

Moments for YOU

Volume 51, Number 2

Theme: Romans 8:28



FOR BAD OR GOOD?

“All these things are against me”
(Genesis 42:36).

These words were spoken by Jacob, the father of the nation of Israel. Of his twelve sons, Joseph was his favorite, and so Jacob carefully and lovingly “made him a coat of many colors” (Genesis 37:3). Jacob fashioned Joseph’s coat with only love in mind, but from the time Joseph put it on, his life entered a downward spiral that brought such adversity to Joseph and grief to his father, leading him to declare these despairing words.

Have you ever felt this way? That everything in your life was working against you? That your plans have all come apart, and that there is no hope for the future? Well, if you are a true Christian—if you have repented to God and trusted Jesus Christ for salvation—then just the opposite is true! God’s promise to you is that “all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28).

The story is told of a preacher who would visit the homes of families who were going through tragedy or trial. He would show them a woven silk bookmark with tangled threads running in all directions. It had no discernible pattern, and the colors were all jumbled up. After a while, he would turn the bookmark over and show them that what they had been looking at was the back side; the front revealed a beautiful design with the words “God is love!”

The lesson is that God is the skillful weaver who patterns our lives according to His plan. From our perspective, things may look like a tangled mess, but in God’s design “all things work

together for good.” The knowledge of this truth brought much comfort to those families, and will do the same for us today.

In this issue we aim to explore the reality and power of Romans 8:28, and discern what it says (and does not say). We will also see a great example of its truth in the life of Joseph, and I trust that you will be encouraged to grasp hold of its life-changing perspective.

—T. Don Johnson

CAN WE STILL BELIEVE IN ROMANS 8:28?

I do not have to tell you that Romans 8:28 is one of the most beloved verses in the Bible. You know that. Many of you could give testimony to that fact. You were sick and this verse was like medicine to your soul. You lost a loved one and these words somehow carried you through. You were crushed and beaten by the winds of ill-fortune and this verse—and only this verse!—gave you hope to go on.

Therefore it shocks us to know that it is often without consoling power. There are some who secretly doubt it. They hear this verse quoted and instead of a balm to the soul, it is a mocking, cruel joke. But like it or not, it’s in the Bible. And it won’t go away. Which brings us back to the basic question: Can we still believe in Romans 8:28?

THE EMPHASIS NEEDS REVERSED

We will never properly understand this verse as long as we put God at the end and not at the beginning. But some people look at life that way. They believe that after a tragedy God shows up to make everything come

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out right. But that's not the biblical view at all. In reality, God is there at the beginning and He is there at the end and He is at every point in between. 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 divine wheels. It is not fate or kismet or karma or luck. God is actively at work in your life!!!

Is Paul saying that whatever happens is good? No. Is he saying that suffering and evil and tragedy are good? 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.” How? We're not always sure. To what end? Good, and not evil. That's what Romans 8:28 is saying.

WE NEED A LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

Our danger is that we will judge the end by the beginning. Or, to be more exact, that we will judge what we cannot see by what we can see. Here is where Romans 8:28 gives us some real help. Paul says, “And we know that all things work together for good.” That phrase *work together* is really one word—*synergon*—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.

Suppose you go to visit one of the mammoth automobile factories. What you will see is an enormous building that covers many acres. At one end they bring in the raw materials and various components of an automobile—the engine, the wheels, the chassis, the body, the windshield, the seats, and so on. Some of

the parts you recognize; others are unfamiliar. But all of it is constantly being unloaded and brought inside. At the other end of the building—a vast distance away—a new car rolls out.

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 joined with pressure and heat and then they are bent and shaped and joined together. Over time something beautiful is created. Not by accident, but by a divine design. And nothing is ever 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's not necessarily the biblical viewpoint. Paul defines it for us in the very next verse—“For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 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. That certain end is that we might be conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

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 don't. But God is not committed to making you healthy, wealthy, and wise. 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.

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.

WE MUST UNDERSTAND THE LIMITATION OF THIS VERSE

Notice the last phrase of Romans 8:28. It is a promise "to them that love God, to them who are the 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 saving purpose?

You either answer "Yes" or "No" to those questions. There is no middle ground. Until you can answer "Yes," this verse does not apply to you.

WHAT IS YOUR ALTERNATIVE?

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

Yes, we can—and must—believe in Romans 8:28. It is teaching us one great truth—all things ultimately con-

tribute to the ultimate good of those who love God.

That does not answer every question. But it does answer the big question: Does God know what He is doing? Yes he does ... and we know Him ... and that is enough.

—Condensed from a message by Ray Pritchard, President of Keep Believing Ministries, www.keepbelieving.com. Used by permission.

DO YOU LOVE GOD?

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

The promise of Romans 8:28 that "all things work together for good" is only given to "**them that love God**, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Do you love God?

By nature, no one loves God. We are all born in sin, we practice sin and are spiritually dead before God. Instead of loving God, we are His enemy (Romans 5:10) haters of God (Romans 1:30), and walk "according to [Satan] the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). Instead of loving God, we love ourselves (2 Timothy 3:2), we love our sins (Romans 1:28-32), and we love pleasures more than God (2 Timothy 3:5). Such is the condition of every person born into the world. This is not a pretty picture, and we may not like it, but it is the truth of God's Word as to our lost and ruined condition before the God to whom we must give account.

Though we don't love God, "He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." This means that God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer the punishment we deserve for our sins as He hung on Calvary's cross. Being sinless, He alone was able to provide a sacrifice

acceptable to God. God did accept Christ's death in payment of our sins in that He raised Him from the dead. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Oh what love God has for us—for you and for me!

Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). Now the question remains—how can a sinner love God? The answer is clear and plain. Believe with all your heart that you "have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23) and that Christ "bore your sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). By trusting Christ as your personal Saviour, you have the assurance from the God who loves you, "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The believer in Christ will then be able to say, "Yes, I love God," because "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). You will love Him as One who saved you from the burning fires of hell. You will have a divine nature with new desires, including love for God, love for God's Word and love for God's people. ☒

QUESTION & ANSWER

QUESTION: In Romans 8:28 we read, "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.*" Who are the ones that God has called?

ANSWER: We believe that the Bible teaches that the called ones are those who, having heard the gospel, have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. The word "called" does not seem to be

used in the Bible for those who have merely heard the gospel. It always refers to those who have been saved.

The next verse (verse 29) tells us that not only did He call us but He knew us before we came into being. William Kelly, a well known commentator, wrote these comments regarding God's foreknowledge: "It is important to observe that the apostle does not speak of a passive or naked foreknowledge, as if God only saw beforehand what some would be, and do, or believe. His foreknowledge is of persons, not of their state or conduct: it is not *what*, but *whom* He foreknew." As we would meditate upon this truth it cannot help but cause each believer to praise and worship our Saviour. We can thank Him that His calling reached our hearts. It was not through any merit of our own but His wondrous grace. Then when we further realize that He knew us before we came into this world and called us by His grace we cannot help but bow before Him in humble adoration. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Verse 29 goes on to tell us that those whom He called He knew beforehand and marked them out for blessing.

We need to remember as we think about God's calling that this does not diminish man's responsibility to come to the Saviour. We read: "God is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). This verse tells us that men are responsible to repent and come to the Saviour. We may not fully understand how God's calling and man's responsibility can both be true, but they are. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

—John D. McNeil

ABUNDANT LIFE

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,” Jesus promised (John 10:10). Statements like this set my imagination to flight. I want to know more. Full life, abundant life, life the way God meant it to be when He created us—what more could we ask for? Promises crackle through the intercom of Scripture, telling us that everything we encounter will work together for our good, but does that mean everything will *be* good?

We think we know what to expect on the road ahead. Deep down we believe we have some idea of the Lord’s game plan for our lives, yet God rarely follows the script we give Him. Sometimes we find ourselves wondering if He even knows what He is doing.

Joseph had to wonder this throughout his life. His name means “to add, to increase”; but the only thing God added to him was a heartache. Rachel gave him his name as a prayer asking God for another son. The Lord heard her prayer and granted her request, yet it came at the cost of her own life. Joseph was in his early teens when she died. When he was seventeen God began to work in his life. Dreams came to him in the night promising him a position of great glory and honor. When he told his dreams to his brothers they despised him. They already hated him because their father loved him more than any of them; his dreams made them hate him all the more. Soon they began to plot against him and, when given the opportunity, they seized him, threw him in a pit to die, and then compromised with the one brother who wanted to save Joseph’s life by selling him as a slave.

In a few short years Joseph’s life went from bad to worse. His original owners sold him to an Egyptian named Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials. Unfortunately, Potiphar had a wife who burned with desire for Joseph. When he rejected her advances she concocted a story saying that Joseph had tried to rape her. As if being a slave were not bad enough, the one who dreamed of glory found himself locked in an Egyptian prison with no hope of ever being released.

I find it ironic that throughout this entire period of his life Joseph was in the center of God’s will. I know that sounds strange, but let me repeat it: his brothers’ attack, his slavery, his time in prison, all happened to Joseph as a direct result of God’s will for his life. God had great plans for him, because someday this slave-turned-prisoner would save his family from starvation and keep the seed of the Messiah alive. Joseph didn’t know all that. As he looked at his life all he could see was one trial building upon another.

As we come to the end of the story, we find that the Lord had a plan in everything that happened to Joseph. Severe famine was about to strike the area. The Lord in His mercy warned Pharaoh ahead of time in a dream. As the events unfolded, Pharaoh turned to a prisoner who was able to give him God’s interpretation of his

God is behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes which He is behind. We have to learn this, and let Him work, and not think much of man’s busy movements; they will accomplish God’s. The rest of them all perish and disappear. We have only peacefully to do His will.

—J.N. Darby

dreams—to Joseph, and entrusted him with the task of saving enough grain during the years of plenty for the kingdom to survive the years of drought.

Joseph's experience brings us face-to-face with the harsh reality that living in the center of God's will does not always mean a happy, care-free existence. We often become so panicked in the midst of trials that we forget they are the training ground where God prepares you and me for the great works He has in store for us. We shouldn't be surprised at His methods. How many athletes prepare for the Olympics by sitting in a recliner, eating chocolate doughnuts and drinking mass quantities of carbonated beverages? Every champion goes through years of grueling, painful, and boring training, preparing himself for one moment of glory. If this is true of those who compete for a prize that will soon be forgotten, how much more should you and I go through the grueling training ground of trials to prepare for a work with eternal rewards?

God also uses trials to prepare us for His service so that, when He does a great work through us, there is no doubt who is responsible. Who in his wildest dreams would have ever thought that the one man qualified to save a nation from starvation was a Hebrew prisoner? Only God. Not only did the Lord use Joseph to deliver the world from famine, but He also used this man to place the sons of Jacob in a place where they could become a distinct nation. If they had stayed in the land of Canaan they would have been absorbed by the surrounding peoples through intermarriage and treaties. But the Egyptians loathed the Hebrews, so they refused to so much as eat with

them, much less intermarry. Again, God used the least likely candidate, the one brother despised by all the rest, to preserve their distinctiveness and fulfill the promise made to Abraham. Joseph was the tool, but God received the glory.

No matter how big or how small the task, when God is at work He makes His handiwork crystal clear. Trials, adversity, unexpected twists and turns, all of these give Him the perfect stage to do His greatest works. Too often we forget this truth. We struggle to escape life's difficulties or we wonder why God has abandoned us. Remember the life of Joseph. It may well be that your greatest trial is evidence that God is at work in you.

—Condensed from *Name of Heroes of the Faith* by Mark Tabb. Used by permission of Moody Press.

DO YOU BELIEVE IT?

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.

—Raymond Ortlund

ALL THINGS

“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” (Romans 8:28).

If riches will thus do them good, all things shall work together to make them rich; if poverty, all things shall work together to keep them poor. If it be good for them to be healthful and strong, all things shall work together to prevent sickness; if it is better to be sick or weak, all things shall work together to impair their health. And so in everything that can be named.

Why? In that it helps to subdue some vice in them, or to regulate some passion, or to break an ill custom, or to prevent some occasion of falling into sin or mischief, or to divert some temptation, or to arm them against it, or to make them more watchful over themselves. Also to exercise some virtue in them, or to put them in mind of their duty or to keep them close to it, or to give them an opportunity of doing some good which otherwise they could not do, or else to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and so to equip them better to serve God here and to live with Him hereafter.

—Beveridge

WE KNOW IT'S TRUE

Romans 8:28 is one of those verses that perplex us most when the going is roughest. And yet we know the verse is true. We know it because the Bible says it. Faith appropriates it, even when we cannot understand.

We know it is true because of the character of God. If He is a God of infinite love, of infinite wisdom and of infinite power, then it follows that He is planning and working for our highest good.

We know it is true because of the experience of God's people. The story is told of an only survivor of a wreck who was thrown on an uninhabited island. He managed to build himself a hut, in which he placed all that he saved from the wreck. He prayed to God for deliverance and anxiously scanned the horizon each day to hail any passing ship. One day he was horrified to find his hut in flames; all he had went up in smoke. But that which seemed the worst was in reality the best. “We saw your smoke signal,” said the captain of the ship that came to his rescue. Let us remember that if our lives are in God's hands, “All things work together for good.”

—William MacDonald, from *One Day at a Time*. Used by permission.

THE WEAVER

My life is but a weaving
Between my Lord and me.
I cannot choose the colors,
He weaves so steadily.

Oft times He weaveth sorrow
And I in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper,
And I the underside.

Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly,
Will God roll back the canvas
And explain 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.

—B.M. Franklin