Do All Things Really Work Together For Good?
Romans 8:28-30

Introduction

“Do all things really work together for good?”

Hardly a week goes by without someone telling me a young child has a terminal illness. Someone has been killed in an accident; a loved one has died in their sleep. A husband has betrayed his marital vows, a frantic wife calls to tell me her husband is addicted to pornography; a woman serves her husband with divorce papers. Another person is diagnosed with a cancerous tumor and a family wonders whether they will be able to pay this months rent. Some of you wonder—sometimes out loud—whether life is worth living. Others are consumed by fear, terrorized by intense white hot anger, mad, bitter and hostile. Guilt, shame and the failure to forgive those who have wronged you, keep some of you awake at night!

We know the Lord cares about our trials and we “hope” and “persevere” (v.25)

I read the story of Dr. E. C. Caldwell, professor of New Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond Virginia. He had just completed his lecture for the day and informed his students of their assignment. “Tomorrow,” Dr. Caldwell concluded, “I will be teaching on the eighth chapter of Romans. So tonight, as you study this chapter, I want you to pay close attention to verse 28—’all things work together for good to them that love God.’ As you study this verse in your Greek text, be careful to notice what this verse truly says—and what it doesn’t say.” He paused and looked around the room at the fresh faces of the young seminarians. Then sensing the prompting of the Holy Spirit, added, “One final word before I dismiss you—whatever happens in all the years to come, remember: Romans 8:28 will always hold true.” Later that day, Dr. Caldwell and his wife were driving their car. They came to a railroad crossing, unaware that a freight train was bearing down on the crossing. The train plowed into the car, killing Mrs. Caldwell instantly. Severely injured, Dr. Caldwell was rushed by ambulance to the hospital. He survived but his injuries left him permanently handicapped. Months later he returned to the classroom. Gripping his cane, he stood before the class. Not a sound could be heard. They remembered the last words from the Dr.’s mouth about Romans 8:28. Dr. Caldwell looked into the face of each student. “Romans 8:28” he said, “It still holds true. One day we shall see God’s good, even in this” (Becoming A Whole Person In A Broken World by Ron Lee Davis pp.118-119).

Some of you are wondering; “Where is God’s good in my trial, in my circumstance?” Let’s look!

God’s Work In The World (v.28)
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Romans 8:28 is one of the most beloved verses in the Bible. This verse has provided comfort to millions of people who have to face the very hard task of making sense of hardship, pain, trauma, deprivation. Almost every Christian, from an early time in their Christian career, finds this verse and commits it to memory. At least the first part;

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)
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.

Romans 8:28 (RSV)
28 We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

Why the difference? “The answer is that in some ancient manuscripts “God” appears twice in this verse—not only as the object of “love” but also as the subject of “works” (Ralph Earle Word Meanings in the New Testament p.181).

At the risk of boring you to death, I need to give you a little historical review of the Greek text of this passage. Ralph Earle writes;

“When the KJV was made in 1611 only about a half dozen Greek manuscripts formed the basis of the text to be translated, as against some 5,000 available today. In 1628, too late to be used by King James translators, the great Alexandrian manuscript (from the fifth century) was brought to England. About 100 years ago the Vatican manuscript (fourth century) was made available to scholars. Both of these have the added reading ho theos. So does the Sahidic (Egyptian). Origen (third century), the greatest Bible scholar of the Early Church, quoted the verse this way” (p.181).

“. . .in the 1930’s the so called Chester Beatty Papyri were discovered and edited. The most significant find was almost an entire papyrus manuscript of Paul’s Epistles from the third century—100 years older than Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, hitherto our oldest Greek manuscripts. And this, called Papyrus 46, has the added ho theos’”(ibid).

What does this mean? If God is both the subject of works and the object of love—it means the passage says—all things are working—for God’s good.

The New English Bible says “And in everything, as we know, he cooperates for good with those who love God. . .” the idea is a cooperative partnership between us and God—we work together with God to further His plans. In the RSV it says, God works ‘with’ rather than ‘for’.

Earle argues the overwhelming testimony of the early manuscripts and the church fathers reads the verse this way; “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love God (him), who are the called according to his purpose”.

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Is Romans 8:28 a guarantee that all life will turn out good—at least what we human beings think and perceive as our good—health, wealth, prosperity, happiness, freedom from pain, freedom from sorrow, freedom from tragic circumstances—no matter what? The answer is no! We are not doing anyone a favor if we as Christians offer false hope and false expectations. There are many things in life that are not good. There is nothing good about saying good-bye to your beloved mother or father. There is nothing good about burying a child. I heard the story of a woman whose child had died. Well meaning friends tried to comfort her that the child was in heaven. God was in control. She said, “I don’t believe you. I guess I’ll just have to throw dirt on his coffin and pretend that he never existed”. How sad!

God doesn’t ask us to deny our feelings or pretend that our tears of pain are not real. There’s nothing good about watching your spouse abandon his or her vows. There’s nothing good about death, divorce, financial hardship, imprisonment. Yet these things happen. They happen to people who love God, people who are called according to his purpose. And God can and does use our broken circumstances to make us whole and well in ways we seldom imagine. Richard Wurmbrund did not want to go to an Eastern European prison camp and experience beatings, torture, separation from his wife and family. Jim Eliot did not want to die with a spear thrust through his chest. Cassie Bernal’s mother and father miss her every single day. Armando Valladares didn’t consider it a good thing to be confined in a Cuban prison for twenty-two years, subject to indescribable tortures, forced to march through ditches of raw sewage, and eat food tainted with kerosene. Joni Eareckson Tada didn’t consider it a good thing to awake after a diving accident and find herself paralyzed from the neck down and spend the rest of her life in a wheelchair. Yet their suffering and sacrifice has had an impact on tens of thousands of people.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote in his book *The Gulag Archipelago*;

> It was only when I lay there on the rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually, it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through the human heart—and through all human hearts. . . . I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation: Bless you, prison, for having been in my life.

C.S. Lewis once said that the most frequently spoken word in heaven would be “Oh”. *I get it*. Now I see God’s plan. I see my trial in light of God’s kingdom. You may not be able to see how your pain has been woven into the fabric of God’s eternal plan. You may not understand until you see Jesus face to face. But we have God’s certain promise—one day we will look back and say, “Oh, I get it. Now I understand”.

Do All Things Really Work Together For Good?
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“Romans 8:28 does not mean, as is commonly thought, that “everything will turn out okay in this life,” rather that everything will work out for our ultimate good. These words have our eternal rather than our temporal good in mind” (R. Kent Hughes p.167).

“The good news is not that God will make our circumstances come out the way we like, but that God can weave even our disappointments and disasters into His eternal plan. The evil that happens to us can be transformed into God’s good. Romans 8:28 is God’s guarantee that if we love God, our lives can be used to achieve His purposes and further His kingdom. In our limited wisdom, this truth may not always feel good, it may not always make good sense by our reasoning—but by faith we can trust that God’s promise is sure” (Ron Lee Davis Becoming A Whole Person In A Broken World; p.122).

Remember the context of Romans 8:28. The theme of chapter 8 is the person and the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Do you remember verse 9 “But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.”

We are free from judgment (vv.1-4); the Law can’t condemn you and the law can’t control you. We are free from defeat; we have no obligation to the flesh (our old life). We have the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God longs to control us. We have freedom from discouragement, creation groans, believers groan, The Holy Spirit groans. The Holy Spirit shares our burdens—but they are burdens.

We are supposed to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. But many of us are controlled by our anger, our bitterness, our disappointments, our failed expectations, our lusts, our desires, our sinful cravings. Some of us are controlled by our flesh. There are reasons why we continue to wrestle with our flesh (v.7); “because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be”. In our flesh we are selfish. We want what we want when we want it. We do not want to love, forgive, lose, suffer, do without. **When we want our way, we do not want anybody else’s way. That would include God’s way. We are set against Him and against His plan. The second reason we struggle is because we are afraid. We fear losing control of our lives and becoming part of a plan that we have no control over (God’s plan). We like all the benefits of control that God brings but sometimes we lack the courage to face the groans, the bitter disappointments, the failed expectations. The third reason is that in the flesh we are proud.** The Lord knows we are weak; but sometimes we think we are strong. We think we can fight our way out. There are two things we forget. God is in control. We are tempted to deny that. Because of the fact we also lose sight on the fact that we focus on the immediate while Gods’ focus is on the ultimate. God sees you when this is all over. I need to make a special note. As much as you would like to know everything; you never will. God reveals to us according to His pleasure and our diligence. Read the promise again in the verse.
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Remember where we have come from in our text. Verse 18; “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”. From verse 18- to verse 28 is one seamless thread. Yes we have sufferings in this world—but they are nothing compared to the glory to come! In fact everything that happens to us—everything—is woven into the fabric of God’s plan, which He is working in our lives. Romans 8:28 is not a rabbits foot or lucky charm for superstitious Christians. Our circumstances even our bad circumstances can be used to further God’s kingdom.

Note these things:
(1) This is a promise that is to be claimed and not ignored! The word to “know” is a special kind of knowledge or knowing. This is the unshakable, absolute kind of knowledge. We have total assurance. We should embrace the promise with our whole heart.
(2) The project is God’s. This is God’s job. We think it is ours. God causes all things to work together is not the same as GOD CAUSES ALL THINGS. The Bible never lists God as the cause for evil, wickedness, unrighteousness or sin.

James 1:13 (NKJV)
13 Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

God is not the cause of evil in your life. God uses everything in our lives for our best interests. He is the master potter and we are the clay. God will use whatever means necessary (short of evil and sin) to make us pots that are graceful, useful, beautiful. God has the right to shape and design as He sees fit.

The plan is total and not partial. As you look back on your life, you may not see how God has used a special event to accomplish His will. Be He sees clearly and knows completely. We see darkly—as in a misty mirror. God is good. God will not cease to be good in order to accommodate your experience—or give in to the mental and emotional pressures you place on God to try to convince Him He is not good!

(3) God’s purposes in your life are good and not evil. Every circumstance is designed for our good. The Lord is for us.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NKJV)
11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Sometimes we think or talk or act like the opposite is true. God is against me. We think cosmic karma is cheating us out of our just rewards. “What did I ever do to deserve this”? Are you willing to miss out on God’s best and highest?
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Romans 8:28 does not mean that all things work together for good for those who do not love God. God’s plan is cooperative—and comprehensive—and beneficient—(good) but it is also selective—in that it only applies to those who love God and are in fact called by God into His glorious purpose through the redemption effected through Jesus Christ (EBC Alan F. Johnson Vol. 2; p.35).

“I love God”. Do you really love God? How do you know? What is the proof of love? Jesus gave obedience as the test of both discipleship and love.

John 14:15 (NLT)
15 "If you love me, obey my commandments.

John 14:23 (NLT)
23 Jesus replied, “All those who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and live with them.

“Things are not really working out all that well”. Do you love God? Do you love Jesus?

Is God using your intense hatred, your profound disobedience, your commitment to rebel against his love and commands for your good? Does Romans 8:28 suggest that you are free to disregard Christ’s commands? If you don’t love the Lord, this verse really doesn’t apply to you. For the Christian, God really does cause everything that happens to us, (even the evil inflicted by others, even the present inexplicable disappointments) to work out for every believer’s eternal good.

God’s Will In The Believer (vv.29-30)

Why are we so certain? Why is our confidence unshakable? This intense confidence rests on our certainty of our redemption! God is at work in the world. God is at work in our lives. God has a plan! Our lives do not consist of random acts, disconnected from one another. God has a plan. God’s plan is perfect. God’s plan includes;

(1) our good
(2) His Glory

You cannot divorce Romans 8:28 from Romans 8:29.

God’s plan will succeed! Do you want to know why? God begins before time in the Father’s foreknowledge and concludes beyond time in glorification; between these two—in time—come calling and justification. God is the planner and the designer—it is His plan! All who continue in this plan by loving God finish.

Romans 8:29 (NKJV)
29 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.
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Romans 8:29 (NLT)
29 For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters.

God’s plan can’t fail. He knows the beginning and the end. God’s plan is going to succeed for several reasons!
   (1) It is God’s plan.
   (2) The plan began in eternity past. God choose us in Christ!

Ephesians 1:4-5 (NLT)
4 Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.
5 His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure.

God knew you—in advance. But God’s foreknowledge (proginosko) is more than just knowledge in advance—it emphasizes the fact that salvation is initiated by God in His eternal loving choice whereby He chose us in Christ to be the objects of His loving purpose (see Amos 3:2).

Imagine someone bets you the Lakers are going to win the National Championship. You think, “I’ll take that bet.” But the game is over. The game has already been played. They’ve already one. You would be stupid to take the bet today—because the series is over. You do not bet when it’s a done deal! But you bet against God everytime you believe Satan’s lies about yourself! “Your not going to make it!” “You will never be like Jesus”. “You are a failure and a hypocrite and loser”.

God predetermined that one day you would be like Jesus. That’s God’s plan and that’s God’s goal. God is going to make you like Jesus.

People get really confused about predestination. But predestination only applies to people who are saved. The Greek word for ‘predestinate’ is proorizo. Pro means ‘before’ and horizon comes from horos ‘boundary’ (we get the word horizon from this Greek word). The primary meaning is mark off—like a boundary. The idea is God has marked off as His own. What is it we are foreordained too? The context is not individual salvation—rather conformity to the image of Jesus. The word conformed is symmorphous—an adjective found only here and in Phil. 3:1.

“Nowhere are we taught that God predestines people to be eternally condemned. If they are condemned, it is because of their refusal to trust Christ (John 3:18-21)”(Warren Wiersbe p.541).

God’s plan is to make you like Jesus—for your own good and for His glory. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead—that means Jesus was the first to be resurrected never to die—ever again. God is interested in you living forever.
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(v.30) Romans 8:30 (NKJV)
30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Romans 8:30 (NLT)
30 And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And he gave them right standing with himself, and he promised them his glory.

The Lord chose you and then called you. How did God call you? Through the outward invitation of preaching and inward drawing by the Holy Spirit of grace!

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 (NKJV)
13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,
14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you remember when Jesus called you? “Hello this is Jesus. Yes I would like to make you a deal. You know how dead you are on the inside? You know how you live in constant fear about dying and having to face God? Well, God’s my Dad—and my Dad has given all judgment into my hands.

Conclusion

Look at the links in the golden chain! Foreknew; predestined; called; justified; glorified. God sees the past as well as the future. God knew us in advance, made perfect arrangements for us, called us, justified us (as if we had never sinned) and glorified us. God sees our future glorification as if it’s a done deal. God has a project. He is making you like Jesus. He will do whatever it takes to accomplish His goal. He will break you.

“We can do this the hard way, or the easy way”.

Are these called because they love God, or do they love God because they are called? Theologians have debated this for centuries. Paul—does not engage in this philosophical speculation—rather he points out that those who God foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified are in engaged in loving GOD.

I don’t mean to be rude—but your pitiful efforts to thwart the plan of God will be dealt with. There are three stages a person goes through when confronted with the fact that God is in control.

(1) The rejection stage. Because of fear and pride and selfishness we think that we are in control. What a lie. We must remember our failure to cooperate with the plan of God will not thwart the plan.
(2) The maturation stage. As we mature in our faith we begin to realize our experiences confirm God’s goodness. We move from rejection to toleration. But in the end we experience the;

(3) The realization stage. The lights go on. We can rest in God’s plan for our lives and cooperate with Him as He brings about the perfect results. That is complete conformity to the character of Christ. Have you realized there is nothing you can add to the complete provision of God in Christ Jesus the Lord? Your will is a very important and vital part of your identity in Christ. The Holy Spirit is a gracious Gentleman. Even when you are a terrible Host He works to bring you into the conformity of Christ. What means the most to you about this passage? What disturbs you the most about this passage? Has God ever accomplished something in your life against your will? Explain you answer.