There's your problem. If you don't value character, then your trials are going to upset you. If you value character over comfort, then you will accept sorrows and allow them to make you more like Jesus, and you'll come out better rather than bitter. If your highest goal in life is to be comfortable rather than to be conformable, then you're going to be bothered all the way through life with everything that upsets you, but if your goal in life is to be like Him, to be like Jesus Christ, then get ready to be thrown into the tumbler. Get ready to go through the fire. Get ready to go through sorrow, suffering and loss because God is going to answer that prayer, and He's going to mold you and shape you and make you more like Jesus Christ. We need to rightly respond to what we might say is bad. In and of themselves, like the ingredients in a cake, they may be bad, but when they are put together by God in our lives they are working together for our good.

Here is the fifth and last point I want to make about the providence of God, Romans 8:28. That is, it has limitations and there are the objects of His providential care listed in them, those for whom all things are working together for good. "All things" is unlimited, but the objects of His providential care are limited, and Paul describes them in verse 28, "...to them that love God," first of all. For whom do all things work together for good? To those who love God, and secondly, to those who are called according to his purpose. Do you know, the more I think about it the more blown away I am by it? One of my prayers tonight was that I wouldn't get in the way of this text. One of the hardest things to do in preaching a text like this is not messing it up, is not taking an amazing text and confusing people or clouding it up. I want to be clear when it comes to this text and let the text speak.

In this statement, "...them that love God..." and I believe this with all my heart...if you want to have all that God wants for you and you want to have an amazing life beyond your wildest dreams and your craziest comprehensions—if you want to be blessed out of your socks or out of your flip flops or out of your Nikes or whatever you've got on your feet—love God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. On this hangs all the law and the prophets. If you love God with all your heart, nothing bad can happen to you. You say, "I can love God, my car still blows up! I still love God and my kids aren't walking the way I really want them to," or "I can love God and I was just diagnosed with cancer." Yeah, but nothing bad is going to happen to you because God is working all things together for your good and for His glory. I believe that with all my heart.

I was meeting with a young guy from our church the other day who is not married, and I just felt compelled to say to him, "Look, I'll give you one of the ingredients to a happy life. I'm like twice your age and have been down the road a little bit. Let me give you some advice. Love God with all your heart, all your strength, all your soul, and don't let anything get in the way of your passion and your devotion and your love for God because if you love God you're going to seek Him in His Word. If you love God, you're going to pray. If you love God, you're going to be in church. If you love God, you're going to marry somebody that loves God. If you love God, you're going to be the parent that God wants you to be, the worker that God wants you to be,

the servant God wants you to be. Everything in life is going to come into line if you just love God." So, if you're struggling tonight with your life and the priorities of your life, and it seems like your life is kind of helter skelter and doesn't make sense and you don't know why all these things are happening, check your motive tonight. Say, "Do I love God supremely? Do I just say I love God, but I don't really love Him by my actions, the way I spend my time, the way I spend my money, the way I spend my resources? Do they manifest that I really do truly love God?" I believe that if we just really loved God...I think of my children, my grandchildren, I want the best for them. I want them to have a wonderful life, and if they could just do this one thing and love God, just love God with all they've got, that's all they need to do. It's great to go to college. It's great to do this and achieve great things, but you know what? If you just walk humbly with our God and love God you're going to be okay. Life is going to be blessed.

Those with whom God is working for good are those who love God, and it is our love for God that is referred to in that verse. The Bible is all about the love of God for us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave Himself for us." This is the verse that actually says, that those for whom all things work together for good are those who love God. Secondly, we are called according to His purpose. From a theological perspective, you might say—loving God is man's part, called according to His purpose is God's part. God calls us and we love Him. So, God's love for us is the love that we respond to. We're responding to God's love for us. John Stott said, "God's love for us found expression in his eternal purpose and his historical call. So God has a saving purpose, and is working in accordance with it. Life is not the random mess which it may sometimes appear." So, God in His love calls us and we in our response love Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind.

This is referring to Christians, "...them that love God, ...are the called according to his purpose." It is true that you can be a Christian and your love for God can grow cold, but in this passage it's using these phrases, "...them that love God, ...are the called according to his purpose," for Christians. Why do I emphasize that? Because this promise is not just for the "deeper life" club or for the "super" saints. If you're a Christian tonight but you don't really love God, then you can't claim this promise. No, I have to be honest with you. This phrase is referring to Christians. There are a lot of statements in the Bible about Christians that Christians don't often realize. It's all inclusive. It's all or nothing. If you're a child of God, you're described here as loving God, and you're described as called according to His purpose, and then he goes into the five unbreakable chains for this child of God, verse 29. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called:" link number three in the chain, "...and whom he called, them he also justified:" link number four in the chain, "...and whom he justified, them he also glorified." You've heard me make this statement that what begins with grace ends in glory. That's what this verse is teaching. He calls you—it'll end in glorification. These are five links in a chain that cannot be broken. Whom He calls, them He justifies; whom He justifies, them He glorifies. He predetermines what He is going to do with us, make us like Jesus, and then He will glorify you one day. Marvelous, marvelous, marvelous, marvelous text! It's referring to every child of God.

The Bible is full of examples, and we can't tarry on them, but I'm going to mention them and then we'll wrap this up. Take Jacob, for example, in the Old Testament. Remember when Jacob's beloved son, Joseph, was sold by his brethren? The boys came home with that coat that their dad had made for him. They tore it up and put rams' or goats' blood on it and gave to their dad. Would you say that's a bad experience? He didn't know, but we know the story. He didn't know. He thought his beloved son was killed by an animal, killed by a wild beast. Then Joseph went to Egypt and was sold to Potiphar and that thing there. Then the famine came and the boys had to go down, and one of the other sons was put in prison, and then they come back, and all these things were happening. I say all this, to get to the point, Jacob when he was just overwhelmed made this statement, "All these things are against me." When I read that I think, "Man, I've been there." Everyone's against me, all these things are against me. Nothing seems to go right. All these things are against me, but we know that God was working behind the scenes and God was working all things for his good. If you could jump into the story and say, "Jacob, no! All these things are not against you. God has a plan. Joseph is still alive. He's down in Egypt, he's actually second to Pharaoh. He's got a beautiful crash pad down there. He's got all the grain and corn that you need, and you're going to go to Egypt. He's going to feed and take care of you, and you're going to be happy. It's gonna be awesome! Jacob, just hang in there, buddy. It's all gonna work out!" You see, the problem is we can't see the end of the story. We're just looking at it from right where we are, so "all these things are against me!" No they're not! Behind the scenes, God is working.

How about Joseph? Would you say it's a bad thing to have your brothers sell you? Can you imagine being in a support group sharing what you've been through? "So, Joseph, what's your story?" "Yeah, when I was about 13, my brothers sold me. I was taken away to Mexico and became a slave, you know." He went to Egypt and was purchased. Then, he got a job and things were going somewhat smooth. Potiphar's wife lied about him. He was arrested and thrown in prison. After all that time and all those heartaches, all those bitter experiences, you know, as God was working them together and baking it together, Joseph said, "You meant it for evil, but God intended it for good."

I thank God for bitter things;

They've been a 'friend to grace';

They've driven me from paths of ease

To storm the secret place.

Thank God for bitter things! They drive you into the presence of God and on your knees. Then there was Jeremiah, who lamented and cried in the place of the Lord. He said, "I know the plans I have for you..." God speaking through Jeremiah, "...declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a future and a hope."

Last, but not least (as I said, we could go on for some time), this is just one of those amazing

ideas that all of this could be wrapped up in the cross of Jesus Christ. This introduces us to our communion tonight. They rejected Him. They spit upon Him. They mocked Him. They crucified Him. He suffered and He died and He was buried in a tomb. You say, "Bad, really bad." He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, raised the dead, spake like never a man spake. We had hoped He was the Messiah. We had hoped in Him, and now He's crucified. Remember the two on the Emmaus Road? How downcast they were? You might say, "Oh, this is so bad. This is so bad." When you look at the cross from a human perspective you would classify that as being a bad thing, but what did God do through the cross? The greatest victory in human history or in the whole plan and purpose of God in redeeming mankind, took place in the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. All of history revolves around Mt. Calvary, and what, in a human perspective, was the greatest defeat and tragedy, God turned around and brought salvation, hope, and healing; and one day even creation is going to be restored through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ upon the cross. We cannot even begin to fathom or comprehend how God took what seemed to be a tragedy, the death of Jesus Christ, and He turned it around and out of that came salvation for the whole world. I think there is a principle in that—sorrow and suffering leads to glory; God reverses what is bad and uses it for our good and for His glory. That's why when Paul comes to the end of this doctrinal section of the book of Romans, in the eleventh chapter, he says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." Paul basically, in those words, just kind of blew up. He says, "I just can't even fathom how amazing God's wisdom is!"

In the world today, we look at all the tragedy and all the sorrow, the hurt and the pain, but there's a new world coming. Jesus Christ is going to return. He's going to set up His kingdom, He will reign in righteousness, and that's going to flow into the eternal state. So, sorrow, suffering, and tragedy God uses for good. Take this verse and memorize it. Put it to memory and remember "...that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Let's pray.