

All things work for good

An exposition of Romans 8:28

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We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose. Romans 8:28.

This is one of the most wonderful promises in the Bible, (and one of the most misunderstood!). Many quote it (out of context) as saying "If you are a Christian everything will go well for you". This is just not true. Christians sometimes go through very difficult times. Quoting Romans 8:28 in these circumstances is confusing at best, and often quite unhelpful,

Let's explore Romans 8:28 and see what it really says about the Christian life.

We know

Romans 8:28 starts on a note of strong assurance. Paul, the writer of Romans, states *We know.....*

Paul's assurance is based on what he has explained earlier in his letter. i.e. the sure knowledge we have that we are *in Christ Jesus*.

If we are in Christ Jesus:

- there is no condemnation. v1
- we have been set free from the law of sin and death. v2
- the righteous requirements of the Jewish law have been fully met in us. v4
- we are no longer controlled by our old sinful nature, but are led by the Holy Spirit. v5-7
- we are pleasing God. v8
- our minds are set on doing whatever the Holy Spirit desires. v9-11
- the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to make us more and more like Jesus. v11
- we are actively putting to death any leftover parts of our old sinful nature. v12-14
- we have a strong sense of being God's children. v15-17
- we accept that the process of making us like Jesus may involve suffering. v17-21
- we are coming into the glorious freedom of the children of God. v21
- we are waiting patiently for the future redemption of our bodies. v22-25
- the Holy Spirit is helping us in our weakness. v26

What does it mean to be in Christ Jesus?

If we have received Jesus as our Saviour God sees us as *in Christ*. Jesus took our sins and died on the Cross, thus paying the *wages for sin*. On this basis God can declare us to be *righteous in His sight*, and we are able to fellowship with Him.

So legally we are righteous in God's sight (even though we are still sinners). When God looks at us in *Christ* He sees the finished work of Christ on the Cross, and there is no sin barrier to stop us having a relationship with Him.

See Romans Chapters 1-8, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, and Ephesians Chapters 1 and 2.

The promise in Romans 8:28 only applies to those who *are in Christ Jesus*.

.... that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him

So, if we are *in Christ Jesus*, and if we love Him we can **know** that *in all things* God is working for our good.

But this promise is only for those who **love God**. Loving God is not an emotional feeling. Jesus clearly spells out what loving God entails:

If you love me, you will obey what I command. John 14:15. *If anyone loves me, he will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.* John 14:23.

To love God means keeping His commandments; hearing His voice; knowing what He wants you to do, and doing what He says. In other words it's all about being obedient to Him and doing His will.

If we do God's will, God will make sure that all things work together for our good!

This is further developed in the next part of the verse:

.... who have been called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:28 is not a 'blank cheque' type of promise that says everything will go well with you if you are a Christian. No, it is saying that God will work on your behalf, for your good, if you are in Christ Jesus; if you love Him (and are showing your love by being obedient to Him, and doing His will), and if you are *called according to His purpose*.

That means God will only work mightily on your behalf for good if you are doing the things that He wants you to do. He has specific purposes for your life. If you are fulfilling these purposes He will be there for you. If you are just doing your own things, He won't necessarily be there for you; bless you or work things for your good. He may – because He loves you – but He may well not. God is God. He is Lord. He has an eternal purpose for this world and for your life and He is actively working this purpose out. If you are in harmony with His purpose he will bless you; if you are not He may not.

So the keys to experiencing "all things working together for good" in your life are:

- Being in Christ.
- Showing your love for the Lord by being obedient to whatever He wants you to do
- Fulfilling God's purposes for your life.

What are God's purposes?

This question can be answered at different levels, (all of which need to be embraced if God is to work all things for good in your life):

God's purposes for you as an individual

- **To save you**

God wants you to be His child so you can have fellowship with Him, and He with you.

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. 1 Peter 3:18

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9



The only way this can happen is for you to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12.

- **To make you like Jesus**

When you accept Jesus you become a Christian and the Holy Spirit comes into your life. The Holy Spirit then works in your life to make you like Jesus.

We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Ephesians 4:13

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29

- **To use you for His glory**

God wants to use you to share the gospel (good news) so that others can know Jesus as well. The Holy Spirit gives you the power to do this.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19,20

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8.

God's purposes for the world

God also wants to change society. He does this through the Church – the redeemed community of Christians – showing the world how to live His way. As a body we should be right at the forefront of society, changing it so it reflects God's ways. We are to show the world the answer (not be a fearful, hidden little group that is only interested in our own concerns). We are to be light in the darkness of the world, always pointing people to Jesus who is the source of our light.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to His eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:10

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:13-16

Then God will really be glorified, His purposes outworked.

God's purposes for eternity

The world as we know it will end one day. Then God will bring in a *new heavens and a new earth* which will last for eternity. Ultimately everything will function properly – because sin has been removed and all of those in heaven will be in full and open relationship with God. He will be King and all of His redeemed people will fellowship with Him for eternity.

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." Revelation 11:15

God wants to bring everything together under one Head: the Lord Jesus Christ

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will- to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. Ephesians 1:3-10.



These are God's purposes. If what we are doing is in accordance with God's will for us at any particular time, and are in accordance with His purposes we can expect that *all things will work for good*. They have to because God is good and they are His will and purposes!

So as we love God and are called according to His purpose we know all things work together for good.

Why don't we see much of 'God working for good' in the world!

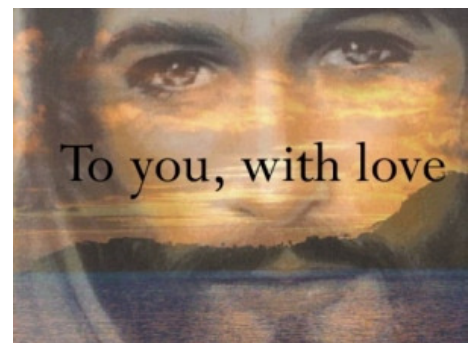
Read your newspaper, listen to TV, talk to your neighbours, listen to talkback radio. What do you hear? Troubles, moaning, war, bickering, families falling apart, economic strife, terrorism, violence, lawlessness, vandalism, lowering moral standards. It certainly doesn't sound like God is working all things for good!

Sin entered the world through Adam and Eve and its effects are all around us. Apparently it is more like 'all things work for the bad' and it seems society is getting worse. So does this mean that God is not at work? No! He is still moving by His Holy Spirit and, when you look closely, is at work in a really exciting way.

God is still God. He is Lord of all and He is still working His purposes out. Jesus work on the cross was not in vain in the 21st century. It is never bad news with God. It's all gospel - good news.

Here are some exciting areas where God is working for good in today's sinful and messy world.

1. **Salvation** – Throughout the world many are being saved healed and delivered. In some countries there are major revivals with countless people coming to Christ. When people turn to the Lord today it tends to be in a deep and meaningful way, because persecution of Christians is rife. There are fewer superficial Christians because it costs a lot to follow Jesus.
2. **Family life** – in the midst of terrible family breakdown God is doing something wonderful. He is establishing strong, healthy families that shine out light lighthouses, when so many families are falling apart. God's way is the best way and the love, joy, peace and hope of Christian families is one of the most powerful ways others will be drawn in to God's Kingdom.
3. **Communications** – We live in an age where communication is very easy. Yes, there is so much out there that is evil and anti-God, but there is also much to help us know God's ways and His standards. Here are some of these ways:
 - a. **Internet** - There is a vast amount of wonderful Christian information available on the internet. If you want to find some information there are countless websites, blogs and forums that are God-honouring and easily accessible.
 - b. **Literature** - Christian books and literature are available on just about any topic. They are still selling in tremendous quantities. No matter what you are interested in you will be able to find something relevant and helpful.
 - c. **Music** - There is lots of quality Christian music and new music is being produced all the time.
 - d. **Radio** - We have a number of Christian radio stations so, if you want to you can have God-honouring music and programmes at all times, day and night.
 - e. **TV** - There are Christian TV stations that broadcast 24 hours a day.
 - f. **Newspapers** - Christian newspapers and periodicals abound, bringing good news of what God is doing in the world.
 - g. **Social groups** - There are lots of different community groups which have a Christian focus. In these groups people can interact, learn, grow, gain support and together make an impact on those around them. Some are Church based; others are not.
4. **Meaning in Life** – It seems that so many people are finding life to be meaningless. But those who turn to the Lord and give themselves to Him find a whole new dimension to their lives. Life with Jesus is purposeful, interesting, challenging, stretching, ...meaningful! He says *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.* John 10:10. Jesus is the source of abundant life!
5. **Relationships** – God is teaching His people to walk in righteousness, love, forgiveness, and trust. This leads to a real depth of fellowship, meaning, and shared purpose. God is building quality into relationships.



6. **Moral Standards** – The ‘new’ morality seems to be just the old ‘immorality’. Today right and wrong are fuzzy and standards of morality and righteousness not valued. But God is doing a deep work in His people (if they will let Him). Old fashioned righteousness is being emphasized, *and righteousness exalts a nation*. Proverbs 13:34.
7. **Wars / strife** – There are wars and strife everywhere, but God said that this would happen. Selfish people seeking to run the world apart from God can never bring peace and harmony. The lack of harmony in the world is preparing the way for the reign of righteousness and peace which Jesus will bring in.

So with God it's all good news. Even though there is lots of sin and darkness in the world Jesus still brings light, hope, love and joy. He is good and all that He does works for good.

And we know that because He loves He will always be with us – right to the end.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39

So, give thanks to the Lord for He is good. All things do work together for good if we love God and are called according to His purposes.

Because He Lives

God sent His son, they called Him Jesus; He came to love, heal, and forgive.
He lived and died to buy my pardon, an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives.

*Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone.
Because I know He holds the future, and life is worth the living just because He lives.*

How sweet to hold a newborn baby, and feel the pride and joy he gives.
But greater still the calm assurance, this child can face uncertain days because He lives.

And then one day I'll cross the river, I'll fight life's final war with pain.
And then as death gives way to victory, I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He lives.

~ William and Gloria Gaither ~

Discussion questions

Read the promise in Romans 8:28 in its context within the whole book of Romans. How does it fit in its context? Who is the promise for? What is it promising? What are the conditions for receiving what the promise promises?

What does it mean to be ‘in Christ’? How does being in Christ relate to Romans 8:28.

What does it mean to love God? Will all things work for good in your life if you love God? Does this mean things will go badly for those who don't love God?

What are the purposes of God for your life, for the world and for eternity? Will all things work for good if you are fulfilling these purposes? What happens if you are not fulfilling these purposes?

Why does God say He will work for good when you fulfill His purposes? How can you be sure you are fulfilling His purposes?

Why do Christians sometimes claim Romans 8:28 and then feel disappointed because things don't go well?

What are some of the wonderful things that God is doing in your life? In your community? In the world?

What have you learned from your study of Romans 8:28? How will you apply this in your life in future?