

“God Causes Everything to Work Together for Good”  
Romans 8:28

Introduction: This is the third time since I have been at this church that we have visited this passage, which I think we would all agree is one of the most reassuring passages in the whole Bible. Let’s face it, there are many many things which have happened, are happening or will happen in this world that can be very discouraging. Everyone of you here this evening is undoubtedly struggling with something, whether large or small. Maybe you are struggling with failing or uncertain health, uncertainty in your finances, or perhaps you are struggling with sin. If it doesn’t have to do with you directly, perhaps someone close to you is suffering, or has died, or maybe a friend has turned against you. In this world of sin, things like this are happening all the time. And when they happen, sometimes we begin to wonder whether or not God still cares about us or really loves us. We have a hard time understanding why the Lord would allow things like this to happen to us. Well, because these things are happening all the time, I think it would be good for us to again consider why they happen and what kind of comfort God gives us in them. Romans 8 is one of the best places to start.

Paul begins this chapter by telling us what is perhaps the best news we could ever hear, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (v. 1). After reading chapter 7, where Paul tells us that our Christian experience is going to be a continual battle with sin throughout our whole lives, this is good to know. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. If we have savingly trusted in Christ, our sins, though we will have to struggle with them as long as we live, will never overcome us. We will be delivered from God’s judgment by the grace of Christ. Now if we are armed with this truth, the battle is all but over. Where does our greatest fear in life come from, but the uncertainty of whether or not the Lord will accept us on that day? But if we know that we are in Him, then nothing that comes into our lives, whatever it may be, will ever ultimately be able to hurt us.

Now how can this be true? What has the Lord done to make sure it will turn out this way? The answer is that He has given to us His Spirit. He has introduced a new principle of life in us, which is the Spirit of God. Notice verse 2 of Romans 8, “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” God has given to us a new principle of life by His Spirit that has set us free from the principle of sin and corruption that we were born with. He is the One who gives us the strength to walk in the ways of Christ (v. 4). He is the One who will eventually raise our bodies from the dead (v. 11). He is the One who gives us the power to put our sins to death (v. 13). And through the work of sanctification that He does in us, He is the One who bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God (v. 16), and, of course, that we are also the heirs of the kingdom of God (v. 17). He is also the One who gives us hope in all of our suffering. His presence assures us that one day, no matter how bad things might get, our bodies will be redeemed by Christ, when He comes again to raise all the dead (vv. 17-25). But He not only gives us hope, He also prays for us, since we don’t really know how to pray for ourselves. He prays perfectly according to the Father’s will at all times, since He knows perfectly what that will is (vv. 26-27). And lastly, He also assures us that ultimately everything that happens to us in this world will work together for good in God’s plan, and that for two reasons: He will never stop until He has brought us to heaven (vv. 29-30), and He will make sure that nothing in heaven or earth will ever separate us from Him (vv. 31-39).

Now I could stop here. What more really needs to be said to encourage us? If we have all this going for us, then what could ever cause us to fear? But it still happens, doesn’t it? Just about every time we get into the middle of a trial, we still tend to become afraid of what’s going to happen, even though we have seen God time and time again work everything in our lives out for good. But remember, this is the reason why He brings these things into our lives in the first place, so that we will learn to trust Him more.

Let’s take the next few minutes to think about this a little more to remind ourselves that this is God’s promise to us, that

***In the middle of all of our trials, God is at work to bring good out of them.***

Let’s consider first what Paul says in this verse, and then we will probe a little deeper into its meaning.

**I. First, what does Paul say.**

- A. He says first that God causes all things to work together for good.
    - 1. In the original language, it doesn't really say that God does this. What it actually says is "All things work together for good."
      - a. If you have the KJV of the Bible, this is what you will see.
      - b. But the translators of the New American Standard Bible, realizing that all things don't work together by themselves, apart from God's plans, wisely added that God is the One who causes these things to turn out this way. After all, Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:11 that God "works all things after the counsel of His will."
    - 2. But is there One of the three persons in particular that does this? It could certainly be argued from the context of this passage that it is the Holy Spirit who does so. He appears to be the One through whom the Lord bestows all of the blessings mentioned in this chapter. But either way, we know it is God.
  - B. And what is it again that He does?
    - 1. He causes all things to work together for good; not some things, but all things; not just the things that happen to us, but also the way we respond to them, including all of our failures.
    - 2. God has ordained everything that happens to you, and He has done so that He might work them together for good, so that they might help you in some way, if you are a Christian, if you love Him, if you have been called according to His purpose.
- II. Let's think about now what this means and what it doesn't mean.
- A. First, let's consider what it doesn't mean.
    - 1. This passage does not teach us that God is working out everything that happens to us for the very highest good that is possible. In other words, things could always be better.
      - a. If He did work everything out in our lives in the best possible way, then all of us could certainly look forward to receiving the highest possible reward on the day of judgment. But obviously, this isn't what the Bible teaches. It tells us that we will each receive a different reward according to what we have done.
      - b. God has already determined what that reward will be. He did this in eternity before He made us. He not only ordained what each of us would do, but also what our place would be in His eternal kingdom.
      - c. While we are on earth, He is preparing each of us for that place. We are like living stones which are being shaped and molded for our place in His heavenly Temple, a Temple where God is pleased to dwell forever. God has already decided where He is going to put us. And obviously we cannot all fill the same space.
      - d. God causes all things to work together for good, but not for the greatest possible good.
    - 2. Along these same lines, God also holds back from us some things that could have worked together for our greater good.
      - a. Certainly, if He gave us more of His Spirit, we would have more love for Him and would do more than we do now for Him, even as the apostles did when they were filled with the Spirit. But He only gives to us what is pleasing to Him.
      - b. If He gave us more money, we could use it to help more people. If He gave us more strength and energy, we could serve our brethren and neighbors more. If He gave us more intelligence, we could use it to advance His kingdom more. If He gave us more time, we could serve Him longer than we can now.
      - c. But He gives us each what is pleasing to Him that we should have, which is again to say that this promise does not mean that God is working all things together for our greatest possible good.
    - 3. The last point has to do with sin. Does God work even our sins together for good? Yes, He says that He works everything together for good. But does this mean that it is better for us to sin, than not to sin? God does work good out of all things, even our sins, but generally speaking, it is still better for us not to sin, than to sin and then have to pay the consequences.

- a. In other words, it isn't good that we love the Father and the Son only as much as we do. It isn't good that we fall as short as we do in our service to Him. It isn't good that we are no more humble or holy than we are. It isn't good that we know so little of His Word.
  - b. The Lord may use our weaknesses and sins to bring good into our lives, but we must be careful that we don't arrive at the conclusion that it is therefore better to be weak and sinful. It is always better to obey than to disobey. The Lord may bring good from either, but greater good generally comes from greater obedience.
  - c. On the day of judgment, it will be much better to have built on the foundation of Christ with gold, silver and precious stones by doing what is right, than to have only the wood, hay and stubble of worthless works.
- B. Understanding then that this promise doesn't mean that God will work all things together for our greatest possible good, what does it mean?
1. First it means that whatever God may bring into our lives, and whatever our responses to them may be, God will bring *something good* out of them. Because of His love for us, God has some good purpose in all that He has ordained for us.
  2. This is true of all the evil that comes into our lives as well.
    - a. Now remember, God did not create evil, but He does allow it. The reason He allows it is so that He may use it to bring about good for His people.
    - b. Was it evil for Joseph's brothers to throw him into a pit, to sell him to slave traders, and to tell his father that wild animals had devoured him? Yes! But did God bring good out of it for Joseph and for his people? Yes! God made Joseph second to Pharaoh in Egypt, and through this Joseph was able to save his family from the famine.
    - c. Was it evil for the Jews and Gentiles to crucify Jesus? Yes! But did God bring good out of it? Yes. Through His crucifixion Christ saved so many people that we could never count them. He was also exalted to the highest place of honor and authority in all the universe.
    - d. God ordained that both of these evil actions would take place, and He also worked good out of both of them. God ordained them for good, and good was the result, so that we can say, "It was actually a good thing that Joseph was sold by his brothers into Egypt, for if they hadn't, God's people would have perished in the famine," and, "It was a good thing that the Jews and the Gentiles crucified Christ, for if they hadn't, we would have all perished in our sins."
    - e. In God's plan, it is good that there is evil. He certainly must have thought so, for that is why He ordained it in the first place. God works all things together for good.
    - f. He even works sin together for our good. If Adam had never fallen, we wouldn't have the glorious future we now have in Christ. The blessing we would have received from Adam if he had passed his probation in the garden is nothing compared to the blessing Christ has earned. Adam's reward would only have been that of a perfect man receiving more than he deserved. But what do the works of One who is both God and man deserve? More? Yes, infinitely more! This is what we have to look forward to, for through faith in Christ, the blessing He earned is ours. It is better for us that sin came into the world.
    - g. But again, does this mean that it is better for us to sin than to obey? No. God is still going to reward us according to what we do. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:6, "Now this *I say*, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully." And he says in 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." *God will work even our sins together for good, but generally it would have been better for us if we didn't sin. If this wasn't true, then we could throw all ethics out the door.*
    - h. On the other hand, we need to recognize there are times in the grace and mercy of God that He does work some of our sins to an even greater good than if we had not sinned in the first place. Sometimes, when we fail, it can powerfully motivate us to keep away from those sins in the future. It can also cause us to devote ourselves even more fully to the work of Christ, just as Paul's sins moved him to do, after the Lord showed him such love and mercy. This doesn't mean that falling into sin all the time is good. But it does mean that sometimes God will cause our sins to help us more than if we hadn't sinned in the first place.

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- k. God works all things together for good to all who love Him and who are called according to His purpose, but generally they work together for even greater good to those saints who continue to love God and bear the fruits of holiness even during times of trial.*

**III. Now what should we learn from this?**

- A. First, realizing that these promises only apply to believers, if you want to claim this blessing you need to be one.
1. Obviously, if you don't love the Lord, even though the Lord may still give you good things in this life, He will not work even these together for your good. Every kindness which God shows you, that you do not thank Him and serve Him for, will only speak out against you on the day of judgment. It will work out to your condemnation.
  2. But if you turn from your sins and embrace the Savior, then this promise will be yours. Turn from your sins then. Embrace the Lord Jesus in faith and repentance, and the blessings will be yours.
- B. But if you are a child of God here this evening, then you can know that God has been and continues to work everything in your life together for His glory and your good.
- a. He is at work through every situation in your life for good: through your health and sicknesses, your prosperity or your poverty, your good relationships and your conflicts, your gains and your losses.
  - b. He is even working your sins together for your good. God is bringing good out of all of them -- not as much as you might have gained if you had not sinned, although sometimes more, but always some good, by which He is continuing to prepare you for heaven.
  - c. What a blessing this is, especially when you consider that, outside of Christ, far from working together for your good, every sin would only increase your damnation in the day of His judgment.
  - d. May the Lord use this precious truth to strengthen us this evening, whether we are in the middle of a trial or have been given a moment of rest by the mercy of God. May He give us the grace to believe His promise, for this will be our greatest comfort in the middle of even the worst of situations. Amen.