

Life in Romans 8:28

Romans 8:28

We are coming to the second of two messages in this rock-solid verse, Romans 8:28.

We saw last time the facts of this providential care God has for each of His precious people. We saw that this is part of a marvelous mountain range in this best of chapters: Hope before you, the Holy Spirit pulling you, and in the past, God's sovereign purpose, which is our next matter in 29-30. And then, like a giant exclamation point, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Now I doubt many of us get out of bed in the morning and begin with “*God is for me today.*” While this great, this grand truth is set, mountain-like, before us, how little does it get into our thoughts, our hearts, our lives?! We are not living on these high places! This is the struggle we have.

So with that in mind, we return to Romans 8.28 today with a very deliberate purpose. We can see that this verse can become a cliché, a nearly empty slogan. But the Lord has built into this perhaps best verse in the best chapter some things which prohibit us from falling into that trap. As one person put it, this is a pillow on which the believer may lay his head. It is much bigger than a pillow – it is a house in which we are to live. But how do we make the connection?

Many read this passage as it says, all things work together in God's great purpose. We open it like a great volume of theology and say

YUP, there it is; our doctrine of providence, and put it back on the shelf.

But we are not allowed to do that if we pay closer attention to three things tie to this verse; things which bring us into the house; things which sets our heads upon that pillow.

Are you not amazed with me to find our knowledge, our affections in love, and our purpose, or our wills, are all found here. Three things to connect us most **strongly**, most **intimately**, and most **clearly** with Romans 8.28.

We begin with: “**For we know**”. This is not a throw away phrase; a filler for Paul to introduce this topic. He has used this phrase before:

- we know all creation groans, verse 22, and we know it longs to enter into the liberty of the sons of God
- we know we have Christ, we have the Spirit in us in verses 9-11; we have the first-fruits of heaven in us – verse 23, but we do not know yet what we shall be when He appears
- we know the Holy Spirit is bringing us to perfection, yet we don't know even what to pray for as we ought at times!
- we know all things work together for our good, but we don't know all the ways in which God does that

What do we KNOW then in this verse?

1. First, we know Him. This refers to the knowledge of God. We know that it is to His glory to have our minds conformed in all things to His place of highest honor, and to be transformed by the renewing

of our minds. Who God is, what God does, How He is your God, your Savior is the same mindset found in Psalm 139. David knew a loving God who knows him, whose knowledge is too wonderful to attain, whose presence is with him in the heights of heaven and depths of Sheol, everywhere and every time. He is a God for whom darkness is as the light, the God who knew me in the womb where I was made, and the God to whom I give thanks for making me fearfully and wonderfully. What you think about God is the most important thing about you!

2. This leads secondly to how you cannot know yourself apart from knowing God. True wisdom is know God and to know yourself as his creature, as fallen, as finding salvation in Him, as Calvin began his famous Institutes. Our problem is we continue to think, to understand, to be assured that we can be our own good in life. We think we can get along without God who gives us our very breath, and causes our heart to beat every second.
3. Then this God can only be known through the Savior, so come to Jesus. Come to know Him and draw near to Him! Faith is at the heart of knowing the Lord, as it is for all three of these points. Faith is the one key that fits all the locks; trust more deeply in Jesus as your God and Savior, and you know the Father by Him, you know the Spirit by Him. ‘He who has seen me has seen the Father.’ ‘No man comes to the Father but by Me!’
4. So much more could be said here on knowing the Lord:
 - a. You know the Lord through His Word
 - b. You know Him by studying His ways and his works
 - c. You know him by past experiences
 - d. You know Him through prayer

e. And you know Him in community – we need one another.

But now **the Heart Calls** us – Literally, the verse says, ‘And we know that those who love God, all things work together for good.’

For Paul’s teaching on agape, and usually God’s love to us – see Romans 5.5, 8; 8.35, 37, 39.

Our love to God is found much less frequently in Paul as compared to John. But it is there:

He closes his letter to the Corinthians: “If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha.” (1Co 16:22). In fact, Anders Nygren cannot find a single place in all Paul’s writings where the *noun*, love, clearly means love to God! Except for here!

Notice that this is not loving things about God, as much as loving God himself, personally. And this personal love to God is so important to how you live upon God’s working all things for your good. How so? Much in every way!

1. First of all, love to God is proof that you have connected with God’s love for you. You love him because He first loved you. Your love functions not as a foundation, not as a cause, not as a reason for God saving you by grace. Nobody should read this as though only when we love will all things work together for good! No; rather this is a description, a mark of believers only. Get this – this is not for unbelievers!

2. Then second, the proper response to such love to us, as God's perfect care in our lives, can only be to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength!
 - a. This love is sincere – not in word only, but heartily.
 - b. It is supreme, putting him first over all.
 - c. It is stable, or consistent, not once in a while, but the way of your life.
3. How does this come about? Well we are told that faith energizes love. The more we draw near to him, and the bigger he is to us, the warmer our hearts will grow. And then the more we will put off what displeases him and the more we will grow like him. God is love and he is shaping us in his image by Christ, the Son of His love, by the Spirit whose fruit is love. Are you a 1 Corinthians 13 Christian?

But what if our responses are unloving? Does not mean that all things don't work together then? Does that mean God ceases to be our God? Can you imagine that nightmare?! But that is not at all the case! It is just that God in his wisdom and goodness will come to you differently than if you had lovingly obeyed him.

Oh consider, beloved, is there any other response more fitting towards God than love? Love doesn't quit! "It is our love to God that makes every providence sweet, and therefore profitable. Those that love God make the best of all he does..." Matthew Henry

Now come thirdly to **Called according to His purpose:**

Now this is a very Pauline concept: God's sovereign, effectual call, is here, not his general call to all to be saved. He writes in 2 Tim. 1.9-10

– “who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, ¹⁰ but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,”

You have been called out of the worst condition ever! From sin, from death, from hell, from dominion under the wrath and curse of an eternal and righteously angry God! And you have been called into the best condition ever – to be called the righteousness of God in Christ, to eternal life and immortality, as redeemed, as children of the living God, forever and ever!

God’s full purpose now opens before us – of bringing everything into conformity with His Son, in whom all things are to be summed up. That means your future, which is already written in almighty ink can neither fail nor change, is what dictates everything in the present! Rather than seeing the bad things of life as insurmountable, they must work together for your good. Nothing, and I say again, nothing can be against you, if God is for you!

Listen to this great insight:

The Christian lives *from the future into the past*. He or she sees time in the light of eternity and therefore views affliction through lenses tinted with glory. Nor is the relationship between the two nearly chronological – suffering now, glory then; it is causal: ‘This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.’ It is as though struggles, suffering, trials, are, in the Spirit’s hands, the raw materials out of

which he creates glory in us. Knowing this helps us to understand why it can be such a painful process. By nature we are not very auspicious candidates for the production of glory! But our lives are in the hands of a very determined heavenly Father. He knows that without holiness we will not have the capacity to see the Lord. For only those who are like him will be able to see him as he is. Grasp this and it sheds light on our path. Am I puzzled by what the Lord seems to be doing in the circumstances of my life? Do I face trials and experience affliction, even forms of persecution I never expected? Am I discovering more sin in my heart than I ever imagined before I became a Christian? Then he is sanctifying me. And this is a much bigger, wider, longer, deeper work than I first realized when I became a Christian. God is not interested in short-term results but long-term, permanent (everlasting) changes. God is not using wood and hay and stubble but fire-tested, refined metals and precious stones. He means his building to last for all eternity. This perspective impacts everything. It provides a new focus. (Sinclair Ferguson, *Devoted to God*, pages 219 and 220)

Jeremiah 29:11 is such a remarkable passage. God says to those going into a most horrible bondage and suffering under Babylon: 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.' He then adds: 'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 'You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jer 29:11-13)

You are a people of destiny. And it is the Lord Himself who is bringing you. He has not said, ‘I hope you make it here!’ He has not said, ‘I will get you started but you will have to finish it!’ He who began by calling you into his kingdom, will complete it. God is at work in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure!

This means every Christian has a meaningful life; you have found heaven’s “raison d’etre”! Your reason of being!

And is that not a call to live deliberately and dependently, by faith, in fellowship with a God with whom you will dwell forever? Has he not given you so many incentives to do so? So many firstfruits and foretastes so you would lean forward and run the race set before you! And all by His grace!

I close with Calvin’s excellent summary, worth your committing to memory! “The necessary consequences of the knowledge of providence are, gratitude in prosperity, patience in adversity, and a wonderful security respecting the future.” Institutes of the Christian Religion, 17.7

Gratitude, not pride, in prosperity – still dependent on the Lord!

Patience, not frustration or irritation, in adversity and afflictions.

And hopeful regarding the future. Your future is always better than your past!

May God bring this song out of your souls!

[Day by day, and with each passing moment,
Strength I find, to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father's wise bestowment,
I've no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best—
Lovingly, its part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

Every day, the Lord Himself is near me
With a special mercy for each hour;
All my cares He fain would bear, and cheer me,
He whose name is Counselor and Power;
The protection of His child and treasure
Is a charge that on Himself He laid;
As thy days, thy strength shall be in measure,
This the pledge to me He made.

Help me then, in every tribulation
So to trust Thy promises, O Lord,
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation
Offered me within Thy holy Word.
Help me, Lord, when toil and trouble meeting,
E'er to take, as from a father's hand,
One by one, the days, the moments fleeting,
Till I reach the promised land.

Lina Sandell – author of Children of the Heavenly Father (sing and point out lines 2, 3 and 5)]