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The Benefits that Flow from Christ, Part 10

Of all the books of the Bible, the epistle to the Romans emerges as one of its most thorough doctrinal treatments. It contains teaching on the following doctrines:

- The nature of God.
- General revelation.
- The Gospel.
- Adiaphora.
- Spiritual gifts.
- The nature of Sanctification.
- The Christian's responsibility to government.
- The place of the Jew and Gentile in the Economy of God.

Now of all the verses in the book of Romans, Romans 8:28-30 emerges as one of its most incredible statements. On the one hand, this text is used by God's children as the basis of extreme comfort, hope, and joy. And yet on the other hand, it is frequently spurned by God's children on account of its seemingly incongruent message in the face of trial or suffering.

On the one hand, the truth presented in this text has for some shed light and meaning on tragedy and evil. On the other hand, this text has seemed to others as empty and weak consolation for their hurting soul. And all of this is not surprising for Romans 8:28-30 relates to one of the most profound questions an individual can ask: Why does God allow bad things to happen to His people?

- Why was Jacob deceived into marrying Leah instead of Rachel?
- Why was Israel first defeated in their war against Ai?
- Why did Lazarus die?
- Why was the man born blind?
- Why was Stephen killed?
- Why did the apostolic church suffer persecution at the hands of the Jews?
- Why were Peter and Paul martyred?

The specific answer for many of these questions we may never know. Was it because of their sin? Or like Job, was it because of their righteousness? Was it God's punishment? Or was it simply because of the state of sin and misery in which we live?

Brothers and sisters, as finite and limited beings we may never know the answer to these questions, nor must we know only God knows! But this we do know, in light of the character and nature of our God as revealed throughout Scripture, 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.”

Corrie Ten Boon

On a train ride to the city when she was a little girl, Corrie Ten Boon asked her father why he wouldn't tell her about the facts of life. After a long pause, her father said, “Corrie, bring me your suitcase case.”

Corrie responded by saying, “But father, you know I can't bear the suitcase; it is too heavy.”

Corrie's father said, “And that is why I carry it. There are many things in this life that you are not able to bear at this time and so I carry them for you. Corrie, the facts of life are one of these.”

Brothers and sisters, when it comes to the question of evil in the lives of God's children, there are many answers that God has chosen to bear. However, that we might not be answer any less, God has given promises like our text; promises of comfort and assurance that give us insight into the Divine plan.

The Benefit of Assurance

I want us to look at this passage, a passage that details an eighth benefit that flows from Christ: The benefit of assurance. Let us begin by looking at the text and identifying the content of this assurance.

Romans 8:28, “**And we know¹ that all things² work together for good to them that love God**, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Notice that of the two words for *know* in the Greek; *ginosko*, relational knowledge and so partial and *oida*, which references the fullness of knowledge, Paul uses *oida*. In other words, Paul is making a statement as to the confession of every believer!

What is the confession? What is the assurance given in this text?

¹ ειδω ειδο ι'-do

² πας pas

The confession is NOT that what occurs in our lives is necessarily good, but that God causes all that occurs in our lives to work for good!

Now, the term *all things* is an important qualification. In Romans 8:26-27 Paul references the Spirit's help in our weakness. And then in this text mentions *all things* which yield the following nuance; not only in our times of greatest weakness does the Spirit give us aid but God causes ALL THINGS — weakness, trial, suffering, etc. —to work for good.

Now, it is important that we give proper emphasis to the “all” in this text. See, many times when we read this passage we are tempted to translate it in our minds as, “Some things.”

- God's providence that doesn't cost too much.
- Those inconvenient times of life.
- A missed bus.
- A job transfer.

But, let the goals of our lives be thwarted

- Our health wane.
- Our ship doesn't come in.
- The providence of God truly cost us.

And we are tempted to respond with anger and bitterness and questions of how God could allow this to happen. Brothers and sisters, the focus of the “all” in this text is not just the inconvenient things that happen to us in life, but even the bad, the wicked, and the evil, ALL THINGS work together for good.

This phrase, *work together*³, implies that while the things that occur in our life may not be good (sickness, difficulty, trial), yet God uses them to produce that which is good. It is as the inner workings of Big Ben. If you were granted access to its inner workings, you would notice that one sprocket goes forward while another one goes backwards. One lever goes up while another moves down. Yet all, of these elements, work together in order to produce near perfect time.

And so it is with God's providences in our life. Providence works together NOT to keep perfect time, BUT to produce that which is “good” in our lives. And what is that “good?”

This term *good*⁴ is very important. It carries the connotation that something not only is good in its character and essence, but also in its effect or result. Thus a “good” heart is a heart that not only is good before God but also works to the benefit of others. A “good” book is a book whose contents not only are good in the eyes of God but also lead to the benefit of the reader. A “good” Bible study is a time that not only is good before God but leads to our spiritual maturation and growth in grace.

And so, for something to work for good in our lives implies that the net result not only is good, but it is also *beneficial* in our lives! And thus, God is able to use INJUSTICE to produce a good result that will be beneficial to the Christian.

³ συνεργεω sunergeo

⁴ αγαθος agathos

- God is able to use TRAGEDY to produce a good result that will be beneficial to the Christian.
- God is able to use SICKNESS to produce a good result that will be beneficial to the Christian.
- God is able to take ANYTHING that this world can throw at us and from it bring a good result that will be beneficial to the Christian.

This is what Paul means when he says that “God causes all things to work together for good.”

And yet, here is where the rub lies. As ones who have received a frowning providence, we evaluate our lives before and after the trial and often times we conclude (even years later) that our lives were better before! And then we ask, “How did that work for good in my life?”

Now brothers and sisters, while we may never know the complete answer, this text does address the question, for the “good” referenced here is qualified. Now, I want you to look with me at three texts to see this.

Ephesians 2:1-2, “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.”

The age in which we lived is ruled by a prince known as Satan. And though we might divide lands and call them kingdoms, we must see that there is but one kingdom that encompasses all of this present world: The Kingdom of Satan.

Mark 10:35-37, “And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.”

In Scripture, it is quite clear that there is coming a day when God will conquer Satan and usher in His Kingdom of Righteousness.⁵ Now, in this coming kingdom there will be no

- Sin.
- Death.
- Ruin.
- Want.
- Mourning.
- Pain.

Only righteousness will dwell!

Luke 17:20-21, “And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”

Now amazingly, with the first advent of Christ, the coming Kingdom of God promised in Scripture has already begun on this earth. When Christ began His public ministry, we read this:

⁵ Compare 2 Peter 3:10-13

Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

When Christ sent His disciples out into this world, we read of Christ's instructions.

Matthew 10:7, "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

In fact, Christ summarized part of His earthly ministry as, "preaching the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43). And when Christ died, we read of the kingdom of Satan:

Hebrews 2:14, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"

Our present world is governed by two kingdoms or ages which have overlapped:

- One in the process of diminishing.
- The other in the process of increasing.

And thus, Paul, looking at the already/not yet kingdom of God, could say this:

Romans 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18, "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

This is who Paul prayed:

Philippians 3:10-11, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

So brothers and sisters, when we say that "God causes all things to work together for good" we must ask these questions:

- "By what Kingdom is this 'Good' measured? According to the present, passing world? Or, according to the present, coming world?"

The answer in our verse is the latter!

Indeed, we cannot measure "good" by the things of this age, for many times what is good in God's kingdom is NOT good in the present kingdom of this world. If you want to

- Be FIRST in the kingdom of God, you must be last in the present, passing one .

- Be RICH in the kingdom of God, you must be spiritually poor in the present, passing world.
- Be EXALTED in the kingdom of God, you must be humbled here.
- REIGN with God in the kingdom of God, you must serve now!
- SAVE your life in the kingdom of God, you must lose your life in the present.

And so, to the one who looks at his life before and after the trial and concludes that life was better before, this text says, "That may be. But God is using that and all things in your life to produce Kingdom fruit; that which essentially is good and beneficial in the life of the believer both now and especially in the age to come." And thus, we are exhorted in Scripture:

- 1 Timothy 4:8: to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness because, "...godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."
- James 1:12: to count it a blessing when we go through trial, for, "...once [we] have been approved, [we] will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."
- Matthew 6:20: to, "...lay up for [our]selves treasures in heaven..."
- 1 Timothy 6:19: to use our wealth in such a way that we "[Store] up for [our]selves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of that which is life indeed."

And that is the assurance we have as a benefit of the cross of Christ, God uses all that occurs in our lives as a tool to raise us up as

- Children of God!
- Citizens of the already/not yet kingdom of God!
- Heirs of "life indeed."

Now, this raises these very important questions:

- Is this promise for everybody?
- Are all given the Assurance that God is working all things for good in their lives?

The Recipients of Assurance

The answer is No!

Romans 8:28, "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.**"

This qualifies the benefit mentioned in this text: Those who receive the assurance here referenced are ONLY those who

1. Love God- which is a description of the child of God; "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).
2. Are called according to His purpose which also is a description of the child of God; "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Ephesians 1:4-5).

And so, it is only the child of God who receives the benefit of assurance mentioned in this verse. This

really only makes sense, if the “good” mentioned in this text is qualified by the kingdom of God then only those who are citizens of God's kingdom can participate in this benefit!

This raises two very important implications.

1. If you are NOT a child of God, then the difficulties and hardships of this life have no purpose other than to remind you of your state of slavery in the kingdom of Satan, and to warn you of a greater, more horrifying day to come when the wrath of God will be revealed from heaven against you on account of your sin. In the words of Christ, “unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3). And thus in the words of Ezekiel, I say to you, “turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11).

Truly, the promise of this text can be yours today, but you first must enter into the salvation that Christ purchased on the cross. On account of our slavery to Satan, God became a man, Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life and died sacrificially in the place of His children.

And thus, all those who trust in Christ to save them, ask God to forgive them for their sins on account of the death of Christ. And you shall be saved and brought into the family of God.⁶ And thus I exhort you, come to Christ this day, turn from your sins to Christ, and receive the benefit of

- Salvation.
 - Forgiveness of sins.
 - Life everlasting.
 - The assurance that God will work all things in this life for your Good!
2. And if you are a child of God, then you have the assurance that the activities of this world have a greater significance, a significance that transcends the here and now. As such, though we encounter difficulties and loss in this life, we
 - Live with hope.
 - Serve in hope.
 - Grieve with Hope!
 - Minister in light of this hope.

And what is it that enables us to believe, hope and trust even though we don't see. And it helps us affirm with Paul that “we know” the truth of this text!⁷

The Basis of Assurance

Romans 8:29-30, “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”

⁶ Compare Acts 16:31 and John 1:12

⁷ Other passages that affirm the truth of this text are: 1 Peter 5:10; Genesis 50:20; Jeremiah 24:5-7; Job 23:10; Zech 13:8-9; Psalm 119:67, 71, 75; 1 Peter 4:11-12a.

Next week, we are going to discuss this verse in greater detail; however for now, notice the point Paul begins in Romans 8:29 with “for” or *hoti* which tells us that He is explaining the BASIS for the assurance of Romans 8:28.

And what is that BASIS?

The basis is the character and plan of God! The verse tells us God foreknew⁸. This means to love beforehand! Before the world began, God had already set His love on His people and determined to bring them into a relationship with Him! And thus, it is God's character of love and His plan of redemption that serves as the basis for all that is written and promised here!

This brings us to some very important questions for the child of God.

- Will your circumstances serve as that which interprets the character and nature of your God? Or
- Will you allow the character and nature of your God to interpret your circumstances?

If we are not convinced that our God is a loving, kind, and good our faith in God is not based on the truth of His word but on the workings of providence. Then the things of this world will destroy us! But we are not those who shrink back in faith, ours is a loving God who is working for our benefit not in relation to the present, evil age but in relation to His Kingdom.

And that is why trial and hardship are so difficult in this life, for we must view them through the eye of faith. The eye of faith that has not seen and yet believes-

- And thus is blessed, John 20:29.
- The eye of faith that confesses with David Psalm 25:10, “All the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth to those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.”
- The eye of faith that is convinced that “God is able to guard what we have entrusted to Him until that day” (2 Timothy 1:12).
- The eye of faith that affirms the truth of “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Family of God, God has a great and marvelous future planned for us. We have been saved to reign with Christ in glory! And thus, while we live in this passing world, we suffer great hardship, no one will graduate untouched.

Yet, we nevertheless have the assurance that “God causes all things to work together for good” in our lives as His children.

⁸ προγινωσκω proginosko

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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