

FOUNDATIONS OF TRUTH

Does It Really Work?

Romans 8:28

INTRODUCTION: Right in the middle of our reading Romans 6 to 11 this week we came to what many would call the grandest verse of Scripture in the whole book. Some would call it their favorite in all the Holy Scriptures, or at least second only to John 3:16.

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

There are many of you here today that if you did not say a verbal “Amen” to the reading of this promise, at least gave one in your spirit. For some of you, your heart leapt with joy to remember some special time you remember this happening in your life.

But not everybody reacted that way. There are some of you that in recent days

- Lost jobs and bills are piling up
- Lost loved ones to death and the sting of death still hurts
- Have received bad news about your health or the health of someone you know

I think God wants to speak to our hearts concerning this portion of Scripture because some are asking, “Does it really work?” Some of you have these issues or other issues that to you are even more pressing, more concerning, more troublesome.

Maybe sometime in the midst of your despair someone has quoted Rom. 8:28 and you have smiled and said, “I know.” But in your secret heart you have wondered, “Does it really work?”

Romans 8:28

And we know

that all things

work together for good

to those who love God,

to those who are the called

according to *His* purpose.

The first thing that a careful study of this verse reveals is a lack of clarity in the translation. This is a tad bit technical, but not so much that you cannot understand this if you will just give me your really close attention for a minute. Because what I am going to show you right here at the beginning of the sermon is the key to the verse. This is what makes this truth work.

In both the King James and New King James and many of the more recent versions it says “all things work together for good.” “All things” is the subject and “work together” is the predicate.

Romans 8:28

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This is not so in the Greek for “all things” is actually one word and it is a plural noun, yet the verb translated “work together” is a singular verb. This is not a matter of poor grammar on Paul’s part but rather a case where we are able to observe the intricate working of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. A singular verb requires a singular subject. The subject is clearly understood by the context: God. Here is a more accurate translation.

Romans 8:28

And we know

that God works all things

together for good

to those who love God,

to those who are the called

according to *His* purpose.

God works all things together for good. This is quite different from just all things work together for good, because the latter might make us think that such is the natural order. Things just work out for the best. But things do not naturally work out for the best. Things only work out for the best when God works them out for the best.

To help us consider the depth and breadth of this promise, let me ask four questions.

I. FOR WHOM DOES THIS WORK?

A. For those who love God.

The word love here is the Greek word agapao, meaning a **God-like, self-sacrificing kind of love.**

Who loves God with the same kind of love with which God loves us? Only the saved.

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

In 1 John, both our love and His love are again the Greek word for God-like love. We have a God-like love for the Lord because He loved us that way first!

So, for whom does this promise work? For those who love God, not just as a friendly acquaintance which is actually another Greek word for love, but those who love God back in the same kind of self-sacrificing way that He loves us. Those are people who have been saved!

Interestingly, Paul answers this question twice. For whom does this promise work?

A. For those who love God.

B. For those who are the called according to His purpose.

Who are the called according to God's purpose? They are the same ones, the saved. Each one who has been saved was called by God into this relationship as the Father drew them through the convicting of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

This promise is for everyone who is saved, but only for the saved.

All things do not work together for good for the unsaved.

- They end up in the lake of fire, and there is nothing good about that!
- Other things also do not necessarily work together for good for the lost either.

This is a promise for God's children through faith in Christ, who have received God's love and who love Him back. And while this promise works for all who have been saved, the more we love the Lord and walk faithfully in fellowship with Him, the more we see the visible working of this promise.

I am not saying that it works more for the faithful, just that we see more from God's perspective, so we observe the working of the promise more fully and more frequently.

The second question:

II. WHAT IS REALLY PROMISED?

A. What is not promised: That all things will be good.

This is obvious to us. Not everything that happens in the life of the believer is good. As we have seen, even sin still occasionally surfaces in the life of the believer, and certainly sin is not good. But the promise is not that only good things happen. Unfortunately, sometimes when bad things happen in the life of the believer, the believer says, "What happened to Romans 8:28? Why did God not keep His promise?"

God always keeps His promises, but God did not promise that all things will be good.

B. What is promised: God makes all things work together so that the end result is good.

What better example of this can we have than the biblical story of Joseph? Certainly not everything that happened in his life was good. Much of what happened was not only caused by sin but was done with evil motives.

- His brothers were sinfully jealous.
- They planned his murder, but relented to sell him as a slave instead.
- They lied to their aged father.
- Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph and got him thrown in prison.
- His fellow prisoner, Pharaoh's butler, failed to keep his promise to Joseph for two whole years.
- A lot of bad happened to Joseph.

But listen to what Joseph says about it all after the fact.

Genesis 50:20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.

Joseph saw this promise fulfilled in his life.

- Many things had happened across the years, good and bad.
- But God had caused all of them to work together for the good of Joseph and of his family.
- Furthermore, God worked the good of His own redemptive plan, using the sojourn of Jacob's family in Goshen to transform them from a large family into a nation, the nation of Israel.
- Through that nation, God sent the Messiah, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, to be a blessing to all the families of the earth by providing God's gift of salvation through Jesus.
- So God not only caused all things to work together for good for Joseph and his family but for you and me as well!

Twenty-one years ago, while I was president of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, elected to that position to lead our state convention to return to a position of affirming the inerrancy of Scripture in every dimension of our work, I had pain on the tops of my shoulders that sent me to my doctor, resulting very quickly in a quadruple heart bypass.

Early on a Friday morning while I was waiting to go to surgery, my brother Jerry came in the room to wait with Karen and I and some deacon friends from our church. The nurse had just given me a pill that was making me a little loopy and I guess reduced some of my inhibitions.

Someone expressed they were praying I would come out strong and healthy. My brother, who was a Charismatic Pastor, said with a big smile on his face, "I am praying you will come out of the surgery speaking in tongues."

I don't know if it was the medicine or the Spirit that prompted it, but immediately, I began singing the doxology in Hebrew at the top of my voice.

Then I said, "That's a tongue!"

God took good care of me and I was out of ICU by Sunday. On Monday I was supposed to be traveling to an important Executive Board meeting in a city 4 hours away. Obviously I could not go, but early that morning I called a staff member to bring me my laptop. I got up to a chair and pecked out a short letter to the board, most of whom were in opposition to the reforms I was trying to accomplish.

Call it the sympathy effect or whatever you want to, but God began to change some hearts that day. God took an event in my life and my family's life that none of us would have called good, but God worked it for good: for me, for my family, for our convention, and ultimately for the Kingdom.

III. WHICH THINGS DOES GOD WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD?

A. All things!

B. Even sin in our lives.

This is not to suggest in any way that sin is good, acceptable, or excusable. Nor is it to say that in the life of the Christian it does not bring the chastening hand of God in loving discipline. It is to be honest with the text that nothing is excluded from God's providential sovereignty.

Sodium and chlorine are both poisons. But when God works them together with His wondrous laws of chemistry, they become table salt.

For the believer, nothing can poison the pot. Whatever is thrown in, God will ultimately work the end result to be good!

C. Even sin in the lives of others that affect us.

We have already observed the example of Joseph, but the greatest example of all is the cross. The sin of unbelieving Jews, ungodly religious leaders, officials playing politics put Jesus on the cross.

But not just their sin, our sin, put Jesus on the cross. But on the cross, God worked the greatest good of all. Without the cross, there would be no salvation, no eternal life.

But God can and does take the very worst things that can happen and by His great power and with His great love works them together for good for those who love God and who are the called according to His purpose.

D. Even things we do not know have happened or are happening.

God is keeping this promise in the lives of all of His children continuously in a way that only God is able to do. Ages ago, pagan Jebusites dug a shaft from the top of Mt. Zion to tunnels of the Gihon Spring down below. They even planned this as part of their defense against those YHWH worshippers moving into their land. But it all worked for good because before David went to attack Jerusalem, he found out and had his men enter the spring and climb the shaft to invade and take the city. God works good even when we are unaware of His working.

IV.WHY DOES THIS WORK?

A. Because God knows all things.

Past, present, future. God knows it all.

Isaiah 46:9–10 9 Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,’

God knows all things.

B. Because God is in ultimate control.

This does not mean that God predetermines where every leaf will fall. He knows where every leaf will fall, and if the place it will land influences one of the things God has already determined will happen, He will cause it to land where He pleases.

God in His sovereignty has made man in His own image. God chooses, so He has made man to have free will to choose as well.

Man’s choices cannot thwart the will of God, but God has allowed man to choose certain things that determine man’s own relationship to his Creator. We shall see the working of this more fully in the passages to come. But ultimately, God is in control. That is why **We know that God works all things together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**

CONCLUSION: Rom. 8:28 begins with “We know.” And most of us could say, “We know” meaning we are aware, we understand. But God wants us to know at a deeper level than that. He wants us to know experientially. And when we are not at the point that we can know experientially, He wants us to know by faith, by sheer trust.

I have loved preaching this truth to you this morning but it has caused some sad memories for me to resurface. The last time I preached a sermon on this text was two weeks after I revealed to our church in Slidell the existence of the biggest problem in a church I had ever had to deal with.

At the close of the service on an Easter Sunday morning I had to tell the church of the forced departure of a staff member because of grievous sin in his life involving others in the church. I told them I would explain more on Sunday night. We may have had the largest Easter Sunday night attendance in church I have ever seen.

Now for those of you just waking up, this did not happen here. It was in my previous church!

After we dealt with the issue on that Sunday night as biblically and redemptively as we knew how, the next Sunday morning, I preached this text to our church. We were all asking the question, “Does it really work?” that Sunday.

I confessed to the church that for 10 straight days I felt like I had a hole the size of a basketball in my chest. And some of that was sheer sadness and grief, and I think that was OK. But some of it was a lack of faith on my part. Part of it was that I just did not know by faith deeply enough in my own heart that God was going to take it all and work it for good.

- But I told them that I was choosing to believe God’s Word.
- I was choosing to act by faith and not by sight.

And that is where some of you are today, and I invite you to do the same.

- **Take God at His Word.**
- **Believe Him. Trust Him.**
- Whatever your situation and hurt, if you have been saved, God will take the things that are not good that are causing you grief and anguish, and ultimately He will work good for you who love the Lord and whom He has called for His purpose.