

THE GOOD IS REALLY COMING
Survival Guide
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The message is titled “The Good is Really Coming.” Romans 8:28-30 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified he also glorified.”

Beginning with verse 18 of Romans 8 Paul takes this last half of the chapter to give us four steps or guidelines to survive when life gets difficult. He has told us first of all to compare the groaning to the glory. He has told us secondly that in our downtimes the Holy Spirit is praying through us and for us. We do not know how to pray as we ought but the Holy Spirit knows.

Today we come to that third step in surviving the difficult times. The good is really coming.

As we enter today’s scripture we should immediately notice that the emphasis is upon doctrine. We know. Then words like “called” and “justified” and “glorified” and “predestined” and “foreknew” are used. So this is a doctrinal passage.

It’s important to realize that that’s there because there are times when our feelings are not sufficient to testify to us concerning the truth of a matter. Paul does not say, We feel that in all things God is working for the good. Or, We have our fingers crossed that God is going to come through. His statement is far more substantial: We know.

In a difficult circumstance Satan would desire to deprive us of that security of knowing. If he can deprive us of the security of saying, We know, then indeed in our difficulties we are at sea without an anchor.

Paul tells us that we know in all things God is working for the good. I want us today to look at three facets of the teaching that good is really coming.

First, I want us to see the comprehensiveness or totality of God’s working for the good. The word is “all”. “We know that in all things.” Or “We know that in everything.” Meaning that there is nothing excludable. There is nothing that has happened to us that God cannot work good from.

Paul’s own life situation at the time he writes Romans is an example of this. He writes from the city of Corinth. From Corinth he will journey to Jerusalem where he will be imprisoned. At the very peak of his maturity and life as an apostle, he will spend the next five years as a prisoner. I’m sure that in that long five-year trial the words “We know that God is working for the good,” which he wrote earlier came back many times as a solace and a comfort and a strength to his life. We know God is working for the good in all things. In fact in Paul’s experience were it not for the imprisonment we would not have the letters of Philemon, Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians.

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Some good we live long enough to see. Some good we may have to wait till eternity to see when God shows us the other side of the picture. But there is no exception to the word “all.” So think of whatever you have gone through or are going through now that is difficult for you to bear. Whatever you are experiencing, that is included in the word “all.” The totality of the working.

Then the second aspect of the working is the goal of the working.

The goal is that it is for the good. This is not to suggest that everything is good of itself. There are many things that happen to us that are very negative and bad. That’s not what Paul is saying here. In fact Jesus himself when he stands at the tomb of Lazarus does not say, “I thank you God that Lazarus is dead.” Death is no fun. Jesus in that moment experiences simply what is true. “I thank you Father that you have heard me.”

When we look at events themselves those events when they first hit us that are difficult to bear are negative in orientation and the event itself is not good. But what the scripture is saying is that in that event God is always working for the good. Even as God the Father worked a resurrection through the crucifixion of Jesus, so in our own trials of life God is working for restoration and for resurrection.

Steinway, the president of Steinway and Sons who make the great pianos once said, “In one of our concert grand pianos, 243 taunt strings exert a pull of 40,000 pounds on an iron frame. It is proof that out of great tension may come great harmony.” God is working for the good.

The third aspect of this scripture is not only the comprehensiveness of the working and the goal of the working but it is the limitation or the condition of the working.

There are limitations. It is not all things work for good for everyone. The limitation is two fold. Manward – to those who love God. And the limitation secondly is Godward – who are called according to his purpose. Let’s look at these two limitations or conditions for things working for the good.

Manward – love God. To those who love God. Love is being called for in the most difficult moment. Precisely when it is hardest to love God we are told God is working for the good for those who love him. Things will not work for the good in our life if we let that adversity produce bitterness in us, unforgiveness, blame, hatred, a get-even spirit, a spirit of self-pity. All of those things will wind up destroying us. We must in our down moments of life come back to the Lord and say. “When I first began to follow you, I gave myself to you and every step along the way I’ve given myself to you. And again, in this moment of my life I don’t understand what you’re up to and what’s going on but not just because I feel it, (because many times we don’t in those moments feel anything). Out of the discipline of life, Lord, I present to you once more my life, my heart, my mind, my soul and my strength to serve you and love you.” When we cannot do that the Holy Spirit even takes over and helps us to do that.

The enemy cannot take what he does not give. Love God in the difficult moments of life. Not understand God. But love God.

Then the second limitation to the working for good is that we are called. “To those who are called according to his purpose.” The idea here of called is what might be called in older

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language “the effectual call.” That is to say, when God calls it gets results. We respond. Called according to his purpose.

So rich are the dimensions of this call that Paul goes on in verses 29-30 to outline five main verbs, which amplify the idea of being called. The five main verbs – foreknew, predestined, called, justified and glorified – all in the past tense. Describing action that has therefore already happened. But it’s past tense because from God’s point of view the action is completed even though from the human point of view some of the action has not even yet occurred. But so certain is it to occur that Paul already may refer to it in the past tense. Because God sees us from the perspective of eternity he foreknew us. He knew us beforehand. And he therefore predestined us to become conformed to the image of his Son.

The word “predestined” is literally “before the horizon.” Horizon is the limit of what you can see and God can see beyond the horizon. God is in no doubt what his Son looks like. Since he predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son he’s in no doubt what we ultimately will look like.

What is Paul talking about here? He’s saying God sees how we’re finally going to look like. We’re going to look like his Son. And God wants us for the sake of his son, the firstborn. “Firstborn among many brethren,” is not a phrase to suggest that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. Rather, it stands for rank or protocol. He is the one who has the protocol among many brethren. What would be the purpose of Christ coming if indeed there was not a family that resulted from his coming? God foreknew us and he predestined us.

It’s important to know what “predestination” does not mean since I think it’s so easily confuse-able. Predestination does not mean that we are not free human beings. Scripture teaches us that we are free. And therefore whatever predestination is it does not exclude human freedom.

Predestination also in the New Testament never refers to being predestined to hell. When predestination is used it’s being conformed to the image of his Son or being predestined to be called by him. I think theologians err when they go on to conclude that if the Lord predestines us to be conformed to the image of his Son therefore he must predestine certain others. Scripture does not say that.

Moody adequately summarized it when he said, “The whosoever wills are the elect and the whosoever will nots are the non elect. The Lord voted for my salvation, the devil voted for my damnation. And I voted with the Lord so we got a majority.”

What election or predestination does mean is that you are not an accident. It does mean that God has never varied in his feeling toward you. Since the verbs are in the past tense we switch to eternity and God is really saying, “I knew you would respond.”

Can you imagine arriving in heaven and appearing before the Lord and the Lord says, “I’m surprised! I didn’t know whether you were going to make it or not.” I can’t imagine that of the divine, all-knowing Lord.

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The Lord knows. It means we're not a momentary person. We've been in the mind of God for a long, long time. He saw us before the horizon. And he called us and he justified us. He declared us righteous, not guilty. Those whom he justified, he also glorified.

Glorified is a more technical word. In the letter to the Romans and the other epistles generally it as the connotation of the resurrection or translation of the body. It is an aspect of redemption that is yet to come. When we came to Christ we were already redeemed from Satan and we were made alive inside. But the effect has not yet been transmitted to our physical bodies, which are still subject to illness, decay, disease and death. There is going to come a day when the application of redemption is going to be made also to our bodies. In the resurrection from the dead or in our being caught up if Christ returns for us while we're alive. That incorporation of our bodies into a permanent state of glory is called "glorification."

Here however in Romans 8 Paul is saying you were glorified. Those who he foreknew he predestined, those whom he predestined, he called. Those whom he called he justified. Those whom he justified he glorified. Meaning that God is so certain about the incorporation of your body in to the benefits of redemption, your ultimate salvation that he's already speaking of your resurrection in the past tense. That's how certain God is of you when you put your faith in him.

Do you notice in these verses that there is a whole lot more said about God's part in the working for good than our part? That's deliberate. That's to assure us. We're not left on our own when we're in difficult times. We have one who is working on our behalf. We're not left like the father who put his son on a bicycle for the first time and sent him off with a cheery, "Hope you make it!" The Father is there to go behind us and to stead us in the adventures of life.

God says I foreknew you, predestined you, called you, justified you and glorified you. There is no psalm that says, In spite of the above promises that doesn't mean I won't get tired of you and leave you. There is none of that. God is working for the good in all circumstances of life. In all circumstances. To those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Our Father, we thank you indeed that there is no PS on your love. We want to lift up every person in this room who is going through a present trial or who has not resolved a past trial. That you will help them in this time to look to you as never before. In moments like these sign out a love song to Jesus. We realize that in becoming a follower of yours you have not exempted us from the same kinds of negative things that have happened to other people. We as Christians also have illnesses and accidents and financial difficulties and trials. We're so glad that we have you in the midst of our trial and we're so glad to know that our trials are not purposeless. If we did not know you all that would be left of our trials is meaninglessness. What does it all come to? What does it amount to? But when we follow you we learn that in every crucifixion in life there is a resurrection just around the corner. There is good that will emerge. Help us Lord to keep the faith in that time. Help us Lord to depend upon our knowings and not our feelings. The good is really coming. We praise you for your word. Give that assurance deep within hearts today that you know and you understand the circumstance that they are in. And you deeply care and you've called them and your calling will be effectual in their life. We thank you for that today. In Christ's name. Amen.