

It Is Written

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All Things For Good, But Who's Good?

By Roger Shouse

One of the most well-known passages in the New Testament is found in Romans 8:28. "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."

The magical verse to use for comfort! The spiritual pill that solves all problems! Of course I'm NOT being serious, but it sure seems that this verse is used in this way many times.

I have stood alongside grieving parents whose son lies in a casket and have overheard folks saying this verse to them. Are you serious? Are we to think that this moment is good or that good can come from a teenage son who died without knowing the Lord?

This magical verse has even been used to offer comfort to a woman with little children whose husband has left her for someone else.

It seems that folks use this verse for all situations as a "happily ever after" truth. No matter how bad the circumstances, you'll see good again because of Romans 8. There are two major thoughts here that some seem to forget.

First, this verse isn't a one-size-fits-all passage. Paul is directing this to "those who love God" and "have been called." That's not everyone, although I wish it was. This doesn't fit the guy down the street whose house burned down, who never darkens a church building, has a foul mouth, and believes not in God but in aliens. Giving this verse to such a person doesn't help, nor is it according to the will of God. This is addressed to those walking with the Lord.

Secondly, the good of this passage is not necessarily my personal good, but God's good. God causes things to work together for good...later, according to His purpose. It might be good that I suffer, if that brings others to Christ. God's good is the kingdom, righteousness, hope, truth, and Heaven. That's what God is after. If it takes dark valleys to accomplish that, so be it. But using this verse to assure that fortunes will be restored, love will be found, or jobs will be secured is not the right direction. The good is not our good that Paul is referring to but God's good.

Acts 13:22 tells us that David served God's purpose. He was raised up to do God's will. David's life included giants, wars, rebellion, turmoil, and periods of peace. I imagine David wouldn't call all those things good, nor did all those circumstances work out for David's good. But it did work out for God's good and for his purpose. God moves things, God moves people, to fulfill His purpose. THY will be done is absolute. That's what Paul is addressing in Romans 8.

Within my life, things happen. God does things. As I walk with the Lord, He will use me and you as His instruments to accomplish His will. The dying Christ on the cross illustrates this. Personally, for Jesus, dying wasn't a good thing. It came after intense suffering and pain. But for the cause of Christ, for "the good," it had to be done. It was worth it.

The prodigal going to the pig pen was a good thing to get him to wake up and come home. The goal of God is that we walk with Him. He will do things to fulfill that purpose. It is marvelous to know that God moves things to help us complete His purpose. He is active in our lives and is doing things that we do not understand.

Later in this very Roman chapter Paul would say, "tribulation, distress, persecution, famine or nakedness or peril or sword" will not separate us for the love of God. That list isn't a "nice" list. I

wouldn't want to choose any of those. They all involve suffering, shame, and pain. Will those all turn into "good" things? Not as some use our passage, but they can lead to the fulfilling and accomplishing of God's will.

It is hard for us to realize that life is not about us. We are not the center of the universe. God's way is greater than us, including our personal joy and happiness. If all we seek is to be happy, we live like the world, jumping from relationship to relationship, chasing fads, pretty on the outside, and hollow on the inside. God has a plan for each one of us. Smiles on our faces aren't it. Getting to live selfish lives where we do anything we want, isn't it. It's righteousness, holiness, and following Him. If God must break us to get us there, that is good. If we have to be slapped into reality, that is good. If we lose all, but save our souls, that's good.

This is a powerful verse, if used correctly. It is dangerous if misused. We must be able to pray, "Thy will be done..." and live accordingly.

How to Answer When You Don't Know the Answer

By Greg Gwin

No one likes to be 'put on the spot.' We dread the possibility of being asked questions that we can't answer. This is especially true when the questions are about religion.

Without a doubt, one of the biggest hindrances to spreading the gospel is this fear of being asked questions. Many Christians feel uneasy about their level of Bible knowledge. Thus, to avoid potentially embarrassing situations, they do their best to sidestep any discussion that might turn to religious themes. This is sad, because it keeps us from many 'open doors' for personal evangelism.

Since no one has ALL of the answers, it is important for us to know what to do when questions arise that 'stump' us. Here are some suggestions:

1) Realize -- and be ready to explain -- that there are simply some pieces of information that we do not have because God has not supplied them. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God" (Deut. 29:29). But, we have "all truth" (John 16:12, 13), and "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). So, every piece of essential information has been supplied.

2) When you do not know the answer, it is best to simply admit it. This is much better than trying to 'bluff' your way through. Humbly say, "I don't know." But do not fail to add: "I'll find out and get back to you on that." Following this procedure will actually provide additional opportunities to teach. It keeps the door open to further discussions.

3) Study, study, study! You will feel less intimidated and more willing to engage in biblical discussions if you build your confidence level by increasing your Bible knowledge. Pay special attention to areas where you presently feel 'weak' in knowledge and understanding. Be well prepared to deal with popular denominational errors. Be ready to explain 'issues' that divide brethren.

4) Never shy away from a chance to talk about God and His Word. The more you do this, the easier it will become. Every such conversation serves as an opportunity for you to 'sharpen your sword.'