

Why All Things MUST Work Together for Our Good

Call to Worship: Psalm 46

1st Scripture: Romans 8:1-17

2nd Scripture: Romans 8:18-30

Introduction

As we continue to press through our current national “outbreak” crisis, I thought it would be wise to digress from our series on the Gospel of Matthew again, focusing instead, on relevant ways that we can be encouraged during this challenging time.

Please bear with me, as I am not used to preaching to a church of empty pews. I know you all are with me, but my visual senses will have to adjust to speaking into cyberspace, and that, in itself, takes an element of faith on my part.

For this morning, I want to hone in on a text that most of us are probably very familiar with, from Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, specifically chapter 8:28-30. But, as we work through this text, I want to further bolster up what we know about this glorious text, by considering *why* all things absolutely *must* work together for the good of God’s people. We know the statement to be true, in its own right, but considering *the absolute necessity* for this statement to be true, will, I hope, encourage us to work through all of the providentially ordained trials that God brings our way, with even greater boldness, joy and faith.

I. The Context of Verse 28

Let us begin, by considering the context of verse 28, which will also serve to help eliminate any extreme charismatic abuses of our main text. It is important to recognize that, as is the case with most of Scripture, verses 28-30 come out of a broader context, and ought to be considered within that context. And so, when the Apostle Paul tells us that all things work together for the good of God’s people, the context preceding and following verse 28, defines what exactly is meant by the “good” unto which, all things work, for the people of God.

And a very basic reading of the text shows us that this is not referring to our *physical* good. In other words, to use this text as a means of assuring one’s self that you will get a

particular job that you desire, or that you will overcome a particular bout with cancer, or that no evil will befall you (in any sense), is to completely wrench the text out of its context, which in turn, will lead a lot of people to question their faith, to question God's faithfulness, and into the place of utter despair. If I promise to give you one hundred apples and you are expecting lemons because you have misunderstood my promise, then you are going to be sorely disappointed (and our relationship is going to be negatively affected) when you receive apples.

Indeed, the very purpose of Romans 8:28, is to offer comfort to God's people *because they will suffer*. It assumes great suffering, loss and discomfort in this life. That is why Paul makes the statement that he makes here. He wants to assure us that, contrary to what we might feel, every painful path into suffering that we take, is for our good. Notice again, how the very context involves the reality and certainty of Christian suffering.

[Read verses 12-18] Note, the context of sanctification and putting sin to death, which involves the necessity of suffering. And this suffering is a necessity for all who are joint heirs with Christ, because even as He suffered (much worse) to atone for our sins, we now suffer (much less), in putting them to death, since they will no longer be held to our account. This then bridges into verses 18ff, where Paul, acknowledging that suffering is never fun, yet reminds us that the suffering we endure in our sanctification is not worthy to be compared to the glory, which will be produced in us by that suffering. In other words, the final product is well, well worth it! You see, we already have the preface, as it were, to the "good" that Paul is speaking about in verse 28. Putting sin to death (sanctification), necessitates suffering (Ill: refining silver). Suffering is never enjoyable (it burns bad!), but it brings about the glorious end of our salvation...our glorification, where Christ is produced in us (we will come back to this soon).

And Paul moves on to say that the entire creation longs for the completion of this process of purification, when all of the evil that it has been subjected to, because of our sin, will be completely removed, and the people of God will be wholly refined. And this process, involving not only us, but especially our Triune God working with and for us, will be wholly complete, when we have our new resurrection bodies in glory [Read verses 18-27].

This is the context, within which, verses 28-30, comes to us.

II. The Meaning of Verse 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” (vs. 28).

And so, when Paul makes this assertion, he is literally talking about *all* things, but especially in this context, he is talking about all matters related to our suffering, which are ultimately used by God to further our sanctification (the process of our putting to death remaining sin, with the aid of the Holy Spirit).

Now, notice the wording here. It is very comforting and encouraging, and really puts things into proper perspective when dealing with literally any circumstance (or better said, any divine providence; there are no “random” circumstances in God’s creation) that we are called to endure in this life.

1) “And we know...” We have the absolute certainty concerning this matter. There is no gray area here. There is no language of “possibility” or even “probability” here. This is something that the child of God can be most certain about.

2) “that all things...” Every single providence that befalls the Christian, from the minutest to the grandest of events. You were rear-ended by another driver, your key broke in your door lock when you turned it, your tire went flat, you have lost your job, you are home-bound because of a Coronavirus outbreak, you are undergoing mild to severe persecution, you have been diagnosed with terminal cancer...whatever it is, is within the scope of the “all things” herein mentioned by the Apostle Paul.

3) “work together for good...” Any and every divine providence which is brought to your life path, absolutely, positively, beyond the shadow of any doubt, without any iota of a fraction of a circumstance omitted, must work together for your good; for your sanctifying good, as we have seen in the immediate context, and as we will see in the ongoing context, in a few moments.

4) “to those who love God...” To the true child of God; to those who have been redeemed by God in Christ, and have come to love, adore and worship our great God. To those who are in fellowship with God, by Christ, and through the sustaining work of the Holy Spirit in you. If your hope is in Christ, then this comfort is most assuredly for you. We know that all things are working together for your good.

5) “To those who are the called...” To the elect; to those who have received the effectual call of God upon your souls, which has brought you to repent of your sins and to flee to Christ by faith; to those who have been called out of the darkness of your past depravity and into the glorious light of the children of God; to those, whom God has called effectually and drawn, by His irresistible grace, to believe into Christ through the Gospel, the very means of His calling you.

6) “according to His purpose...” You were called in accordance with a foreordained purpose of God. God did not call you randomly; He didn’t draw out a lottery ticket that happened to have your name on it. No, He called you specifically and individually, to be joined to His body of the redeemed in Christ. There was a divine will, established before the foundation of the world, where God would call you, out of the darkness of this sin-cursed world, and into His marvelous light. And because you were called according to God’s divine purpose (a purpose, which has broader implications than your calling and salvation), it absolutely must be the case, that God will accomplish every single detail of His purpose with you, in Christ! And this, in itself, assumes that all things must work together for your good, because the calling and the purpose are from God, not you. And that purpose involves God hallowing and sanctifying a people for Himself (as we have seen, and as we will continue to see in the verses that follow), and since that purpose involves sanctifying and hallowing a people for Himself, then the process of fulfilling that purpose involves saving you not only from the ultimate consequence and condemnation of your sins, but also, from the remaining effects of your sins. Again, it is the purpose of sanctifying you, which requires the continual burning away of your dross, so that you will be refined like silver. And while this process is often painful, it is both necessary and intentional, such that, we can know that the sufferings that we must endure (every last one of them) are ordained by God to serve this very good purpose. It works to that good, all of it!

And what is the ultimate end of this purifying process? What is the glorious pattern and template, unto which God is sanctifying us, brethren? Where does God’s preordained purpose, ultimately lead His suffering people?

Verse 29a: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...”

7) “For those whom God foreknew...” For those, whom God knew beforehand; those whom He had set His love upon relationally, in Christ the beloved, from before the world was. This is not God foreknowing an event, as in, His knowledge of future events. This is God foreknowing *a people*; that is, relating to them lovingly, in keeping with His covenant of redemption, made within the Trinity, before the world was even created.

8) For those whom He foreknew “He also predestined...” The ones, upon whom, God had set His covenant love, from before the foundation of the world, He had predestined; He had predetermined... to certainly accomplish His specific will and purpose in and for them. He had set them apart, in Christ, and He had ordered all things to follow in time and space, in such a way that they would be redeemed and sanctified; they would be rescued from the fall that would ensue, spared His wrath, adopted as His children, sanctified, perfected and glorified, all in accordance with His predetermined will.

9) And He predestined those whom He foreknew unto a certain end; unto a particular template and pattern, which is altogether lovely, received, and acceptable in God’s sight. They would be “conformed to the image of His Son.” They would be brought into perfect, moral conformity to that which is most beautiful and lovely to our God... His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! The pattern given and the template set by the incarnate God, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be the image, into which, all whom God foreknew, would be conformed!

And brethren, that is the the ultimate good, toward which, all things work, in the process of God sanctifying His people. That is the good, toward which, God is working all things *for and in you*, in and by your sufferings, throughout the course of this short life, which will lead into an eternal glory, where there is no more suffering, tears, sorrow or death! We may not understand the precise way, in which, every ounce of our sufferings lead to this end, but we can know for certain that every ounce of our suffering and pain comes from the hand of our loving Father, who is determined to form us into the image of His beloved Son. What might you be suffering right now? What have you suffered in the past? What will you suffer in the times ahead? All of it; the whole package of your sufferings and trials, even as others (demons and all manner of ungodly opposition) mean you harm, it is being used by God, in very focused and specific ways, to refine you, and to form you into the image of Christ. God doesn’t say “some”

or even “most” things work together for your good. No, “ALL” things work together for your good, brethren. Nothing is by chance. There is no excess of anything that is added to your burden that goes beyond what is precisely necessary for your sanctification, to the very last detail. It is important to remind ourselves of this, brethren, as we work through times such as what we are working through in the present.

The hand of God is definitely behind all that is going on with the Coronavirus. And we don’t want to miss it. It is for the good of His people, and it is a golden opportunity for grabbing the attention of all who are outside of Christ, as they begin to have thoughts about the bigger issues of life, such as where this is all leading, who our God is, and how we can ensure that we are right with Him.

III. The Necessity of Verse 28

Finally, having considered the context of verse 28 and the meaning of verse 28, let us move on to consider the *necessity* of verse 28. It is not only the case that God *is* working all things for the good of His people, but *it is also necessary* that all things work together for the good of God’s people, because of the ultimate end that He has in view. We have already seen that His design is to wholly sanctify all whom He has foreknown, but even this design has a greater, God-glorifying purpose at its ultimate end. And here it is:

“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. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, *that He might be the firstborn among many brethren*” (vs. 28-29).

What is God’s ultimate design in redeeming a people for Himself, and in refining and sanctifying them unto the image of His Son? That Christ might be the firstborn among many brethren. Now, it is important that we understand exactly what this means, brethren. The word “firstborn” here, has Jewish connotations that can easily be missed or misunderstood, if we simply assume our own modern day, cultural understanding of the term, which is exactly what the JW’s do, when they seek to define this term. There are two realities connected to this term:

1) The idea of the Lord Jesus Christ rescuing a remnant of people from out of their natural union with Adam and the corruption of Adam's fall, and bringing them into union with Himself, so that, they might be restored to a good and refined, holy humanity, is certainly implied here. To this end, Jesus is the originator, or firstborn, of a new race of people, as it were; a new and glorified humanity, who through Him, are brought into the family of God.

2) But secondly, the whole concept of the "firstborn," is meant to convey the idea of "preeminence." [Read Colossians 1:9-18]. To this end, in a nut shell, God is going to exalt and glorify His son, as He is given the preeminence over a large mass of redeemed people, all of whom, have been washed and reconciled to God through Him. And for the Lord to accomplish the fullness of this purpose; for Christ to receive this preeminence, all of God's people must not only be saved from the penalty of their sins, but they must also be saved from sin's complete corruption, so that, they fully bear the image of the Son of God! Jesus only receives the preeminence, if His people are wholly sanctified. And because this is God's ultimate end, we know that all things work together to accomplish this end, providing us with the best ultimate outcome of being formed into the image of Christ, who is the firstborn among many brethren!

And so, brethren, this is why we ought all the more to take comfort in the promise given here in verse 28. All things must work together for our good, yes, because God truly and sincerely loves us, but furthermore, because this is much bigger than us. This is about God glorifying His Son, by giving Him the preeminence! The very glory of God is tied to our sanctification, and all things working together to accomplish the good of our sanctification.

And that is why the Apostle Paul moves on to present what has often been called the "Golden chain of redemption"; that chain of all that God will wholly accomplish in us, unto this glorious end! Verse 30- "Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." God's work in us, is based on an entire package that must come to fruition. And it is so easy to lose sight of the full package, thinking that somehow, God fixes His will on short-term goals. No, God is determined (pre-determined) to complete the entire package of our redemption. That is why Paul can also state that he is confident that, "He who began a good work in us, will complete that

work until the Day of Christ's return!" God is not like the unreliable builder who leaves projects undone or not done well. God finishes and perfects all that He begins.

IV. Concluding Encouragement

Why the Coronavirus? Why the threat of contamination and even the infection of some Christians with the virus? Why the strain on the economy? Why the hindrance upon our jobs and lives? Why the temporal cancellation of church gatherings and other plans? Why the sufferings and seeming setbacks in life? Ultimately, for the good of Christ's church and the spread of His Gospel. There may be all manner of agents involved with spreading this virus. There may be demonic beings behind it. There may be corrupt governments behind it. There may be negligence behind it. There may be all kinds of selfish actions committed throughout the course of this time, with all manner of evil intentions at work. But, at the end of the day, the coronavirus is *God's* virus. It is God's messenger, sent for the good of His church and His glory. Some of the greatest expressions of God's love, come in the form of sanctifying chastisements. For, God loves those whom He chastens and He scourges every son that He receives, because, God is more concerned about refining us, and making us more like the Lord Jesus Christ in the long run, than He is about securing our temporal comforts in this life. He has the greater good and the bigger picture in mind. Let us remember that. Let us rejoice in that. And let us reach out to those who do not know this glorious God in truth, with the Gospel of His Beloved Son!

[The Gospel!!!!]

Benediction: Romans 8:31-39