

Romans 8:28-29 (Part 4)

This week we are skipping ahead to verse 28. In the next few weeks I might be able to go back and pick up verse 27 because that is a powerful passage.

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

Other than John 3:16, Romans 8:28 might be the most quoted text in the bible. It has given comfort and courage to countless people who have been in painful situations. It is consoling to know that when life does not make sense to me, it does make sense to God. And not only does it make sense to God, He is actually using my painful circumstances for good. The pain is not pointless—it will not be wasted. This text is important to Christians who live in a pain filled world, because it helps us to trust God no matter what is going on.

TWO BIG LIES

Satan often tries to kill our faith using two lies.

God is not able

The first lie is that God is not able to completely control our circumstances. This lie questions His power to make anything good come out of evil.

When the times are dark in our lives and we have evil things occur, we can be tempted to think that Satan is in control. Maybe if we pray harder or get enough people to pray harder, or maybe if we live a better life God will be in control. But right now it doesn't look like God is in control.

In these times we get desperate because we do not believe God is in control. Instead we believe that Satan is having his way. But this bible verse says that God works all things together for good.

God is not good

The second lie is that God is not good. Often when we face trials and evil deeds we may wonder how a good God could allow these awful things to happen to us. This too is a very old lie. Satan convinced Eve the reason God did not want her and Adam to eat the fruit was because He did not want what was best for them.

If we believe with all our heart that (1.)God is all-powerful and is able to control every circumstance and (2.)God is nothing but good in His dealing with us; we would never worry in the middle of crisis.

God is *strong* enough to completely control what comes into your life and if He is *good* enough to limit what comes into your life to that which is for your good, why would you ever worry? Our worry comes from a vacuum in our faith and the two lies that fill those vacuums are “*God is in some way not ABLE to control this madness.*” and/or “*God is in some way not good in all this.*”

Romans 8:28-29 attacks these lies head on because it affirms both God’s power and his goodness. God is powerful enough to allow only things into our lives that will in the end turn out for good. And he allows only things that are good for us to enter our lives.

STORY – SHOW ME THE MONEY

Last year we really struggled to make our church budget in Winter. And to be honest there were times when I wondered why people were not being more generous. Had I failed to communicate the need? Had Satan blinded people so that they did not see the needs of the church? Satan was

trying to get us to doubt God's ability to take care of our needs. But sure enough, God was and is in control. God allowed us to get a few thousand dollars behind. Why did he do that? Because he wanted to show us that making the budget is an act of God, not just an act of man. Weeks before the end of the fiscal year we received a 10,000-dollar check. God knew that help was on the way. But Satan wanted us to doubt God's power. And Satan wanted us to doubt God would do what is good. God will always give us enough resources to do his will. God is powerful and God is good. God caused us to have a temporary short fall because he wanted us to become more like Jesus and have total faith in the Father, just like Jesus does.

STORY - JOSEPH

Joseph is another example of God working all things for good. The first half of Joseph's life was miserable. He was spoiled by his father and hated by his brothers who sold him into slavery. He worked long and hard for Potiphar and what did it get him? Potiphar's wife framed him. He was thrown in prison for a long time.

Do you suppose Joseph, as he was sitting in that prison, ever wondered how God could have allowed things to spin so far out of control? Where was God when his brothers threw him into that pit? Where was God when he needed protection from Potiphar's wife? How on earth could God free Him from an Egyptian prison? None of it made any sense at all.

It makes sense to us because we know the rest of the story. Was God hamstrung by the resentment of Joseph's brothers? Was He thwarted by the sin of Potiphar's wife? Did the Egyptian prison intimidate God? No, of course not. He is bigger than the sin of the brothers and the vanity of Potiphar's wife and the walls of that prison. In fact God was using all those horrible elements to make something good. God caused all those

circumstances to happen to Joseph to create a man who would be prepared to do much good. God caused Joseph to be sold into slavery and be moved to Egypt so that in the end Israel would survive the drought, which God knew was coming.

God can use “all things” to work together for good because He is bigger than all things. Nothing ever spins out of control with God—He has a handle of everything. He is sovereign—He rules over all, including that which causes us pain and suffering.

Lamentations 3:37-38 speak of God’s total control. ***“Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? ³⁸Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?”*** Nothing ever happens without God’s superintending control.

Our problem is, we may be sitting right in the middle of a whole bunch of miserable circumstances. The problem is not with God’s power or goodness. The discomfort is that we cannot yet see the end. We see the end of Joseph’s story so we understand and accept the suffering he went through. But when we cannot see the end, suffering and pain often seems pointless.

Will we patiently wait for God to finish his work and make something beautiful out of all the smelly circumstances in our lives, or will we question God’s power? If you don’t know the outcome, God does. And God is good all the time.

The second half of ***verse 28 and 29*** says, ***“who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brothers.”***

We will briefly address the issue of predestination, but first we need to make sure we know what is meant by the word “good”. In the bible, the

word “good” does not mean that we are comfortable or get what we want. In the bible good refers to the things that make us more like Jesus. So winning a new 4 wheeler in a raffle is fun. But developing faith by making through a difficult time is good.

Paul is saying that God sometimes uses painful things in our lives to make us look more like Jesus. Looking like Jesus is the highest good. Why? The reason God saved us is for His glory.

Many Christians believe God’s highest goal in our salvation is to keep us from going to hell. That is one blessing, but God’s highest purpose is to glorify Jesus Christ.

Paul says the reason we are to be conformed to Christ is ***“so that he [Christ] might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*** It’s not about us, but Christ.

SPURGEON QUOTE

Spurgeon said that God was so pleased with His Son that He desired to multiply His image. *“The Father wills to have His Son’s beauty reflected in ten thousand mirrors - in saints made like Him.”* That multiplies the glory of Christ. God has designed the universe in such a way that whatever is for His glory is for our highest good. What’s good for God is good for us.

So, when we claim this promise that all the pain works for good, we must understand that all the pain works to make us look more like Christ.

God uses many tools to shape us so that we are like a mirror that reflects the image of Jesus Christ into this world. God uses Satan to tempt us and bring us discomfort. In the end we see how the things of Satan wreck our lives and we learn to hate evil and become more Christ like. And God can use poverty, physical suffering and just about anything to get us to turn to him and call out to him. From the outside we can wonder why God would

allow physical suffering. But I have seen dozens if not hundreds of people live their lives apart from Christ. But as soon as they began to suffer physically, they turned to God and embraced the purpose of being a mirror to reflect the glory of Jesus.

The process of becoming Christ like in this life always happens through death to self. It's as we die, that the life of Christ may be manifest in us. Anything He can use to kill off whatever doesn't look Like Christ, is God's tool to shape us into the image of Christ.

One of the reasons we can be confident in the face of difficulties is that God does not just make it up as He goes along. He is not working "off the cuff." Paul says God is allowing a carefully ordered plan to be worked out in our lives. There will be no surprises in the process for Him. He has already decided whom he will make into the image of Christ and what He will use to achieve that goal.

We see this in **verse 29** where Paul says, "***For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.***" Based on the word "foreknew" Some people think this verse teaches that God predetermines those who get to go to heaven because He knows ahead of time who will receive Him. But this cannot be true for the following reason.

The word "fore-know" means that God knows beforehand. And when God knows someone it does not just mean that he is aware of what they would do. When God "knows" someone, he is intimately acquainted with him or her. Jesus will say to many in the judgment, "I never knew you." He isn't saying, "*I've never had the pleasure of your acquaintance, or I didn't know you were alive.*" He's is aware of everything. No, he's saying, "*I never had a relationship with you.*" "Foreknowing" isn't just an intellectual awareness. When God foreknows someone, he knows him or her in a much

deeper sense. Before they are born He “knows” them in this deeper sense. And those whom He foreknows in this intimate sense He predestines—that is, He destines them to look like Christ before they are born.

This teaching raises many questions and we will address those in Romans nine. For now we can understand Paul’s point is to give the church great confidence by pointing out that the trials and pain in our life are totally controlled by God. And in the end these trials will make us look like Christ. And that is the ultimate good. We can be confident of that because He has already predestined that it will occur. We don’t need to wonder whether good will occur—it already HAS occurred in the mind of God and it WILL be brought into existence. ***“...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:6. “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” First Thessalonians 5:24.*** We can be certain of it because our completion is not only a work in progress, it is a work already done. May God give us the grace to replace the lies with the truth for God’s glory and our peace in the middle of our trials.

TAKING IT HOME

1. When you are in the middle of pain or pressure, do you think of your struggle as pointless? If so, would you ask God help you trust and believe both his power and his goodness even in the struggles?
2. Did you realize that the way you measure whether your life is good or not is by whether you reflect the life of Jesus to this world?
3. Spurgeon said that God was so pleased with His Son that He desired to multiply His image. *“The Father wills to have His Son’s beauty reflected in ten thousand mirrors in saints made like Him.”* Do you want you life to become a mirror reflecting the goodness of Jesus to this world?