

## Work It Out!

*“All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose”*

Romans 8:28



I've said it, and I'm sure you have too -“Don't worry; everything will work out just fine.” Don't kid yourself. Things don't always work out and all things are not good. Look at everything that's going on in the world – sickness, death, wars, poverty, addiction, and natural catastrophes – none of that is good. There is so much “name it and claim it” prosperity preaching and beliefs around these days. So much so that many church people believe that this scripture means that you won't lose your job or home, but if you do, God will immediately give you better ones, as long as you love Him. Your loved ones will always be safe and healthy and God will always make sure you'll prosper as long as you love God.

But we have to look at the context of this scripture. Paul was living by the power of the Spirit, in the midst of suffering and pain and Paul was definitely no stranger to suffering. He was often beaten, imprisoned, and persecuted. So you couldn't really accuse him of being a Pollyanna type. Paul was expressing the prerequisites for the good to take place. He is not giving this promise to all people but only to those *“who love God, who are called according to his purpose.”*

But what does this mean? Those who love God are, in this context, Christians, because they are called according to God's purpose. The ‘called’ are also the ‘justified’ who will be ‘glorified.’ Verses 29 and 30 speak of our conformity to Christ, our glorification, as the *inevitable* outcome of those who love God. And that's not dependent on how *much* we love God but on the finished work of Christ on the cross. Paul ends the chapter by making it very clear that *nothing* can separate us from the love of God (verses 38-39). By implication, that would include even our temporary lapses in our love for the Savior.

What, then, is the good? It is defined for us, initially at least, in verse 29, *“because those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters”* (NET). The good is not our comfort, wealth, or health. It is conformity to Christ! This good is then fully defined in the next verse: *“And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified”* (NET). Ultimately, all things work together to bring each Christian into conformity to Christ, to bring each Christian to glory. Paul is so certain that this will take place that He speaks of our glorification in the past tense! Basically He's saying, “It's a done deal.” Not only this, but no one is lost between predestination and glorification. Paul does not say “some of those” or even “most of those” when He speaks of the steps in the salvation journey. From predestination to glorification, He uses the simple “those.” *No one* misses the boat along the way.

When we read Romans 8:28 in its context we can give a positive answer to the questions of pain and suffering in the world. We may see nothing good come of misery and disaster in this world,

but this world is not all of reality. There is an ‘until’ - there is a place beyond the realm of what our senses can apprehend, and it is more real and more lasting than what we experience in this mortal body. God is using the present, even the miserable present, to conform us to the image of his Son. If we define the good as only what we can see in this life, then we have missed the whole point of this text. Because, as Paul said earlier in the same chapter, “*For I consider that our present sufferings cannot even be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us*” (Romans 8:18, NET). We Christians sometimes tend to pervert texts such as this one. If our lives are comfortable, if we have wealth, good health, that is fine and well. But that is not the good that Paul had in mind, and it is not the goal of the Christian life.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why does a merciful and gracious God allow so much pain and suffering in this life?
2. How would you have turned out if the Lord had not chastised you? Think about your children or children you know. Imagine how they would grow up without someone to discipline them.
3. Why is it hard for Christians to adjust to suffering? Have you been told that once you give your life to Christ, everything will be all right? How have we been fooled into believing that children of God are exempt from suffering?

**Reflections:**

The Christian must always remember that the Lord allows suffering as a means of refining human character. The wounds of life are “working together” to educate us and to bring us closer to God. The day will come eventually when the redeemed saint will look back upon the “bruises” received in the “school of hard knocks,” and thank God our Creator for the discipline we received, realizing that without it, heaven might never have been gained.

**Prayer:**

*Lord, may we always trust that even in the midst of pain, suffering and disappointment, you are working on us to get us ready to be with you in your kingdom. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*

What God wants me to do:

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Special insights I have learned:

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