

**Romans**  
**All Things for Good**  
**Romans 8:28**  
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*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher*  
*Countryside Bible Church*

Our world seems desperately out of control. There are natural disasters, earthquakes, droughts, famine, floods, heat, but even more troublesome to all of us are the personal tragedies of life, things such as major illness, the loss of a job, or even tragically, the loss of someone we love. The question that often comes to the minds of the people of our world is why? Why does God allow such things? Even unbelievers find themselves trying to grapple with that issue.

In fact, many years ago now in his famous book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Kushner concluded that there could only be one explanation; only one explanation and that is that God is, in fact, good, but He's not all-powerful. So, he concluded, "Therefore, when bad things happen to good people, it's because those events are outside of God's control."

Clearly, that's contrary to the teaching of Scripture. (we'll see that together this morning), but even more fundamentally wrong is the fact that Kushner asked the wrong question. The right question is not, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The real question, according to Jesus our Lord Himself in Luke 13, and if you haven't read it or thought of it recently, read at some point, Luke 13:1 - 9; the real question is this, "Why do so many amazingly good things happen to bad people, all of us?" That's the real question.

But even if we understand that, and I trust that we do, if we're honest with ourselves even as believers, there have been times in our life's darkest moments when we've all been tempted to question God's providence. It often does feel, doesn't it, like everything is out of control? In fact, most people in our world would attribute the cause behind life's events and circumstances either to some inescapable cosmic force with no ultimate meaning or purpose or to blind chance, randomness. But the circumstances of our lives are not the product of cruel, capricious fate or of randomness.

The Scriptures teach us that there is a God in heaven, who on our darkest day, remains on His throne, and He rules over the world He has made. Theologians refer to God's absolute rule as His sovereignty. God is in control! But what is that sovereign like? Well I love the way the Psalmist often answers it; and in fact, I've been meditating my way for the last two weeks

through Psalm 100 and studying and thinking about it, and I'm just struck with how sometimes the Psalmist just presents a very simple theology that even a child can understand.

In that Psalm, he simply says this, "God is God and God is good. God is God and God is good." You see, our great God is, in fact, in control; that's the very definition of God, and He is good, and that's the message of one of the most famous verses in Romans and in all the New Testament, and it's found in the paragraph that we come to this morning in our study through this magnificent letter. You see in the most difficult moments of life, this verse has comforted Christians for 2,000 years because it underscores both. In contradiction to Rabbi Kushner, it underscores both God's sovereignty and power over every event in life, and yet at the same time, His incredible, relentless, overwhelming goodness.

Now, just to remind you of the context of this verse, we've been discovering in Romans 8 that Paul has set out to prove the absolute security of every true Christian, and every paragraph in this chapter drives that theme home. So far, we've discovered five reasons that we are secure in Christ: God has redeemed us from all condemnation; God has changed and empowered us by His Spirit; God has adopted us as His children; and God has destined us for glory. And then the last paragraph we were studying together, verses 26 and 27, God has given us His Spirit as an intercessor.

Now today, we begin to learn a sixth great reason that you and I are secure in Jesus Christ and it's this: God has called us according to His eternal plan; God has called us according to His eternal plan. This is verses 28 - 30 of this eighth chapter of the book of Romans. Now these three verses contain what is perhaps the deepest, richest theology in the entire letter to the Romans. Let's read it together, Romans 8:28 - 30:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren, and these whom He predestined, He also called, and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Now, you can see obviously that verse 28 is part of a larger paragraph, the paragraph we just read together; and Lord willing, next week, we're going to consider the relationship of verse 28 to its larger context, to its paragraph. But today, I want us just to consider its own profound

message. Verse 28, notice that in this case, Paul actually states his theme outright, for His own children, “God causes all things to work together for good.”

Now, you’ve heard that hundreds of times, perhaps thousands of times. But I want you to go on a journey with me through this passage this morning, through this verse, and I want you to imagine, for a moment, you’ve never heard these truths. I want you to think about what’s really here with me, together. It’s an incredible promise; and for 2,000 years, believers have found great comfort here. In fact, this passage, this verse, has even been described as a pillow for the Christian’s weary head. Let’s look at it together.

He begins very simply with verse 28. He says, “And we know ...” and we know. Again, Paul uses that expression for a truth that is generally recognized by all Christians to be true. We simply know this, what truth is it that we all know or should know? “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good.” Now, if you have a different translation of the Bible than the one I’m using, you may have a slightly different translation. Let me explain why there are different renderings of this promise.

First of all, there are some Greek manuscripts, as we look back on the historical data, that have the reading that’s here in our NAS, “God causes all things to work together for good.” But there are other manuscripts that read, “All things work together for good.” That’s the translation in the Old King James; many of you grew up learning the wording of that. It’s in the new ESV or the newer ESV as well. “All things work together for good.” But if in fact that is the right reading, don’t misunderstand. It still doesn’t mean what many people think it means. It’s simply not honest or true that somehow things just work out by themselves; that’s not what Paul is saying. Clearly here in Romans 8, God is at work.

As Douglas Moo writes, “It is the sovereign guidance of God that is presumed as the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of life.” Or, as Cranfield puts it, “The faith expressed here, (I love this.) the faith expressed here is not in things, but in God.” So, understand that even if this reading is correct, “all things work together for good,” it doesn’t mean they just kind of work out. That’s not what he’s saying.

A third group of manuscripts read, “He works all things together for good.” Who does “He” refer to in that context? Well, look down in verse 29, right in the very same context as he talks about “He”, he says this, that “He ... predestined [us] to become conformed to the image of (Whom?) His Son.” So, who is “He” then? It has to be God the Father, right? So, if in fact, it’s

He, it's still referring to God the Father. So, I do all that just to make this point; in the end, all three readings mean exactly the same thing, "God causes all things to work together for good." That's the point, whichever rendering you may happen to have in your text.

Now, let's examine then the remarkable claims that are made in this brief but amazing promise. Let's look at the remarkable claims together; there are a number of them. These are the truths, the claims that lie just beneath the surface of this magnificent verse.

Claim number one: God is completely sovereign; God is completely sovereign. Again, look at verse 28; look at the promise, "God causes all things to work together for good."

Now think about that for a moment just theologically and logically. The only way that's possible is if He controls all things. That means what we're really talking here, and there is universal agreement on this, is divine sovereignty. What is sovereignty? When we say God is sovereign, what do we mean? Well sovereign is something that God is, okay? Sovereignty is, here's one definition, "God's absolute rule and authority over all things." God, by the very nature of who He is, by being God, has absolute rule of everything as Joshua said just a few minutes ago, "There's not a stray molecule in God's universe." That came from the pen of our late brother R. C. Sproul. "There isn't a stray molecule in the universe." God is sovereign over all things; He rules over all things. Is that biblically true? Yes, absolutely! Take Psalm 103:19, I love this; I know Psalm 103 is a favorite for many of you; verse 19 says this, "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all." He's established His throne; He is completely sovereign.

Turn back to Daniel; Daniel's prophecy, and look at chapter 4. I love the fact that this comes from the mouth of a man who was the greatest pagan king of the ancient world, Nebuchadnezzar, a man I personally believe came to genuine faith in the true God. I think we'll meet this man in heaven. And he writes a chapter in our Bible, the fourth chapter, he begins by addressing us, you know, "I Nebuchadnezzar, [you know] write this to all peoples of every land," and so forth. But

listen to the conclusion he came to through his own story and through the events God brought to bear in his life. Look at Daniel 4:34:

“But at the end of that period, [The seven years.] I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High (El Elyon, the highest One.) and praised and honored Him who lives forever;

For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, [So, His rule is forever.]  
...His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. [Okay, so it's an eternal kingdom, but how far does this rule go? Verse 35] All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing. But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth;  
[Folks, what's left? He does His will in heaven and on earth. In other words, the entire universe.] And no one [How about a person somewhere, some great being who can challenge the sovereignty of God!] ... no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’”

You can't even question God much less change what He's doing. This is God, completely sovereign, and that lies behind the promise in Romans 8:28, because only a sovereign God can do what this verse promises.

A second claim that's made back in Romans 8:28 is this: God has a comprehensive, eternal plan; God has a comprehensive, eternal plan. Notice how Paul puts it, “God causes,” and then he says, “to work together.” He's talking about all things and he says, “He causes them to work together.” What does that imply? God has a purpose, a goal, an end in mind. In fact, the “causes to work together” translates one Greek word, and it means exactly what it's translated here as, but it teaches us two things about God. It teaches us that God is not passive; He's not uninvolved in our world like the deists would teach. He's intimately involved in the details of this planet and of our lives, and He has this eternal plan that He is working out. This is what theologians call “The eternal decree of God.” In other words, in eternity past, God made a decree about all things.

Here's how it is stated in both the Westminster Confession and in the Baptist Confession; they both have the same theology. Here's what it says, “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise

and holy counsel of His own will, freely [In other words, He wasn't influenced by anything; He did what He wanted.] and unchangeably ordains whatsoever comes to pass.”

Again, is that what Scripture teaches? Well, let me show you several passages. Go back to Psalm 33; Psalm 33, and look at verse 10; Psalm 33:10. Verse 9 talks about His creative ability: He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. And then verse 10 and following talks about His providence and His sovereign control of all things. Verse 10 says, “The LORD nullifies the counsel of the nations.” Listen, if all of the nations of our world could come together and agree on anything, which isn't likely to happen soon, but if that were even a possibility, God is unaffected by their plans. He “nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples.” Why? Because He has a plan, verse 11, “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, [and] The plans of His heart from generation to generation.” This is our God! He has an eternal, comprehensive plan.

Turn to the book of Ephesians; I love the way Paul unfolds this truth here in the book of Ephesians. I wish I had time to walk you through in more detail, but let me just show you a couple of references that make this same point. Verse 9 of chapter 1; Ephesians 1:9, God has “... made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in ... [Christ.]” And then he goes on to talk about, “summing all things up in Christ,” so this is where things are moving. God has this plan, and notice everything fits into this plan, verse 11, “we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined [Now watch this.] according to His purpose [His plan, and notice how he's described.] who works all things after the counsel of His will.” He has this plan, this comprehensive, eternal plan, and He works all things in keeping with that plan.

Go over to chapter 3 of Ephesians, verse 11. He's talking about how God has now created the church and put His glory on display, His wisdom on display through the church, verse 10. Verse 11, “This was in accordance with the eternal purpose.” Now if you have a Bible, New American Standard that has a footnote version, you'll notice that that's footnoted because, literally, the Greek text says, “This was in accordance with the purpose of the ages.” You see, God had a purpose of the ages that He's working out, and that, at its heart, was in Christ Jesus our Lord. So, understand then, that God has this comprehensive, eternal plan.

Now, let's go back to Romans 8:28 and find yet another truth here. Another claim that this promise makes is that: God has an individual plan, not just this sweeping eternal plan, comprehensive plan, but an individual plan. That is a plan for individuals, for you, for me!

Maybe you acknowledge that God is sovereign; maybe you acknowledge that He has the sovereign eternal plan of redemption, but frankly, you begin to wonder at times about your own life. Well, Paul says it very clearly here, look at verse 28, “we know that God causes all things to work together for good [He’s not talking about that sweeping, comprehensive, eternal plan because He says,] to those [Now He’s talking about people, about individuals.] to those who love God, [and] to those who are called according to *His* purpose.” You see, God not only has this comprehensive plan for all things in the universe, He has a sovereign plan for all who are His.

Now don’t misunderstand. There are several ways you can get off track here pretty quickly. Let me make sure you don’t. Paul is not promising that God will tell you what that sovereign plan is ahead of time. In other words, forget your fleeces, alright? Remember, God got on to Gideon for a fleece. God’s not going to tell you what His sovereign plan is beforehand. He expects you to seek counsel, to pray for direction, and to make as wise a decision as you can in the situation; that’s what He expects of you. But He has a sovereign purpose and plan for your life.

Secondly, don’t misunderstand, Paul is not promising that you will ever know how God is going to use all things for good; that’s not what he’s promising. Did Job ever really get it in this life, what was going on in his story? No, he never knew. God never told him. He told us, but He never told Job. He may never tell you how He’s accomplishing His purpose in your life, what He’s doing.

And thirdly, don’t misunderstand; Paul is not here, and this is the real point I want you to see; He’s not blaming God for all the evil things, all the sins that are committed against you. You see, God is sovereign over all things, and He directs them for His own purposes, but Paul does not say, notice, look at verse 28, he does not say “God causes all things.” Instead, he says that God causes all things to work together for good. Of course, God is sovereign over all things. He directs even the evil things that come into our lives to ends unforeseen by the sinner who committed them against us. But He doesn’t cause them. Why is that distinction important? Because if God causes all things, that means He actually makes people sin, and God Himself would personally be the cause of things like murder and violence and lust and anger and rape, and God takes zero responsibility for the evil that’s done in this world.

In fact, let me tell you how He says it. This is Ezekiel 18:20. “The person who sins will die ... the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.” God says, “It’s your responsibility” and the person who sins against you, “it’s their responsibility.” James 1:13 says, “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, [And here it is.]

... He Himself does not tempt anyone.” Not only does He not cause sin, He doesn’t tempt anyone to sin.

You say, “Well how does all that work?” Well listen again to both the Westminster and Baptist Confessions; I love the way they say it; this is what the Scriptures teach. This is called “concurrency”. This is the theological term. It means, the people on this planet are really acting, really making their own decisions; they’re doing exactly what they want. But at the same time, God is acting to supervise and direct that to His own ends and purposes without having any cause of their sin. Here’s again how the confessions put it, “God, from all eternity, did freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet, so as thereby, neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures.”

In other words, you’re not a robot; people around you not robots, doing only what God has forced them to do; everybody’s making real decisions about what they want. “Nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” In other words, God is not the immediate cause of everything. He made a hydrological cycle; He made gravity to work the way gravity works; He uses second causes. But in the end, man works, man decides, man sins, and God directs and orders man’s choices to the ends that He Himself ultimately wants to accomplish. That’s what the Scriptures teach.

Specifically, Paul, in this verse, pictures God as sort of carefully weaving the events and the details of our lives together so that, in the end, it’s what He wants. You’ve all heard, I’m sure, the illustration of the tapestry weaver; and if you walk up on the backside of that tapestry and you see it from the backside, it looks like a mangled mess of knots; it doesn’t make any sense. But if the weaver takes you around to the front side, it all comes together. We will never, I don’t think in this life, we’re never going to see the front of the tapestry. All we see is the backside of the knots, and it looks like a helpless tangle, but the point that Paul is making is that God is weaving it together for our good.

There’s a fourth claim here in Romans 8:28, and it’s that: God works in and through all things. Verse 28 said, “God causes all things to work together for good.” Now, we get to another part of systematic theology here. This is what theologians call ‘providence,’ providence. Now, here’s the definition of providence, “God’s ordering all issues and events of everything after the



counsel of His own will to His own glory.” You got the “all”? If you remember that, you got the point. You know, God is ordering and directing everything after the counsel of His own will.

You see, providence, theologically, includes both God’s preserving of everything He created; He sustains it, moment by moment. “In Him we live and move and have our being,” right? The animals look to Him for food; we look to Him for food; we have help because God wills it to be so; we live because He chooses for us to live, and the moment He chooses, we die. He sustains everything He made. But, the other part of providence is that He governs everything that He created and sustains; He governs it to ensure that all the purposes for which He created them are accomplished. So, sovereign is what God is; providence is what He does because He is sovereign. He orders and directs all things.

Now, here’s a trick question. What is included in “all things”? Obviously, “all things”! This describes the sphere of God’s activity and God’s control. Again, there is not a stray molecule, or let me put it this way, there is not a single event or happening in your life that is excluded from this promise, not one! God’s great providential plan encompasses the physical world. I love what Jesus says in Matthew 10:29. Jesus said, “not one [sparrow,] [Now you just think about all the birds in your backyard.] not one [sparrow falls] to the ground apart from your Father.” Obviously, He controls the physical world, right? If not one sparrow falls out of His control.

The affairs of nations are in God’s providential plan. Read the book of Daniel. Daniel proves again and again in that magnificent book that God rules; God rules over human history; He is in control of world empires; He is there. Read Daniel 5. He’s there when one world Empire falls and another rises, and He’s causing it. Read it, and you see that He’s sovereign over nations, and He is sovereign over every individual ruler of every nation on this planet, be they good or bad.

He’s sovereign also over the lives of individuals. Psalm 139:16 says this, I love this, “in Your book,” the psalmist said, “were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, [Notice that, “The days.”] When as yet there was not one of them.”

God is sovereign over your life. But let’s be more specific. Okay, He’s sovereign over my life, but what does “all things” include? Let me just look at the context here and in a few cases beyond the context to fill that out for you. Here’s what “all things” mean. First of all, it includes life’s blessings and joys, all of life’s blessings and joys. In Acts 14:17, Paul is preaching to a bunch of pagans, and he says, God “... did not leave Himself without witness, [So God is giving a witness of Himself and here’s how He did it.] in that He did good and [He] gave you rains from

heaven and fruitful seasons, ... [and He satisfied] your hearts with food and gladness.” God accomplishes spiritual purposes in the lives even of unbelievers and certainly believers as well through life’s blessings and joys.

In 1 Timothy 6:17, Paul writes to us as believers, “... God ... richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.” God is in the blessings and joys of life, teaching us something spiritual about Himself; He’s working it for our good; He’s teaching us that He is good, that He is generous beyond our imagination, that He is lavish in His love.

There’s another thing that “all things” includes, not only life lessons and joys, but also life’s trials and griefs. In fact, here in the context of Romans 8, “all things” refers primarily to the sufferings of this present life. Go back up to verse 18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” And then he goes on through the rest of that paragraph to talk about this suffering that is connected with this current life. Guess what? “All things” includes that.

Go down to verse 35, and he gets even more specific. “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” And he says, “Okay, we’re going to have tribulation; nope, not going to separate us, or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril [Some danger, some nameless, faceless danger.] or the sword,” personal violence. We’re not exempt from those things; and yet notice, that’s part of the “all things” that God is weaving together for our good, not causing them, not justifying the sin of those who commit them against us, but He is so good that He can overcome the sinful heart of mankind that perpetrated those sins and bring His own goodness through it. So, as we wait for future glory, verses 26 and 27 tell us the Spirit helps by interceding for us; and here in our text, we learn another way that we’re helped. God, in His providence, works all things including the sufferings of this present time for our good.

There are so many passages that describe this. Just go back to chapter 5; I’ll show you one more. Of course, you know James 1, “Consider it all joy when you fall into various trials.” But **look at** Romans 5:3. He’s just said, verse 1, that “having been justified by faith,” we have these benefits that are ours, and here’s one of them. Verse 3, “... not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, [the troubles and pressures of this life because we know that that] ... tribulation brings about perseverance; ... perseverance, proven character; [By the way, not proven character to God; God already knows we’re His, right? But it shows us that we’re His. When we go

through trouble and we stay faithful to Him, it proves to us that we're the real deal.] and proven character, [produces] hope....” Yes, God is using the troubles of this life for our spiritual good.

There's a third thing that we can say “all things” includes and this is surprising to some: the sins of others, the sins of others against us. Again, don't misunderstand, God doesn't cause them; He doesn't justify them, and He will judge those who don't repent. But He includes that in “all things,” the sins of others. Look at verse 35, I showed you just a moment ago; it includes persecution. That's a sin against believers. “Sword” likely also is a sin. You look back in Genesis 50:20. You remember Joseph, talking to his brothers who had sold him into slavery, said this, “As for you, you meant evil against me.” That's absolutely, when people hurt us, when people sin against us, they mean evil against us. “But God meant it for good,” so at the same time, again you get concurrence, right? Man's acting; he means it for evil. At the very same time God is directing that, God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result to preserve many people alive.

And of course, the ultimate demonstration of that is the cross. In Acts 2:23, Peter, in his sermon at Pentecost, said that the rulers of this nation and the Gentiles and everybody was gathered against Christ to do what God had predetermined would be done. Were they doing exactly what they wanted to Christ? You bet they were! But was God superintending that to ends they could never have foreseen? Yes, absolutely!

Fourthly: “all things” includes our sins, our own sins. You say, “Why do you say that?” Well, think about this in the context. Clearly “all things” in verse 28 includes the groanings of verse 23, while we're here in this life “we ... groan within ourselves,” and the groanings of verse 23, as I showed you when we taught that text, include the groaning over our sin back in 7:24, “Wretched man that I am! Who will ... me [deliver me] from the body of this death?” So, even our own sin is included in “all things”. Paul's point is that God is so wise and so good and so powerful that He uses everything we encounter in this life to help us spiritually; and as one author put it, “to bring us safely and certainly to eternal glory.”

There's a fifth great claim in this verse and paragraph, and it's that: God has two great ends; God has two great ends. First of all: the glory of His own name. Look at verse 29, “For [Because, here's why we can be confident that all things work together for good. Because] those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son [Notice the little word “so that.” Here's God's purpose in this spiritual plan.] so that He would be [That is Christ.] would be the firstborn among many [brothers.]” In other words, God is at work in the

lives of believers for the glory of His Son; and ultimately, when His Son gets glory, He gets glory. John 14:13, “the Father [is] glorified in the Son.” So, God is at work for His own glory.

But God has another great end in this and that is: the good of His children, the good of His children. Notice verse 28, “God causes all things to work together for good.” Now, it is true that God often causes the circumstances in this life to work together for our temporal good. If I had time, I would take you back to Deuteronomy 8:15 and 16, where it talks about, God took them through the wilderness in order “to do good [to them] in the end.” He put them in the Promised Land; He put them in a better place than they could have imagined in this life. And God sometimes causes the circumstances of life to work together for our temporal good, but not always.

This isn't a promise for wealth and health and prosperity. This doesn't mean God has promised us continual happiness, protection from all trials and difficulties. If you doubt that, just look at the context. Just look on both sides of this verse. There's a lot of trouble in this chapter. Paul is not talking primarily here about our temporal blessings. In context, he is primarily referring to our spiritual good. How do I know that? Well, look down in verse 29. What's God aiming toward? What's the ultimate good God is pointing us toward? Likeness to His Son! God has a great spiritual plan He's working out; a plan to rescue sinners, and eventually, to make them like His Son, to place them in His presence forever. That's God's goal in everything. It's His goal in making the world. It's His goal in creating you. It's His goal in everything that happens in your life, and He will use all the things in your life, be they good or be they evil, toward that great purpose.

Now look again at what he says and doesn't say because this is where a lot of Christians get misled. He doesn't say, “All things are good.” You know, for a while there was this sort of popular saying, “Whatever came into my life, it's good.” Well maybe it is, but maybe it's not. Sin isn't good. The sin of others against you isn't good. Even the effects of the curse, in and of themselves, aren't good. So, he doesn't say all things are good.

Nor does he say, and we know this all too well, “that all things feel good.” He's not promising you that it's going to be great. No, instead he says, “God will cause all things to work together for good.” That is our spiritual eternal good. Turn over to 1 Peter; 1 Peter 5; I love this. Verse 10, you know, Peter is writing to believers who are beginning to suffer significant persecution in the first century, and he says this to them in verse 10, and I think the suffering here is more than

just persecution. It's all things that we face in this life; but primarily in context, he's talking about the suffering of persecution. He says,

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. [You say, "How can that happen? Nero is on the throne. Christians are being persecuted." Well look at the next verse,] To Him ... [That is to God, is the] ... dominion [the rule] forever and ever." He's still on His throne!

So, here are the remarkable claims in this promise. God is completely sovereign. God has a comprehensive, eternal plan. God has an individual plan for each person. God works in and through all things without exception, and God does it to two great ends.

Now, there's a sixth claim here, and it's a surprising one: God limits this promise. God restricts this promise. Notice what he says in verse 28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who [watch this] to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

You see the promise of Romans 8:28 is not for everybody; it's not even for everybody who's here this morning. It's a promise that's limited in its scope. God only does this for certain people. He only does it for believers.

Now, Paul identifies believers, the only recipients of this promise, in two ways here at the end of verse 28. First of all, "to those who love God," to those who love God. Now that's an interesting way to say it because, you know, most people in our world, I think if you were to survey the world, if they were truly honest with themselves, they would say, "Well, no, I wouldn't say that it's true that I love God, but I don't hate Him either." God is very quick to disagree with that statement, because God often divides mankind into two groups, those who love Him and those who hate Him. If you doubt that you can look it up. Here are a couple of references, Exodus 20:5 and 6; Deuteronomy 7:9 and 10. I'm not going to turn you there, but that's what He says. He says, "There are those who love me and there are those who hate me." There's no sort of neutral category. That may be where you put yourself. God doesn't put you there. We all belong to one of those categories.

Now, it's important to understand then that all true believers always love God. Let me give you a couple of references. First Corinthians 2:9 says, "... THAT GOD HAS PREPARED [heaven] FOR

THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” So, true believers are described as those who love God. First Corinthians 8:3, “if anyone loves God, he is known by [God].” Or, here’s James 2:5. There, James tells us that “God ... [has promised the kingdom] to those who love Him.” So, in our text, Paul says, explicitly says, that “God causes all things to work together for good ... [only] to those who love God.”

If you’re here this morning, and you don’t love God, if you honestly, in your own heart, have to say, “I don’t love God,” then first of all, you need to understand this; whether you feel like it’s true or not, God says you hate Him because you’ve not humbled yourself and sought Him, the One who has given you everything, the One who has provided for your salvation in His Son, you hate Him. And it also means that this promise is not for you. I plead with you this morning, God is gracious; He receives everyone who repents and turns to Him. He says, “Turn to me all the ends of the earth and be saved, for I am alone the only Savior.” Come to Him this morning through His Son, Jesus Christ.

He adds a second description here of those who enjoy this promise. Not only those who love God, but he adds, “to those who are called.” Now what is he talking about, “called?” Well, he explains it down in verse 30. He says, those “whom [God] predestined, [And we’re going to talk about His words next week.] those whom [God] predestined, He also called.” So, this is what He is talking about. He called, and those “whom He called, He ... justified; [He declared right with Him.]” So, understand then, that that’s the context of this word “called.” When you look at that expression, “those who love Him,” that looks at our relationship to God from the human side. But when you look at “those who are called,” that looks at our relationship to God from the divine side.

Now, on one occasion in His ministry, Jesus used the word “called” of the general invitation to believe the gospel. Whenever you hear the gospel, there is a call, a general invitation in that invitation of the gospel. Here’s how Jesus put it, Matthew 22:14, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” He’s talking about a general call that goes out with the gospel, “Come to Christ, repent ... believe.” But in Paul’s epistle, this word “called” always, without exception, identifies those God has powerfully, irresistibly summoned into a relationship with Himself. Let me show you.

Go back to Romans 1:6; he’s talking about the Roman believers, and he says, “you ... are the called of Jesus Christ.” If you’re a Christian, you have been called to believe in Jesus Christ. Go over to chapter 9; Romans 9:11, “though the twins were not yet born [not done anything good or

bad] ... so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but [Watch this.] because of Him who calls." So, we're talking about that effectual call of God. Go down to verse 23 of chapter 9:

[God made] ... known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, *even us*, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from ... [the] Gentiles. [All believers are "the called."]

Go over to 1 Corinthians 1; 1 Corinthians 1:23:

We preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block ... to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

So, He can't just be talking about a general invitation, right? Because he says, "to [the ones] who are called ... Christ [has become] the power ... and ... wisdom of God." And then he says in verse 26, "consider your calling," consider who God picked, who God called to Himself, not many wise, not many of the intelligentsia of the world, not many of the highbrows, not many of the elite, the powerful, not many, some, but not many. So that God could get the glory. So, calling, then, has this connotation.

Go over to 2 Thessalonians; 2 Thessalonians 2:14. Paul says, "It was for this [God] called you [Now here it's beautifully put.] it was for this [God] called you through our gospel, [in order] that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's the call.

You say, "How does that work?" Well, here's how it works. You heard the gospel many times before you truly came to faith in Christ, likely. I certainly did. And every time you heard the gospel, that was a general call, "Come, come to Christ." There's an invitation to come to Christ. But then there was a day when God was at work through His Spirit, and you heard the gospel, but you didn't just hear it like you had always heard it before. Why? Because God was in that message of the gospel, calling you powerfully, effectively, irresistibly to Himself, and He gave you the wonderful gifts of faith and repentance to respond to that gospel. That's the call. Go over to 2 Timothy; 2 Timothy 1:9, God "... saved us and called us with a holy calling, not

according to our works, but [He called us. Notice this.] according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.” That’s your calling.

Now go back to Romans 8:28 and notice one last thing. Paul adds in verse 28, “those who are called according to His purpose.” You see, God’s effectual call happens on the basis of and in agreement with God’s purpose. By the way, the word “purpose” literally means, “to set forth”, it means “that which is planned in advance”. God called you according to His predetermined plan.

Do you know what’s amazing about this? Put the two together; we love God; we were the called according to His purpose. Here’s the point; Cranfield writes, “Behind the love which those who are righteous by faith have for God and far transcending it in significance is God’s prior choice of them; their love for Him is a sign and token of His prior love for them.” As John puts it in 1 John 4:19, “We love ... [God] because He first loved us.”

Charles Hodge, the great Roman’s commentator says, “The fact that some men love God is to be attributed to His sovereign grace and not to themselves. And if men are called according to the eternal purpose of God, then their salvation is secure.” Think about this, because of His eternal purpose, He chose to set His love on you, Christian, and He, in time, called you to Himself.

So, what Paul is describing here is not some, as one author puts it, some general superficial optimism that everything sort of tends to everybody’s good. Instead, it’s for “those who love God ... [and] who are called according to His purpose.” I love this. Here’s how it all fits together. If, in His eternal purpose, God set His love on you, and He called you to Himself through the gospel, do you really believe that He will not cause “all things to work together for [your] good”? That’s His point.

Now, very quickly, how should we use this text? Let me just say, unfortunately, this text is sometimes shared tritely with those who are hurting. Let me encourage you to be very careful. Don’t walk up to somebody who just experienced the death of a loved one and say, “Well, all things work together for good.” That’s most unhelpful! The New Testament commands us to “weep with those who weep.” But the trite use aside, there is a real and deep comfort in this profound verse. Your life is not a random collection of messy events. You may not be able to



understand what God is doing; you may not be able to trace His hand, but you can trust His heart. He is out to do you good.

I don't know all that you're dealing with right now. I suspect many of you are dealing with much that others just don't know. But I do know this; whatever it is you're facing, right now, it is an "all thing"; it's an "all thing". Preach the truth of this to yourself. "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."

Let's pray together.

Oh, God, we bow our hearts beneath Your throne. Help us, oh, Lord, to trust You more. Thank you that You are sovereign and that You are good. May those twin truths about Yourself sustain us through these brief days until we're ushered into the sunlight of Your eternal presence.

We pray in Jesus's name, Amen.