

# **“ALL THINGS FOR GOD’S GLORY AND OUR GOOD.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Romans 8:26-30**

## **Introduction.**

We have all been listening to the devastating effects of one of the worst storms to ever hit the US. The destruction and loss of life are terrible. This is just the most recent of the countless tragedies that fill our news cycle every day.

I don't know if you have noticed but these sorts of events turn everyone into theologians. Someone will post a comment saying our prayers are with you and someone else will hurl back a comment don't bother, there is no God and He can't do anything about it. People question did God cause it or just permit it? Could He have stopped it? Or was it Satan's doing? Maybe God isn't good after all or maybe He doesn't even exist?

Of course, these questions intensify for us when the tragedy is personal, when it hits close to home, our family, our job, our school, our friends. Where is God, what is He doing, why is He doing it? Is He an active participant or a passive spectator? And before long Romans 8:28 will be cited.

This morning, we are going to focus on this one verse which contains one of the most powerful promises in all the Bible.

If the Bible is the greatest book in the world, and if Romans is the greatest book in the Bible and chapter 8 is the greatest chapter in Romans, could verse 28 be the greatest verse in the greatest chapter in the greatest letter in the greatest book? And Romans 8:28-39 the greatest section?

Someone described it this way. “If the entire Bible was a necklace, then Romans would be the pendant on that necklace. Romans 8 would be the cluster of diamonds in the middle of the pendant. And verse 28 would be the brightest diamond in the center of the cluster” (James Jackson).

There is a good chance you have a pillow or coffee mug or T-shirt or a wall plaque or refrigerator magnet with Romans 8:28 on it. But do we understand the depth and power of this promise?

**Romans 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Four points, the certainty, completeness, culmination and condition of God's great promise.

## The Certainty of God's Promise

### *We know.*

We know, not we wish or we hope or even we pray this is true. We know that God causes all things to work for good. This is either true or it is a terrible lie or a stupid, trite, nice saying. There is no middle way, either you embrace this or you mock it.

Paul says without a hint of doubt or hesitation, we know that God causes all things to work for good. I hope you can say this with absolute confidence and conviction. So much depends on this and hinges on this and makes a difference because of this promise. We know.

We know *that*. Not we know how, or when. Not we know all the details or particulars, not we can see into the heavens and know the mind of God and His hidden ways.

There is a huge difference between saying we know *that* God does something and knowing *how* God does it. We can have certainty about what God does without knowing how He does it.

How does God govern all events in the universe without sinning or being responsible for evil?

How does God govern all events without removing responsibility from man?

How does God get good and compassionate results from such dark/evil situations?

If God is all powerful, why doesn't He just spare us in the first place? Why does He exert energy to cause them to be good, when He could cause them not to be at all? These are hard questions that perplex our finite minds.

Fifty years of walking with God has given me a settled confidence there are mysteries and unanswered questions that don't change the truth. He is the potter and I am the clay. He is the shepherd and I am the sheep. He is the Father and I am His child. God is God, God is good. Period.

God "works all things after the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11).

## **The Completeness of God's Promise**

### *All things work together.*

What does Paul mean by all things? What does all mean? Does all mean all, as in everything? Are there any exceptions? Is it just the big things?

All things includes all the sufferings of this present time (vs. 18). All things include all the groaning of creation and all our inward groanings in this present life. All things include the lists in vs. 35 and 38-39.

**Romans 8:35, 38-39** ... tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation.

This isn't just some random list Paul made up, these are all things Paul experienced personally and believed God fit together and worked together in his own life for his good. He endured all these things confident (we know) of God's love and goodness.

Don't think for a minute Paul is minimizing your struggles and your pain and heartache. Paul knows the depth of suffering God's people endure, no one more than him. He knows.

Your list doesn't read anything like Paul's, but you do have your list and it is just as heartfelt and real. Can you say you know God is fitting it all together of His glory and your good?

The Greek word for work together is the word we get synergy from. It is normally translated work together, work with, cooperate with. God is causing all things to work together, to fit together, to make sense toward a purposeful end.

It may not look like it to us but that's because we are in the middle of it, we can't see the end in store. We are still in the groaning stages.

You have probably heard of some of the analogies or illustrations used to describe this. It is like the little gear wheels in a fine watch, some spinning one direction, some another, but all working together.

Or our lives are like looking at the underside of a great tapestry, a jumble of threads and colors that don't look like anything or at least nothing beautiful, but God sees the other side and knows what He is making.

Or like a symphony orchestra warming up and it is just a big mess of noise, no melody, no beauty, just harsh sounds. And then the conductor comes out and directs all the various instruments into beautiful harmony.

Or like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Here is an idea, next time you buy a new one, don't look at the picture, just dump out the pieces and then try to put it together without looking at the picture. Our lives may feel like a confusing mix of unrelated pieces but God knows each piece and exactly where it fits with what He is fitting together.

How things seem to us is not always the way they are. But by a wonderful and mysterious providence of God, He works and orders and causes all things to fit and work together to one end, one purpose, for our good, for our salvation.

If God is providentially in control of the hair that falls from our head, He is providentially and sovereignly in control of all things.

All things what happen to the saints are so controlled by God to work for our advantage and not for our harm. All things, means all things, nothing is excluded.

What about sin? Yes, all sin, is under the sovereign control of God. God uses sin to show us what is in our hearts, showing us our weakness and depravity, making us turn to Him, humbling us, driving us to greater prayerfulness, seeking and giving forgiveness, desiring holiness, relying on His grace and loving Him more.

King David's sin led him to a deep humility and godly sorrow, to a greater knowledge of the deceitfulness of his heart, and it led to greater worship, to singing out loud of God's righteousness and holiness. From it we got Psalm 51.

Even the most malicious acts of Satan, must be turned to good by God. The cross proves it.

## **The Culmination of God's Promise**

### ***For good.***

For good. For nothing? For futility? Pain for the sake of pain? No, for good.

If God hears our sighs and groanings, our cries for mercy, and more to the point, if God hears the groaning of His Holy Spirit making intercession for us on our behalf, then why are we not delivered from all our sufferings and troubles?

God is God and God is good. Because in God's sovereign goodness, these things are profitable for us. Everything works to the advantage of God's children.

All the events of human history, the creation, the fall, the redemption, all the providences of God, whether good or ill, all things are working, conspiring for our good under the sovereign hand of God.

Paul speaks of his trials making him more dependent on God. The believers in Hebrews 11 speak of their afflictions making them more detached from this world and longing for a far better heavenly country.

This verse doesn't mean all that happens to us is good. Not all things *are* good, but all things are for good. Sin is sin, evil is evil, immorality is immorality. There is nothing intrinsically or inherently good about violence, war, deformities, divorce, bankruptcy, poverty, cancer, death.

God doesn't minimize or trivialize your hurts and the harm that comes your way. But as bad as all these things are, God is sovereign over them and can and will use them and fit them into His perfect purposes for our lives, for His glory and our good.

All afflictions in and of themselves are evil, the result of sin and a fallen world. But their effects, the fruit of them is ruled and overruled and made useful by our sovereign, good God.

What is this good? Paul doesn't mean all things must serve our comfort or convenience or worldly interests. This is not a promise everything will come up roses, that we will live our best life now.

Paul identifies this good in verse 29, that God's design is to bring us into moral and spiritual conformity to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Remember the goal is holiness not happiness, purity not possessions, in a word glory. Our faith is not in things, our faith is in God.

All things will assist our ultimate, eternal good, for our salvation and righteousness which leads to the eternal weight of glory that is to be revealed and far outweighs all our suffering.

### **The Condition of God's Promise**

This promise is not universal, it is limited to whom it applies. It doesn't apply to all people everywhere in all times no matter who they are or what they believe. God is not indiscriminate, He is particular, He is specific with what He does.

There are two clauses that tell us who the "we" are. This applies only to a certain group of people, those who love God and have been called according to His purpose.

#### ***For those who love God.***

Paul doesn't say this promise is for those who believe God exists, he says it is for those who love God. Who are those who love God? They are those who have been loved by God first and have responded to His love.

Is this not the whole of our religion, of our faith. The love of God, first God's love for us and then our love for God. It is all based on love. This is the Gospel.

#### ***Called according to His purpose.***

Who are the called ones? Are they the righteous ones, sinless ones, those are good, who obey?

It's not those *who call*, but *who are called*, acted upon, from before the foundation of earth.

**II Timothy 1:9** ... [God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.

Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (John 15:16).

Think about how unlikely God’s choice of us is. How do you explain us, we are unlikely, not many of us strong or wise. God loves to take the most unlikely, most unworthy.

The reason we love God is because He loved us first, and set His affection on us and then we responded. We are known by God before we know Him. We were called, then loved, then know.

***One sign of not loving God and being called according to His purpose.***

We know. Who is it that doesn’t know this?

Those who are bitter, those who are angry. If you have a root of bitterness, if you feel self-pity, if you think others have done you wrong, if you think God owes you something that He hasn’t yet given. If you think you are a victim, then it is impossible to know this promise.

Stop complaining and blaming and start know everything is God’s appointment, everything comes through His hands. Get rid of bitterness, self-pity, and feelings of God being unfair and owing you anything.

Remember the humility of Joseph and Job in the face of their unfair and unjust suffering. No accusing God.

**Implications and application.**

Two quick applications.

***First***, use this verse carefully when sharing with someone who is suffering. This is the best verse perfectly designed for those who are suffering, but it doesn’t mean you just casually blurt it out. How will you know? When you have entered into their suffering, when you have wept with them and have loved them. Become part of their suffering before you speak too much.

***Second***, every time you encounter a new trial, a new setback, a new struggle or obstacle in your life, let Romans 8:28 become alive with new meaning, with new insight into God’s love for you and God’s working in your life for His purposes and your greater good.

If God withholds no good thing from us, and if God orders and ordains all difficult things to result in our good, and if in His providence He overrules whatever is disordered in our lives, even the sins and evil actions of others, and finally over our own sins, then why should we not rest in complete security, peace and patience, as we await the redemption of our bodies and the incomparable glory coming to the heirs of Christ.

Make this verse your refuge in the storms of life, your security and hope and strength in your life. You have no greater promise,

God's sovereign goodness is our solid foundation for our massive confidence that God governs all the pain we will experience for our good.

“When you go through a trial, the sovereignty of God is the pillow upon which you lay your head.”– Charles Spurgeon

**Prayer:** Holy Father, enable us by your Spirit to submit to your providence in all things, to be content with all the changes in circumstances and relationships and life, and in the midst of all adversity to endure with patience, prayer and faith, and to wait with eager hope for the day of consolation and the redemption of our bodies. May our hope be in you and in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.