

ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD

Romans 8:28

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Life is filled with so much trouble that sometimes the believer tends to question the reality, greatness, and ability of our God to save. We claim He is Mighty to save and yet we are in a pandemic. He is Omnipotent and yet we are suffering, our government are maltreating us. He is all-powerful and yet the innocents died in the recent bomb blast at Beirut.

- A seemingly healthy 12-year-old girl develops severe migraine headaches. On Friday she is taken to the hospital; on Saturday she dies. Her father calls *her* “*the sunshine of my life.*”
- A young 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 young lady and a young man dedicated their lives to pleasing God, abstain from fornication and kept themselves pure before marriage, yet they are without a baby after many years in marriage whereas others who do not have the fear of God have kids of their own. And so much and so forth. The list is countless.

*Do all things work together for good? Do they? Can we still believe in **Romans 8:28**? Let us look at the verse as it is in the King James Version:*

“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.”

Let us be honest and admit that we have at least two problems with these words by the apostle Paul.

1. **They promise something we have trouble believing.** Our text says, “*And we know that all things work together for good*” (KJV). Paul, how can you be so sure about that? Most of us are not as sure as Paul was. We hope all things work together for good; we believe they do. But do we really know that to be true?
2. **They include things that we think ought to be left out.** When Paul says “*All things work together for good,*” that seems too definite for us. All things? We might go far as to say that “*some things*” work together for good. We understand that out of difficulty we learn great lessons of faith that cannot come any other way. Yes, some things clearly work together for good. But can we be sure it is really all things?

Perhaps these words are true in the theoretical sense or perhaps as a statement of faith. But are they true to every part of life?

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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 question of life. When it is misused that way, it produces an effect opposite to that intended by Paul.

This verse is sometimes misused by well-meaning Christians.

But like it or not, it is in the Bible. And it will not go away. Which brings us back to the basic question: Can we still believe in **Romans 8:28**? In our sermon, let us consider four facts about **Romans 8:28** to bring it to it to the core:

We Must Begin with God

*God is there at the beginning, He is there at the end, and He is there at every point in between. God is at work. Not luck, or chance, or blind fate. And that answers the great question, “Where is God when it hurts? Is He there at the beginning, or is He there only at the end?” The answer is that **Romans 8:28** begins with God. He was there before it all happened, He is there when it happens, and He is still there after it is all over.*

What do you say when a little child dies? Or when a cop is killed by a drug dealer? Or when a man dies on the mission field? Or when a woman is cheated out of her inheritance? Or when a friend dies of AIDS? Or when your marriage falls apart after thirty-eight years? It is hard to see how these things are good.

When we look at these situations, we must at all costs resist the cheap explanation. It is too quick, too easy. Sometimes tragedies happen and well-meaning people say, “That is not a tragedy. It only looks that way. Just have faith.”

Suppose someone had an accident and wreck his car. And suppose when he takes it into the panel beater, the man says, “Friend, you haven’t had an accident. Your car has just been rearranged.” So the owner turns and look at the cracked grille, the crumpled fender, the twisted bumper, and the shattered windshield. What do you expect him to say, “*oga, something is really wrong with you, you dey see say my car done damage, you dey speak grammar.*”

The Bible never asks us to pretend that tragedy is not tragedy or to pretend that our pain is not real. *The point is, we must see the active involvement of God.* What happens to you and to me is not the mechanical turning of some impersonal wheel. It is not fate or karma or luck. God is actively at work in your life!

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 understand why God allowed tragedy to come? No.

God is actively at work in your life!

What, then, is he saying? He is erecting a sign over the unexplainable mysteries of life, a sign that reads, “*Quiet. God at work.*” How? We are not always sure. To what end? Good, and not evil. That is what **Romans 8:28** is saying.

Little children will often be afraid at night. They are scared because they cannot see in the darkness. They cry out until at last Daddy comes. He sits on the bed and takes them in his arms and holds them and says, “*Don’t be afraid. I’m right here with you.*” *The fear goes away when Daddy comes.* Even so, the darkness of life frightens us until we discover that our heavenly Father is there. The darkness is still dark, but He is there, and that makes all the difference.

We Need a Long-Term Perspective.

So many things in life seem unexplainable. Why does a tornado destroy one house and leave another untouched? Why does one brother excel while another struggles all his life? Why does a tumor come back when the doctor said he thought he got it all? The list of such questions is endless. Seen in isolation, they make no sense whatsoever. If there is a purpose behind such tragedy, we cannot see it.

Our danger is that we will judge the end by the beginning. Or to be more exact, we judge what we cannot see by what we can see. When tragedy strikes, if we cannot see a purpose, we assume there is not one.

We must not judge the end by the beginning.

But the very opposite is true. *We ought to judge the beginning by the end.* Here is where **Romans 8:28** gives us some real help. Paul says, “*And we know that all things work together for good.*” The phrase *work together* is really one word—*synergion*—in Greek. We get our English word *synergy* from it. And what is synergy? It is what happens when you put two or more elements together to form something brand new that neither could form separately. ***Consider the process of making a banga soup, a cake etc.***

That is what Paul means when he says that God causes all things to “*work together.*” *Many of the things that make no sense when seen in isolation are in fact working together to produce something good in my life.* There is a divine synergy even in the darkest moments, a synergy that produces something positive. And the “*good*” that is ultimately produced could not happen any other way. Consider Joseph’s brothers plotting to kill him, eventually, sold him, Potiphar’s wife plotted against him for refusing to sleep with her and the rest is history. If you visit a car factory where a car is produced, all you will see at the beginning are various parts which make no sense in isolation, but when the work of engineering takes place, a beautiful piece of art is the end product. We love the cars we see but forget the work behind the scenes.

Paul is saying that our experience is like that. 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. *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. We must not judge the end by the beginning, but rather the beginning by the end.

We Must Define the word “Good.”

This is the crux of the matter. Paul says that *“all things work together for good.”* But what is the “good” he is talking about? For most of us, “good” equals things like health, happiness, solid relationships, long life, money, food on the table, meaningful work, and a nice place to live. In general, we think the “good” life means a better set of circumstances.

Once again, that is not necessarily the biblical viewpoint. In this case we do not have to wonder what Paul means. He defines it for us in the very next verse: *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son”* (8:29). That makes it very clear. God has predestined you and me to a certain end. That certain end is the “good” of **Romans 8:28**. It is that we might be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

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 that happen. Therefore, anything that makes you more like Jesus Christ is good. Anything that pulls you away from Jesus Christ is bad. When Paul says that all things work together for good, he is not saying that the tragedies and heartaches of life will always produce a better set of circumstances. Sometimes they do, sometimes they do not. But God is not committed to making you happy and successful. He *is* committed to making you like his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. 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 you—the tragedies, the unexplained circumstances, even the stupid choices you make—all of it is grist for the mill of God’s loving purpose. He will not give up even when we do.

This, I think, is our greatest problem with **Romans 8:28**. *Our good and God’s good are not the same.* We want happiness and fulfillment and peace and long life. Meanwhile, God is at work in us and through us and by everything that happens to us to transform us into the image of his Son.

Does that include the worst that happens to us? Yes.

Does that include the things that hurt us deeply? Yes.

Does that include the times when we are heartbroken? Yes.

Does that include the times when we sin? Yes.

Does that include the times when we doubt God? Yes.

Does that include the times when we curse him to His face? Yes.

He is always at work. He is never deterred by us. *Nothing happens to us outside his control.* There are no mistakes and no surprises.

We Must Understand the Limitation of This Verse

Notice the last phrase of **Romans 8:28**. It is a promise to *“those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose.”* That is an all-important limitation. *This verse is true of Christians and only of Christians.* It is not a blanket promise to the whole human race. Why? Because God’s purpose is to make his children one day like his Son.

Therefore, we may truly say that **Romans 8:28** is an evangelistic verse. And we can ask two simple questions:

1. Have you ever responded to God's call?
2. Are you part of God's saved?

Two Important Qualifications

One of the key problems with understanding **Romans 8:28** is that we sometimes over explain it and explain it out of context. We *can* believe in **Romans 8:28** if we keep two things in mind.

1. We must not try to explain the unexplainable.

Sometimes in our zeal to protect God, we try to explain why bad things happen to good people. *That is almost always a bad idea.* We are like little children looking into the face of an infinitely wise Father. It is not possible that we should understand all he does. It is enough that we love him and know that he is there. We do not need to "protect" God. He can take care of himself. Let us be honest and confess that it is right at this point that so much damage has been done. In the end, it is not this verse that has lost its credibility, but rather our feeble attempts to justify the mysterious ways of God. *Better to say nothing than to speak of things we know nothing about.*

2. We must understand that God's values and our values are not the same.

This is really like saying, *"We must understand that we will often not understand at all."* Let us be clear on this point. 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.

Conclusion

"Where Was God When My Son Died?"

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."* *That is the final piece of the puzzle.* He knows what we are going through for He, too, has been there. He watched his own Son die.

God knows what it is like to lose a Son. Therefore, we can say with the apostle Paul, *"We know."* Not because we see the answer, but because we know Him, and He knows what it is like to lose a Son. He knows, and we know him.

Can we still believe in **Romans 8:28**? Let me answer that question with another. What is your alternative? If you do not believe in **Romans 8:28**, what do you believe in? Fate? Chance? The impersonal forces of nature?