



For Whose Good? • Romans 8:18-30

Pastor Kenneth Spiller • February 26, 2023

BIG IDEA: All things may not be good, but God can use all things for good.

Pastor Kenneth opened the message sharing about a season in his life when he believed that the Bible said he wouldn't have to wait at red lights if he only listened to Christian music. Obviously, this isn't found anywhere in Scripture – Kenneth had misconstrued a text and created his own T-Shirt Theology.

Today, we're looking at a popular T-Shirt Theology text, Romans 8:28, which says: **“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.”**

Many quote this verse and reduce it to mean things will go **my** way. Then, when they don't go our way, we wonder, “What happened to the good?” We may even wonder why God let us down and if His word can even be trusted. T-Shirt Theology is dangerous because it can lead us to believe in promises that God may not have made.

Pastor Kenneth gave an example of this from the book *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* by Dan Kimball. In the example, Proverbs 13:24 was used to “justify” child abuse. In the same example, the wife did not report the abuse because she read Ephesians 5:22 out of context. Both of these examples show us the problem with T-Shirt Theology. Addressing our T-Shirt Theology is important because **incorrect interpretation leads to incorrect understanding, which leads to incorrect application.**

➔ **Have you ever claimed a promise from the Bible, only to find out that it wasn't in the Bible?**

Romans 8:28 teaches us this powerful lesson: **All things may not be good, but God can use all**

things for good. In the larger context, it is clearly written to Christians (*Romans 1:7, 5:1*) and to Christians who are growing in faith (*Romans 6:1; 8:1*). In Romans 5 – 8, Paul is teaching his audience (the Roman Christians and us) what it means to be a growing Christian and to be transformed by the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. He ends chapter 8 with these words: **"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."** (*Romans 8:38-39*) The us in this passage refers to those who are Christians. This is the hope that Paul lived by. As he writes to the Roman Christian church, he wants them – and us – to hold on to the same hope.

➔ **Why is knowing Paul was writing to *growing* Christians important context to have when studying this passage?**

➔ **How can you hold onto the hope of which Paul writes?**

What does the immediate context of Romans 8:18-30 teach us?

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." -Romans 8:18

We know that Paul himself went through all kinds of troubles: shipwrecked, beaten, pelted with stones, put in jail, homelessness, and hunger. Paul has thought about this carefully, he has weighed the evidence, and this is what he has concluded. Here's an important truth to hold onto: No matter what we have gone through, are presently going through, or will go through, the sum total is not worth comparing with the magnificence that awaits those in Christ.

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of rewards and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desire not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

-C.S. Lewis

➔ **How did Paul's hope sustain him during his troubles? What or who was Paul's focus during his trials?**

➔ **How can a hope that the glory of God will be revealed through us sustain your faith?**

Paul presents a hope so profound that creation groans for it, believers groan for it, and even the Holy Spirit aids believers with His own groans. Let us look at the word **groaning** this in the passage.

"For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and

brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been *groaning* as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” -Romans 8:19-21

Creation groans as creation itself is longing for the day when God will make all things new, as they were in the Garden of Eden.

“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, *groan* inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” -Romans 8:23-25

We groan as we wait for the adoption and redemption of our bodies. We groan for the full measure of the hope of our salvation – the riches of all the promises found in Christ.

The good news of the Gospel is that, for all of us who have given our allegiance to Christ and received His Spirit, we will receive new bodies one day. The sufferings of this life have a way of helping us look forward to the next in an eager, hopeful way. We long for new resurrected bodies, no more pain, no more struggles with sin, everything will be made right, and we will see Jesus face to face.

➔ What suffering are you dealing with that causes you to look forward to the next life?

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us through wordless *groans*. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.” -Romans 8:26-27

When all we can do is groan, the Holy Spirit searches our hearts and understands what we are unable to put into words. The Holy Spirit groans on our behalf.

➔ Have you ever prayed and known that the Holy Spirit was groaning to God for you? What did that feel like?

Now let’s look at Romans 8:28 even closer. Before we look at verse 28, we need to look at verses 29 and 30. These verses can cause division and controversy, but they are part of the context, so we need to look at them. The key word is “foreknew”. This word is interpreted two different ways or schools of thought.

“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 image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also

glorified." -Romans 8:28-30

1. There are Christians who believe that salvation is rooted in God's Choice, that God chooses who will be saved, and they translated the word foreknew (*Romans 8:29*) as "to choose beforehand" or "predetermined." So, God chooses those who are saved, and because He does so, they will believe and be justified. This is called the doctrine of unconditional election and eternal security.

2. Other Christians believe that while God calls us to Himself, the decision to follow Him is a matter of personal choice following the prompting of the Holy Spirit. We decide or reject God's invitation. The word "foreknew" (*Romans 8:29*) doesn't mean that salvation is predetermined but means "to know ahead of time." God knew the decision we would make ahead of time, and those who choose to believe are those God predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies. God calls the church through His elected grace, and individuals become members of the elected body through faith.

What does Parkgate Community Church believe? We, as a church, believe God offers all an invitation to be saved, and that choice is up to us. God gives us the grace to surrender and follow Him or reject Him. As John 3:16 states, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."** Whoever means whoever.

It's important to note, though, that you can still attend Parkgate and believe in a different interpretation of this passage! As Christians, we can disagree with one another about the meaning of "foreknew" because this is a secondary issue and not a primary issue. An example of a primary issue would be that we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ.

➔ **How does it encourage you to know that there are theological issues on which we can disagree, but still know we have the same primary beliefs?**

So, what does Romans 8:28 tell us?

1. The promise of Romans 8:28 is for those *in Christ*.

Romans 8:28 is often quoted with the ending left off: **"And we know that in all things God works for the good ..."** and skip the rest, **"... of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."** The promise is for believers. **All things may not be good, but God can use all things for good.**

➔ **Why is it important to know that this verse was written to and for believers?**

➔ **How might knowing this change the way you discuss this verse with other people, both believers and non-believers?**

2. The promise of Romans 8:28 does *not* mean everything will go

our way.

Some people want to make the “**all things for good**” part of this verse mean “what I think is good.” It means that everything will work out for our *ultimate* good.

Joni Eareckson Tada is an inspirational speaker, author, and singer, who also happens to be a quadriplegic. She has been confined to a wheelchair for more than 40 years. Joni’s life and ministry are a stunning testimony of how God can use a terrible paralyzing diving accident to impact the lives of millions. Are Joni’s physical limitations good? No. Does God still use her physical limitations for His good? Yes! **All things may not be good, but God can use all things for good.**

God allows what he hates
to accomplish what He
loves.

-Joni Eareckson Tada

➔ **When has something that seemed not so good in your life ended up working out for your ultimate good?**

3. The promise of Romans 8:28 *doesn’t* mean all things are good.

No matter what we may say, there’s nothing good about cancer, human trafficking, or death. The beautiful truth of this passage of scripture is that God is able to redeem and restore anything for His good and His glory. A wise person once said, “God allows everything into our lives for one of two purposes — either to bring us into a relationship with Himself or, if we already know Him, to make us more like His Son.”

➔ **How does knowing that God will redeem and restore anything for His good and glory speak to you today?**

Pastor Kenneth told a story he read about a man named Billy. Billy had cancer. Billy didn’t survive his battle with cancer, but because he chose to respond in faith and trust, many people, including his younger brother, came to know Jesus Christ as their Savior. Billy’s cancer wasn’t good, but God used it for good to make him more like Christ and to draw others into a faith relationship with himself. **All things may not be good, but God can use all things for good.**

➔ **Do you have a story in your life that is similar to Billy’s story? What did that experience do in your life to make you more like Jesus?**

➔ **As you look back over our T-Shirt Theology series, what learning stands out to you?**