

Today's Sermon

God's Sovereign Goodness in All Things

Romans 8:28-32

Pastor Phil Layton, GCBC, March 13, 2022

When we worship God for his various attributes, it's If you've read the Chronicles of Narnia, Lucy asks about Aslan 'is he safe?' She felt nervous to meet a lion, and was told she should: 'who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But He's good. He's the King, I tell you.'

God isn't safe. Jesus the Lion of Judah isn't safe, but He's good. He's King.

He's not a tame lion. Rom 11:22 *behold God's goodness and severity*¹

You can't domesticate God. But He's good even in severity or suffering. Dt 6:24 says '*fear the Lord...for your good.*' Today we'll see God's goodness in severe things of life as we revere Him. Corey taught us on God's holiness and jealousy recently. God's holiness is a consuming fire, He's not safe, but today we'll see God is good, too. For weeks we've looked at His attributes in the book of Romans; wrath, righteousness, kindness, faithfulness, glory, grace, and last week Corey taught God's love in Rom 5 & 8. Today we'll continue in Rom 8 with God's goodness, sovereign goodness in all things.

Last month we looked at the verse '*From him, and through him, and to him are **all things.** To him be **glory** forever. Amen.*' That's the end of Rom 11.

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

That's His sovereign goodness and purpose and calling, sovereign election and sovereign direction of all things worked for our good and for His glory

He's good. He's the King, ruling all things and overruling all things

R.C. Sproul said grandma prayed at supper 'God is great, God is good, and we thank you for this food.' He says he supposed it was supposed to rhyme – and when his grandma said it, it did rhyme! In the old days people talked about 'the good Lord,' and the 'good book.' We say 'God is good, all the time, God is good!' And that's true, all the time and in all things, but this is something we need to think about more deeply, especially in a world of evil

Let's think through v. 28 around 4 questions, this will also be **our outline**:

1. Who is this promise for?
2. What does "good" mean in this text?
3. Why "all things" can work together for good?
4. How should God's goodness impact our lives?

1. Let's start with the context of who this promise is for

v. 28 starts with *And...* It's continuing and connected to the context before.

v. 15: *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba!*

*Father!"*¹⁶ *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him...* that's part of 'all things'

Come, disaster, scorn and pain! ... with [God's] favor, loss is gain.

I have called Thee, "Abba, Father"; I have set my heart on Thee:

Storms may howl, and clouds may gather, **all must work for good to me.**²

v. 28 says *And we know* ... the 'we' are God's children who suffer but cry out to their Father. This is something we know as believers who know God as Father who works all things together for His child's good. It doesn't say 'and we **feel...**' this is something we know by faith, not based on feelings.

But this **isn't a promise to unbelievers that all things will go well:** '*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good...*'

Who loves God is another way to say a child of God, who loves His Father.

Mt 7:11 says the Father loves to give good gifts to His children

How do you know if you love someone? You think often of Him? You speak with Him? Speak about Him? Long to be with Him? Love what He loves? Hate what He hates? Seek to please Him? If you do, not perfectly but you purposefully pursue God who you love and want to love more, v. 28 is a promise for you. But this doesn't promise all on the planet all will go well.

This is only for believers in a love relationship with God

That's #1, who is this for. Now

#2. What does "good" mean in this text?

'And we know for those who love God all things work together for good...'

HOW WE USE GOOD? Good looking. How you doing? Good. I'm good. Good morning. Are we good? It's all good. Hey good job. Have a good day.

BUT WHAT ABOUT ... evil? Bad people? A drunk driver? Abuse to kids? Thing in your past that aren't good, bad memories, dreams? What about war like Russia invading Ukraine? Is God good when a spouse / loved one dies?

Those questions affect people very personally in this room. I'll come back to those. But v. 28 doesn't answer why bad things happen to good people?

In fact, Romans 3 says there are no good people, no not one, none do good. By God's standard all sinners are bad people, that's why bad things happen.

What's amazing is He works all things together for good for *saved* sinners!

Look back at 7:18 *For I know that **nothing good dwells in me**, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do **not do the good I want**, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* Can you identify? **Good=what is right, the opposite of evil.**

²² *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind...* So this is a battle fought on the mind, in our inner person to love God vs. sinful flesh.

Now look at ch 12, how do we win this battle in our mind for what's good?

12:2 *Do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed by the renewal of your mind**, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is **good**...*

We need renewed minds, transformed thinking of what is good.

Then we can test and discern what's good by God's perfect will

Rom 8:28 doesn't say 'all things **ARE** good' (much of Rom 1-7 is about sin and evil). Many things are **not** good in this world, there are horrible terrible things people in this room have gone through. But all things work together for good. Good isn't health, wealth, prosperity, or your best life now. It isn't good as the world defines. God's Word defines good since He is its source.

8:28 is a famous verse and there's many **famous verses on God's goodness**:

- Ps 23 ends with "*My cup overflows. Surely _____ and mercy...*"
- Another psalm says '*O taste and see that the LORD is _____!*' (34:8)
- 10x scripture calls people to give thanks to the Lord *for He is good*³
- From page 1 of the Bible, all things God created He saw it was good
- But even before creation the Bible says He had a good purpose/plan
- Adam sinned eating of the tree, knowledge of good *and evil* came in
- There's trouble in paradise, raising Cain who wasn't a good brother
- QUOTE GEN 6:5, EVIL EVEN IN 'GOOD GUYS' IN GENESIS
- Exodus 33, Moses hears God revealed as '*abundant in...goodness*'
- Moses: '*show me your glory.*' God: '*I will make my goodness pass*'
- Jesus above all shows us goodness as He '*went about doing good*'⁴
- Every good thing is from the Father, goodness is a fruit of the Spirit⁵

DBI: 'goodness in the Bible is God himself. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit *are* good, *do* good and *create* good. God's people are not good in themselves but become capable of doing good through the empowerment of God's Spirit and the presence of God in their lives through Jesus Christ.'⁶

v. 26-27 talk about the Spirit's help right before v. 28

What does good mean in v. 28? Keep reading to v. 29: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the image of his Son**...*

‘**Foreknew**’ means loved beforehand, like Eph 1 says in love He predestined us according to the good pleasure of His will, and His plan beforehand is us looking like His Son as His brothers (family resemblance). Ultimate good is conformity to Christ’s likeness. *All things* include circumstances, suffering –they’re God’s tools to chisel away whatever doesn’t match Christ’s image.

Things work together for good if they make us more conformed to Christ, or more Christlike. Good is what draws us to the Lord, He’s our greatest good, whatever grows our relationship with God, works together for good.

We’ve seen the **Who, the What, now**

#3. **Why all things work for good**

The ESV has a footnote on v. 28 “Some manuscripts *God works all things together for good, or God works in all things for the good*” (cf. NIV, NAS).

Whatever translation you have, v. 28 is about God’s sovereign calling and purpose, because it says it’s ‘*to those called according to his purpose.*’ The called in v. 30 are the same ones who are predestined, that’s a sovereign call

v. 30: *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* 6x in one verse, God is the subject, it’s all His doing from eternity past to glory. 4x in v. 29 it’s He/His so 10x in 2 verses it’s all He, it’s not we. It’s all God, that’s how all can work for good, because He is sovereign beginning to end.

All things work for good because of God’s predestinating orchestrating plan.

LAST THURSDAY GRAVESIDE – no coincidence or accidents

Maybe you’ve heard the one of the cowboy applying for insurance. Agent asks ‘have you had any accidents?’ Cowboy says ‘no, but a bronco did buck me off one time and kicked me in the ribs, and another time a rattlesnake bit me.’ Agent: ‘aren’t those accidents?’ Cowboy: ‘nah, they did it on purpose.’

In a real sense there are no accidents to God, He has a purpose in everything

Even when sinners do us evil on purpose, God has a good purpose in it

Notice v. 28 ends with this truth, that this is all ‘**according to his purpose.**’

There’s a purpose God has. We say ‘that’s random,’ but nothing is random to God. Part of Eph 1 says (NKJV) God ‘*made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His **good** pleasure which He **purposed** in Himself ... **predestined** according to the **purpose** of Him who **works all things according to the counsel of His will...to the praise of His glory**’ (v. 9-12)*

There’s a mystery in the sovereign will of God, but His purpose is good, it’s according to His good pleasure that He works all things based on His will.

Notice Rom 8:28 doesn't say all things WILL work together (in the end / in the future) but right NOW (it's a present tense verb) all things are currently and continually working for good of those called according to His purpose.

Dt 8 says to Israel God '*brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water...that he might humble you and test you, to **do you good in the end.***'⁷

All things Israel went through, hard and humbling testings, were to do them good in the end.

But what about us?

#4. How should this impact us?

Keep reading, 8:31 *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* Read that in context, if God is for us for our good in all things, even evil against us, nothing/no one can ultimately be against us!

Say these things to others. Preach to yourselves He's in charge and He's good, He's for us. Remember who's in control, working all things for good.

Criticism, conflict, co-worker issues, chronic pain, cancer

I mentioned Israel in the Exodus, but turn to Gen 50 before it. It's the story of Joseph who had a lot in his life that wasn't good: brothers threw him in a pit and left him for dead, then sold him as a slave, in Egypt he was falsely accused and imprisoned for years, but later freed and became Egypt's leader

Gen 50:15 *When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the **evil** that we did to him." So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did **evil** to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant **evil** against me, **but God meant it for good**, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

'**kindly**' in Hebrew is literally '**to their heart.**' God's sovereign goodness is a comfort to our hearts to know He's in control and is good, and He works all things, including evil for good. This doctrine helps us forgive and not fear, and to trust God's provision and providence for us. If we see this evil world and fear for your little ones or grandkids, don't -- God is at work for good.

v. 20 says in one version: '*You intended to harm me, but God intended it...*' not 'God had nothing to do with it, but *used it,*' no, '*God meant/intended it*'

Joseph didn't just chock it up to fate or free will, He trusted God's will in it.

Go back to Rom 8 but that's part of what the original Bible readers would know, and that's part of the original background when Paul says *and we know for those who love God all things work together for good...* How did they know? The Bible told them so. Even evil God works together for good.

Even the death of Jesus. ³² *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

God's goodness is at work in all things and His graciousness gives all things we need. Because He's over all things we can trust He'll give us all things we need. Consider the goodness of God in the gospel, God giving His Son. The only truly good person ever wasn't spared death. Jesus was murdered, but what those men meant for evil God meant for good, to save many lives.

Peter says in Acts 2:23 *this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death [EVIL] But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death...[WORKING TOGETHER FOR OUR GOOD]*

The early church prayed in Acts 4:27 *'there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,* ²⁸ *to do whatever **Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.*** ²⁹ *"And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with **all confidence** ...* ³¹ *And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to **speak the word of God with boldness.***

Believing God's sovereign goodness over evil and all things gives confident boldness to speak the gospel. Even as men are at their worst, God is at His best, saving sinners and making believers more conformed to Christlikeness

GOD CAN DO THAT IN UKRAINE AND DRC, PRAY FOR THAT

We need to boldly tell people the gospel. God is not safe, He's holy, and sin is an offense against Him and His Law that's the standard of goodness. God created a world that was very good but Adam sinned and it's now very bad. If you don't love God, all things will work badly for you in the end until you turn from your sin and trust the good news of Jesus the Good Shepherd laying down His life for your evil. You're not a good person and can't be saved by good works, but the goodness of God can lead you to repentance.⁸

Titus 3:4 says it was *'when the goodness...of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us ... [but he goes on to say] let our people learn*

to devote themselves to **good works**, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.' The goodness of God our Savior should motivate us to good works, to help urgent needs. Compassion for Congo is an example of an urgent need to give to, or other good causes we give to.

Rom 10:15 talks about sending missionaries as a good thing in response to God's goodness. ^{10:15} *And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the **good news!**"*

Other texts? 12:21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but **overcome evil with good***
15:2 *Let each of us **please his neighbor for his good**, to build him up.*

15:14 *I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are **full of goodness**, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.*

What shall we say to these things? God is for us for good. Say it and sing it

O Father, You are sovereign in all affairs of man
 No powers of death or darkness, Can thwart your perfect plan...
 All evil overruling, As none but Conqueror could
 Your love pursues its purpose – our souls' eternal good⁹

We aren't victims of a world out of control, we're victors through God who is in control of all things for good. What happens to you doesn't control you and can't conquer you. Look at **8:37**: *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

How is God good when you lose a spouse? Louise: I have leaned heavily on God Almighty. Just knowing He is with me all the time is such a big help. Knowing He has the best plan, no matter what it looks like to me gives me comfort. Knowing that if I really trust Him, I don't have to know why. I miss Del so much. Every time I turn around, he is supposed to be there and he isn't, but God is. I just **have to remind myself of the good** ... and not what I don't have. The most comforting thing people say to me is that they are praying for me ... **God has been too good to me for me to concentrate too much on sadness.** I have so much to thank Him for ... Knowing God is always with me even in my missing my precious Del keeps me thanking Him for all He has and continues to provide. When I get sad, I thank God for all the years I had with Bob (51) and the 16-1/2 years I had with Del, and all He provided through both of them. Then I'm not concentrating on what I don't have. My thank you list is a whole page long in my prayer journal. One whole page is filled with names of people God has cured of cancer. Twelve of them are people in our church family. Yes I have so much to thank God for, He often provides little things that are not necessary, but nice. When that happens, I know just who to thank. ~Louise

How often do you give thanks to the Lord, for He is good? It's a command all over, so if you give complaints rather than thanks about what you don't think is good (about church, life or whatever), that's a sin. May God's goodness lead you to repentance and to remembrance of how good He is. And even things you don't think are good He works together for your good.

O give thanks to the Lord for He is good!

Ps 119:68 '*You are good and do good.*' **Muller** preached his wife's funeral: 'During the six days that my beloved wife was on her deathbed, my soul was sustained by the truth contained in the words of our text [God is good and does good]. Whether she was more easy from pain, or in severe pain; whether there was a little prospect that she might yet be given back to me, or whether all hope was gone; my soul was sustained by these words. They were ever present with me, and I rested my soul on them. [His outline]...

- I. The Lord was good, and did good, *in giving her to me.*
- II. He was good, and did good *in so long leaving her to me.*
- III. He was good, and did good, *in taking her from me.*¹⁰

Muller could later write 'I kiss continually the hand that has afflicted me.'¹¹
 Ps 119:71 *It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.*

Thomas Watson wrote *All Things for Good* in 1663 in a time of persecution and personal suffering. "The expression '*work together*' refers to medicine. Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skill of the [pharmaceutical doctor], make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient. So all God's providences, being divinely tempered and sanctified, work together for the best of the saints." (p. 11)

"Do not mistake me; I do not say that of their own nature the worst things are good, for they are a fruit of the curse, but though they are naturally evil, yet the wise overruling hand of God dispose[s] and sanctif[ies] them (p. 25)

"No vessel can be made of gold without fire; so it is impossible that we should be made vessels of honour, unless we are melted and refined in the furnace of affliction ... As the painter intermixes bright colours with dark shadows, so the wise God mixes mercy with judgment" (p. 26).

"Afflictions work for good, as they are the means of loosening our hearts from the world. When you dig away the earth from the root of a tree, it is to loosen the tree from the earth; so God digs away our earthly comforts to loosen our hearts from the earth" (p. 29). Consider the goodness of God. Christ our trust and treasure. He's sovereign and He's good, He's the King.