

All Things For Good

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[0:00] You guys, grab a Bible. If you have one that you brought with you, we're in Romans chapter 8.

! If you're using one from the chairs that are scattered around you, open up to page 944. Page 944. And we are going to jump in at verse 28 and read down to verse 30.

So you can remain standing if you already are or stand if you're not. And we're going to dive in at verse 28. Paul says, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined, He also called.

And those whom He called, He also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified.

Father, we ask that the great promises and truths held out in this passage would ring true in our hearts.

[1:16] That we would be able this morning to examine our lives, examine our thoughts, and examine our hearts, so that our thinking and feeling and doing might be aligned with the great promises of Your Word.

We ask that in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. You know, I think that we are predisposed today to not trust and not believe when we see promises, when we hear promises. We're predisposed to assume that whoever's making the promise is not going to make good on their promise. So that we don't expect politicians to do what they're going to say they're going to do. We don't expect it at all today. It doesn't even enter into our minds that they might actually do the things that they say they're going to do on the campaign trail. We'll say things like, Well, you know, when they're talking to this group, they need to promise these things.

And when they're talking to that group, they're going to promise these things. But none of us actually expect them to do any of the things that they say that they're going to do. So we have a sort of cynicism when it comes to promises. Not just with politicians and public figures, but also within our own families, within our own lives.

[2:30] We just are not quite certain that people are going to come through on the things that they say. Because sometimes as parents, we overpromise. We promise our kids that we're going to do things or that we will provide things that we know that we're not ultimately going to be able to do.

And kids constantly are promising things to their parents. If you'll just let me do this, then I will wash the dishes every day for a month. And two days later, you're going, When does this month start? Does it start now? Does it start in two weeks? When is this going to happen? I mean, we hear promises and we immediately almost dismiss them because we assume oftentimes that they didn't really mean it or there's no way that that's actually going to happen.

And sometimes as we approach God's Word, that attitude towards promises begins to creep in. And there is sort of hidden somewhere in our heart, there is some shade of doubt that perhaps these things are not going to work out in exactly the way that we expect them to or the way that we would want them to.

Perhaps God's promises aren't going to be fulfilled. And when we see a promise as big as the promise of Romans 8, 28, we are certainly inclined to wonder whether or not something this good could actually happen.

[3:43] Look at the promise that Paul makes. He says that we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to His purpose, that's a big promise.

He includes all things, everything. They're going to work for good, he says. And there's a part of us sometimes that thinks, all things, everything, and is this really going to happen?

Because so many times in our lives we've had people promise us things, tell us they're going to do things, and they just simply do not come through. So many times we have made promises ourselves, and we have not followed through on our promises.

But if we think about the reasons why our promises fail to come to realization, or other people's promises don't come to light, we'll realize that the cause most of the time is either that that person was lying, or that they were simply unable to come through on their promise.

Sometimes we over-promise. Sometimes we say things that we just can't do. We cannot possibly do that. My kids have promised me that they're going to do things if I'll buy them this, or if I will let them do this, they'll promise me things.

[4:56] It's impossible. You cannot physically do that. You're not going to be able to come through on that promise. And we see that all the time. But with God, He's capable of performing everything that He says He's going to do.

He's capable of doing everything that He wants to do. So if you'll remember in Psalm 135, you don't have to turn there, but in Psalm 135 we read that, Whatever the Lord pleases He does, in heaven and on earth, in seas and all deeps.

In other words, God does whatever He wants to do. There are no limits to what God can do. This is the same God that Paul says in Ephesians 1.11, And works all things according to the counsel of His will.

His will is always accomplished. His sovereign plans and desires are always done. So that if He says He can do this, we know that He can do this. Which only leaves one other option if we doubt the promise.

That is that we sometimes are not quite sure whether or not the person making the promise is telling the truth. But again, this is God.

[5:59] He is truth. He cannot lie. It's contrary to His nature. So we read in the Old Testament, in the book of Numbers, way back in Numbers, we read through the prophet Balaam.

Balaam says that God is not a man that He should lie, or a son of man that He should change His mind. He has said, and will He not do it?

Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it? In other words, if God says He's going to do something, He doesn't lie like we do. We're fallen sinful creatures. But God's not a man.

He does not lie. He doesn't change His mind. He doesn't go back on His word. He always fulfills His promises. He's powerful enough. His character binds Him to do what He says He's going to do.

So when He makes a promise like this, a big, massive promise like this, we can be certain that He's going to fulfill the promise.

[6:57] But first we have to understand what the promise actually says. We have to know what the promise is, and we have to know to whom the promise is made. Because sometimes we will accuse God of not fulfilling His promises, and the reality is that He may not have promised the thing that you think He promised.

Or He may not have made that promise with reference to the person that you have in mind. God, you said you would work all things for good, but it doesn't look like that's happening over here for this person. To which God might reply, I didn't make the promise to them.

Or He might reply, I don't think you understand what I mean when I say good. I don't think you're understanding. So before we move forward beyond verse 28 very much in this chapter, I want us to just pause here and consider to whom this great promise is made, and I want us to consider what is God promising precisely.

What is this? What does He mean when He says all things will work together for good? So first let's consider this morning to whom the promise is made. Because this promise is not made indiscriminately to all people in the world.

That's not those to whom the promise is made. Notice Paul gives two qualifiers to describe those to whom this promise is made. At the beginning of verse 28, we know that for those who love God.

[8:13] So to those who love God, this promise is made. And then secondly, for those who are called according to His purpose. Now these are not two groups of people.

These are two ways of describing the one group of people to whom God has made this promise. Those who love God, those who are called according to His purpose.

Of course we might think, well, I don't know anybody who would say that they don't love God. I don't know, I mean, other than those who don't believe that God exists. I know very few people who would just come out and say, no, I don't love God at all.

Most people, if you say, do you love God, would probably say yes. Especially in the Bible Belt where it's just sort of driven into their minds that, do you love God? Well yeah, I guess I should love God. He loves me. Shouldn't I love Him?

And yet the Bible understands love for God to be different than what we often think of. In fact, Jesus goes so far as to say in John chapter 14, If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

[9:12] So if you love God, there should be some evidence in your life, there should be some fruit that flows out of that love to show that you actually do love Him. You cannot say over and over that you love God if your life shows something different.

If your life is a life lived in disobedience to God, then that's evidence that you don't, in fact, love God. Love for God always produces fruit, and that fruit looks like obedience to His commands. If you love me, Jesus says, you will keep my commandments. So we need to make sure that we don't make the mistake of thinking that love is mere sentimentality, or love is saying that you love something, affirming that you love someone.

Love always evidences itself in real, concrete action. Always. But then on the other side, we don't want to make the mistake of thinking that those outward actions actually are love.

You can have evidence for love and yet not have love, because obedience can be motivated by other factors. You could be motivated by fear of God to obey His commandments.

[10:26] You could be motivated by the other's expectations and your sense of duty and obey God's commandments because of a sense of duty. And those things that are normally the fruit of love could be produced in your life by something other than love.

So we don't need to confuse the fruit with love itself. The fruit must be present. You cannot say you love God and live contrary to His word in every area of your life.

And yet you cannot simply point to these outward realities and say, Aha, I must love God because I'm doing all these things. I go to church. I read my Bible. I pray. I'm kind to my neighbors.

I must love God. No, love is far more than the fruit that love itself produces. Love is actually a delighting in God Himself, not merely in doing the things that God wants you to do.

When you delight in someone, when you have genuine pleasure in someone or something, the fruit of that is that you go out and do things to please that person. But you could do all those things and have no real taste for the goodness of God.

[11:35] Imagine, if you will, a child born without any taste buds. You can't taste a thing. They've never tasted anything in their lives. They don't know what anything tastes like. They only eat food because their stomach tells them that they're hungry and they're supposed to eat.

And they have no taste. And yet as they go into a candy store with their siblings, they see their brothers and sisters tasting the chocolate and making faces and making noises.

And so they know that's what's expected. And so they take a bite of the chocolate and say, Mmm, this is so good. They run to the next bit of candy and they eat the candy and they act just the way that their siblings acted.

And the owner of the candy store might think, Boy, this child loves my candy. And yet all the while the child has no taste for it whatsoever. I think that that is true of many, many people who go to church week in and week out.

That outwardly all the things are present that you would expect to be there, but inwardly there is no taste for who God is. There is no savoring of who He is.

[12:38] And love is not merely the outward signs of love. Love is the taste for God. Love is the savoring of who God is. And so I don't want us to miss this. I don't want us to say on the one hand, Yeah, sure, I love God.

And yet there's no evidence of love in our lives. But then I don't want us to say on the other hand, I must love God because I'm doing all of these things. I don't want us to make either of those mistakes. Because this promise is made to those who actually, genuinely love God.

Whose hearts have been turned toward Him. Which brings us to the second qualification. Because we've already learned in Romans chapter 8 that our hearts are not naturally inclined toward God.

We do not have it in and of ourselves, the capacity to really and truly love God from our hearts. Not as fallen sinful people. Paul has already told us in this chapter that those who are in the flesh

cannot please God and they cannot obey His law truly from the heart.

So we know that that's true. We know that in order for us to qualify as those who love God, our hearts must be changed. Something must happen inside of us.

[13 : 52] And that's what Paul describes in his second qualification here. He says that God works all things for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

To those who are the called. Called according to His purpose. This is a word that I feel like we have to pause and meditate upon and think about.

Because so often we miss the theology that's present in these small words. We miss all the truth that lies behind these words.

We think of calling sometimes because at times the New Testament does use it. We sometimes think of calling as simply inviting someone to believe in the gospel. So that Jesus in fact uses the word calling in that way.

He says that many are called but few are chosen. Many are called but few are chosen. And so there clearly the call is the outward preaching of the gospel or the outward invitation of someone to come to Christ.

[14 : 55] And we can at times assume that that's what the word called means throughout the New Testament. And we find in Paul's letters though that that is not how Paul uses this terminology. That is not how Paul thinks of the calling that we have received.

He uses the word calling to describe something else entirely. Paul is not here speaking of the outward call of the gospel. He is speaking of the inward call of the Holy Spirit that works upon your heart to draw you to God himself.

I want you to hold your place in Romans and turn over to 1 Corinthians if you would for just a moment. Where Paul speaks of this calling. He uses the exact same language in 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

We began to see it first. Beginning in verse 22 we'll see it down in verse 24. Paul says in verse 22, For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom.

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling walk to Jews and folly to Gentiles. Now notice the preaching is what we think of sometimes as the outward calling. That's the outward invitation.

[15 : 57] Paul says we're preaching the same message to Jews to Gentiles. We're preaching the same thing to everyone. And then he distinguishes the call from the preaching. We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling walk to Jews and folly to Gentiles.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. So the call here in 1 Corinthians is something that transforms the outward preaching of the gospel from something you merely hear to the power of God to actually change you.

It becomes now wisdom. What once seemed to be foolish to you has suddenly become wisdom. Why? Because of the call of God. We see it in verse 26.

For consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you were wise according to worldly standards. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world. Even the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are. So that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

[17 : 05] He switches from the terminology of calling to chosen because those two terms are so closely related in meaning in Paul's writings. The calling of God is the sovereign work of God to actually change a person's heart so that they desire Christ.

The presence of love in our hearts for Christ. Genuine, real love is proof that God has called us. Because apart from the call, that love would not be there.

This call is inward and it is effectual. It never fails. It always accomplishes the work that God plans to do. So when God issues the sovereign call here that Paul speaks of in Romans 8, 28.

When God puts forth the call, all the called respond. Because the call is the changing of the heart. The call is being born again. The call is receiving a new heart as Ezekiel describes for us.

That's what Paul means when he talks about those who are called. Those who have been given new hearts. Those who have been born again. Those upon whom God has worked with sovereign power to change them so that they now desire Christ when they previously did not.

[18:20] We were unable to obey God's law. Now we are those in whom the law will be fulfilled. How does that happen? The call takes place. The effectual call of God for all those whom he has chosen to come to faith.

Have you ever wondered how the New Testament can speak of faith as a gift of God? How can God give us something that we ourselves do? Because he changes our hearts from a heart of unbelief to a heart of belief.

He changes us from those who are enemies of God to now be those who are seekers of God and friends of God. Whereas Paul can say in Romans 3 that there is no one who seeks after God.

He can also say now in Romans 8 that there are those who love God. How is that possible? It is possible because God calls all those whom he has chosen.

We will look more closely at this next week. But I want you to see how Paul fits calling in to the rest of God's work of salvation in the verses that follow. Verse 28.

[19:34] He says in verse 29. He says those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son.

In order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called. There it is. The calling flows from predestination.

And those whom he called he also justified. Which means that all the called are declared righteous by God. And Paul having already told us that we only become righteous on the basis of faith means that all those who are called believe.

They all express faith. Those who are predestined are called. Those who are called are justified. And then ultimately those who are justified are glorified. Theologians often call this the golden chain of salvation.

It is an unbreakable chain. All those whom he foreknows. Which we'll talk about next week. He predestines. All those he predestines calls. All those he calls he justifies.

[20:38] All those that he justifies he glorifies. So that the call of God here never ever fails to produce a believing heart that's now inclined to love God.

So for those who are called. Who now because of that call love God. Those are the one for whom this promise is made. What is the promise though?

It's fairly simple to see it. All things work together for good. There are some translation difficulties. You can see it in some of your different translations. Some say that God causes all things to work for good.

Some say that God works all things for good. But regardless of the translation the meaning is essentially the same. That God is at work in all of the circumstances of our lives. If we are among the cold.

He is at work in all of those things. To bring and work an ultimate end of good. In and through those things. So that no matter what befalls us.

[21:40] No matter what happens to us. Those things happening to us. If we are among those who belong to Christ. All the things that happen to us. Ultimately work for our good.

That's how it works. Now the question though. What is the good? Because sometimes we trivialize the good. Because we look at our lives and we as Americans.

Even though we go through painful things at times. Even though like everyone else in the world. We suffer great losses. We still live fairly sheltered lives. We still can have a tendency to think that.

Well the good that God is going to do is. Even though temporarily things are bad for me. Tomorrow or the next day. Or maybe next year. Things are going to get better. That's what we tend to think.

We tend to think.

Well if God is going to work everything for good. He's going to turn the ship around. It might happen today. It might happen next year. But eventually things are going to be good again. And I'm not going to grieve anymore. And I'm not going to be sad anymore.

[22:41] It's going to happen for me pretty soon I think. God's going to work all this for good. But that doesn't work. When the evil that befalls you. Is an evil that takes your head.

As the Apostle Paul himself would eventually face. That doesn't work when the evil that befalls you. Ends your life in the moment. Because tomorrow. Things aren't turning around for you.

You're done. That doesn't work when you live in an impoverished country. And you spend your entire life in poverty. And under persecution from those. Who murder your family members.

Who take everything that you have. And constantly for your entire life. Push you down. There's no moment in your life. When it suddenly turns a corner. And it feels better.

And yet this promise must be true. For believers who live in those situations. So what precisely is God promising to do here? What does he mean when he says.

[23 : 40] All things work for good. Well he doesn't leave us to guess. He doesn't leave us to try to figure it out on his own. He tells us in the very next verse. What the good is. I want you to see how verses 28 and 29 are connected.

In the English Standard Version. They're connected with the word for. In some of your translations it might say because. That's the word used here. All things work for good because.

So we're given explanation in verse 29. As to what God means. By all things working together in verse 28. Because those whom he foreknew.

He predestined to be conformed to the image of his son. So the good that God is working. In the lives of all those who are called and love him. Is the good of transforming us.

Conforming us to the image of his son. That's what he's doing. He's not promising. That if today you're suffering some financial difficulties. Tomorrow the money problems will get better.

[24 : 38] He's not promising that if today you're feeling ill. Tomorrow you may get better. Those things may happen. God is good. He blesses us beyond even the promises he gives us here.

And many times he does those things. But that's not what this promise is about. This promise is not saying that he'll improve your finances. Or your health. Or your family situations. In due time.

This promise is saying that. Whatever befalls you. Good or bad. It is all working. By the power of God. To conform you to the image of Jesus Christ.

That's what he's doing. He's doing something in us. Not just something around us. He's not just changing circumstances. He's changing us.

And it's a work that he will never fail to accomplish. In those whom he has called to himself. If you understand the goal of God's work.

[25 : 37] To make you like Jesus. I think that it changes the way that you begin to think about the goals that you have for your own life. Because all of us have various kinds of goals.

We have career goals. We have family goals. We have all sorts of goals in this life. You may set goals for yourself when you exercise. You may set weight loss goals for yourself. Or you may set goals for yourself to learn certain things.

We all have goals. And those are good things. And we should have goals. We should aim towards things in our lives. But we should have an ultimate goal that overrides all of those. And that ultimate goal ought to be that we are conformed to the image of Jesus.

Because when everything else fails to materialize. Maybe you can't pursue the fitness plan that you had laid out for yourself. Or maybe you can't do the things you want to do because you are struck with some sort of illness or injury.

And now you just... So many of the things that you thought you were going to do. Vacations you were going to take. Places you wanted to see. Now you just... You can't do those types of things. Or you might have had goals in your mind when you had children of what your children would be like.

[26 : 46] And it hasn't turned out like that as they've matured into adults. It just hasn't worked out the way that you had planned. Our plans fail. Our goals often are not met.

But when we aim at the things that God is aiming at in our lives. We cannot fail to accomplish our goals. This ought to transform how we think about all those things. It's okay if you don't accomplish all the things you wanted to accomplish in your career.

It's okay if you don't raise your kids to be exactly the way that you envisioned them to be. Those things are okay. It's okay if your life doesn't look anything like you thought it would be like at the age that you are now.

Those things are okay. So long as you're being conformed to the image of Christ. I'm pretty sure that God can conform us to the image of Christ whether we're rich or poor.

Whether we're highly educated or have very little education at all. Whether we have a lot of kids or no kids. I'm certain that God can do the work of conforming us to the image of his son.

[27 : 50] But it doesn't change just the expectations and goals that we set for ourselves. I think that if we understand what God is doing it should change the way that we think about other people as well.

Because if we're honest we have expectations of other people. Even if we pretend that we don't really care what everyone else does. Let everybody do what they want to do. In reality we have in our hearts we have expectations for people.

We certainly have expectations for our kids. We have things that we want them to accomplish. Things that we want them to do. We have sometimes our goals for our kids. Sometimes honestly just behave.

Just don't scream at the top of your lungs for the next hour that we're in this restaurant. It's a simple goal. That's all I really want.

Sometimes that's all we aim at. We just aim at behavior. Do this and don't do that. And I'll feel good about myself as a parent for today. But that's not how our Heavenly Father parents us.

[28:51] That's not how He sets His goals. No. He's aiming at something greater than that. As a Father He is aiming to conform us to the image of His only begotten Son. Why does He say?

So that Christ might be the firstborn among many brothers. This is indeed God's work as our Heavenly Father. He's trying to make us like the perfect Son.

He's trying to conform us so that we can be better sons and daughters. Better children of our Father. So that as parents we ought to look at our kids. And yes we have certain behavioral expectations.

But far above all things our desire for our children should be that they are conformed to the image of Christ. Which means first and foremost our goal is to present them with the Gospel.

Our goal is to make sure that they understand who Christ is. That they understand what He's done. Understand what He's accomplished. Because no matter what your kids learn in school.

[29:49] No matter what languages you teach them. No matter how many instruments they learn to play. No matter how many lofty goals you set for them. If they don't know Christ they will go to hell.

They must know Him. And they must be conformed to His image. Your goal as a parent for your kid is not to induce the right behavior.

Your goal is to point them to Christ. So that God might do the work of calling them to Himself. And that they would become those who love. And then all the omnipotent power of God would be behind conforming them to the image of Jesus.

This is a great promise you guys. If we understand it rightly it can save us from despair. If we understand it rightly it can help us to navigate the most difficult of waters in this life.

Because even if the bottom totally falls out and every plan that we've ever had fails. We will know that even in this terrible event. This illness.

[30:51] This disaster. God is using it right now. To conform me to the image of His Son. God is working all things for our ultimate good of being like Christ.

If we love Him. If we're called according to His purpose. So I want to close by asking you just one question. Do you love Him?

Are you among those who belong to Him? Do all the problems in your life. Do they have a greater purpose? Have you been called by Him?

And do you know that you've been called because you have a real genuine love for Him? Not just outward duty. Not just outward conformity to the expectations for average Christians.

But do you have a genuine affection for Christ? And a delighting in who God is? If you don't, then I would encourage you now to trust in Jesus.

[31:54] Because I trust that as the word is preached even now, the Spirit is at work to call people. And I call on you to respond to that call. Let's pray.

Let's pray.