

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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The Goodness of God

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Many years ago, my wife and I were on our summer holiday. At church on Sunday morning, we met a friend whom we had known as a student. He was a bachelor, and we took him to lunch. As we talked, he confided in us that he had recently been diagnosed with a serious cancer. Before we parted, he told us that he had already made some tentative plans for the future. "If God is good," he began, "I may be able to retire early, and live not far from here." Unfortunately, he had to hurry away. All I had time to say to him as he left was, "Do remember that Romans 8:28 will always be true." Afterward, the phrase which kept repeating in my mind was, "If God is good." Four words, of which the first is the most significant.

I hope our friend did read Romans 8:28 before that day was done. We lost contact, but I do want to tell you what he might have discovered from that verse. It reads, "**We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**"

Let me first of all point out two things Paul is not saying. First, **he is not saying that life is guaranteed to be trouble free for the Christian.** Indeed, in verse 17 of this very chapter, he tells us that "sharing in Christ's sufferings" is a condition of "sharing in his glory." Second, **Paul does not**

claim to know or understand all of God's mysterious providences. "We know" in verse 28 sits comfortably in the same chapter with the disclaimer in verse 26: "We do not know what to pray for as we ought." But we do know God, and we know that whatever He decrees or permits will be for our ultimate good and for His glory.

Now we can follow Paul as he elaborates the way God is at work in our lives.

First, ***God is personally at work for us.*** You must have heard the secular version of this conviction, which has absolutely nothing to do with God, the Bible, or Christianity. It is usually expressed like this: "Don't worry; everything will work out alright, you'll see." That is human optimism, founded on nothing but wishful thinking. Paul's conviction, on the other hand, is founded on the character of God as a loving Father who cares for us and on His personal government over every detail of our lives (see verse 32).

Second, ***God is ceaselessly at work for us.*** We know this from the tense of the verb Paul uses. It is the present tense, which implies an unceasing action. That means God is working out His purposes for us whether we are spiritually dry or spiritually refreshed. He never gives up. As A.W. Tozer put it, "Our heavenly Father... does not keep office hours, nor set aside a time when he will see no one. God never changes His moods, or cools off in His affections, or loses enthusiasm."

Third, ***God is universally at work for us and in us.*** Notice that Paul says "in all things." That means that nothing is excluded from the personal government of God over what happens to us. It includes the bitterest as well as the sweetest of experiences. It includes the sinful

acts of others, as Joseph states in Genesis 50:20: "You intended it for evil to me, but God meant it for good." John Calvin said, tellingly, "Whatever poison Satan produces, God turns it into medicine for His elect." Spurgeon said, "Omnipotence has servants everywhere."

Now the final question is, **what type of person is able to say that God is working in all things for my good?**

Well, Paul is anything but vague about that. Indeed, he is quite specific. His first description is

God never changes His moods or loses enthusiasm.

“those who love God.” But, of course, that love, in Scripture, is the love of commitment. I have often spoken with young people who told me they had declared their love for someone, only to receive the answer, “Oh now, I don’t want to get too serious!” There are many who say that to God. Could you be one of them?

***God is good
and nothing
but good.***

The second description in Romans 8:28 is **“those who are called by God.”** Now, whenever someone hears the gospel message, they hear the external call of God summoning them to personal faith in Jesus Christ. But that call, when it is truly heard inwardly by those to whom God has given spiritual ears to hear it, actually draws the sinner to Christ: “I heard the voice of Jesus say ‘Come unto me and rest’: I came to Jesus, as I was.” The question is, have you heard the call of God in the gospel, and have you found it drawing you to Christ?

So, “all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called by God.” They then discover that they are caught up into the perfect, sovereign purposes of God, which involve His “good and acceptable and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

I well recollect Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones preaching in Glasgow from Psalm 73. He told us that he had discovered that the first line of Psalm 73 could be better translated “God is good and nothing but good to Israel (His people).” I have been a Christian now for almost seventy years, and I must tell you that that is my personal testimony.

Joseph Hart in the eighteenth century expressed it perfectly in his hymn:

***How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,
His love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end.***



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