

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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No Condemnation to no Separation; What Works? What Doesn't Work?

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (Romans 8:28–34, KJV 1900)

Almost every verse in Romans 8 begins with a connective word; "For," "That," "Because," "So," "But," etc. If we blindly ignored the content of these thirty-nine verses, even these simple words would challenge our thoughts and demand that we view the chapter as a whole fabric, not thirty-nine independent and unrelated ideas. The opening thought of the chapter affirms that those whom God has placed in His Son have no condemnation. It ends with the proclamation that those whom God has enfolded in His love shall never be separated from His love. And the verses that make up the chapter take us from that first thought to the last. They explain why and how both divine miracles occur.

Despite this obvious and firm union of connected truth, many people read Verse 28 as if it exists in a vacuum, in no way linked to its context. From beginning to end, Romans 8 deals with God and with His work in and for His people. It therefore contradicts the context of the whole chapter to ignore this point and focus in this one verse on all the things that men and devils do, attempting to sanctify the work of men and devils as if they were God in action. How does Paul characterize human actions throughout the chapter? Consider.

1. Verse 6, "...to be carnally minded is death."
2. Verse 8, "...they that are in the flesh cannot please God."
3. Verse 13, "...if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."

In none of these verses do we read any suggestion that sinful carnal minds who live after the flesh in some way mysteriously work together with God to further or to accomplish His will. Quite the opposite, as in all other Scriptures, this chapter consistently affirms that sinful actions produce bad results. Period.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)

In these verses, Paul emphatically affirms what Scripture consistently teaches; God and Satan, righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, the temple of God and idols never work together. The errant interpretation of Romans 8:28 that claims every act of wicked men and demons mysteriously work together with God or anything that He does, much less that they work for good to God's people, blatantly contradicts 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, along with many similar passages throughout the Bible. When people interpret any passage so that it contradicts other Scriptures, the problem lies in their bad interpretation, not in Scripture itself.

If we understand the moral foundations of God in Scripture and read Scripture's consistent teaching from Genesis to Revelation, we fully appreciate this diametrical contradiction that exists between God and Satan and between everything that God does versus everything that Satan or sinful men do.

The first error committed by those who attempt to force Romans 8:28 to teach that Paul is referring to every act that ever occurs as mysteriously working together, much less for good, is that they isolate the verse from the context of Romans 8 and impose their private interpretation onto it. The second error they commit is that they interpret this one verse in a way that glaringly contradicts what Scripture consistently teaches elsewhere. I have

used only one such passage from the same inspired human author, but similar contradictory passages could be offered throughout the Bible. The third and perhaps most problematic error committed by those who impose a universal view onto the “all things” of Romans 8:28 is that they, directly or indirectly, charge God with complicity in the sin and depravity that exists in this world. Paul directly dealt with that moral problem in Romans 3:5-8, charging that those who so thought and taught slandered the truth of the gospel that he preached and that they wholly misrepresented his teachings. I believe Paul’s writings, both in Romans 3 and in Romans 8, and I choose to follow his teachings in both contexts so as to find harmony in his inspired writing, not contradiction, especially moral contradiction against God.

Often advocates of this errant view of “all things” in Romans 8:28, will play the straw man logical fallacy with “Well, don’t you believe that God can sometimes use the acts of wicked men for His purpose?” The question doesn’t deserve the honor of an answer, for it dishonestly misrepresents what its interrogator believes. The point that Paul makes in Romans 8:28 is not that some things sometimes work together for good. Whatever the Holy Spirit’s intent in Paul’s words, He used “all things,” not “some things sometimes.” I suppose these folks must think that their own personal dishonesty in misrepresenting their own beliefs by their fallacious “some things” in some way works together for good. I suggest that any idea that conveniently justifies open dishonesty is not honoring to God, is not taught by Scripture, and never works together for good, good being defined and established by God, not by morally compromised and logically challenged sinful minds.

The challenge before us is to question the context in which Paul wrote this verse to find a contextual answer to the question “What are these all things?” and to understand how and why they all (Not some things some of the time) work together for good to them that love God, who are called by Him according to His purpose.

The focus of the whole chapter, Romans 8, is on God and what He does to accomplish the dual-objective that Paul affirms, no condemnation to no separation, and all that God must accomplish to secure both objectives. If we start with the contextual fact that Paul consistently in this chapter praises God for what He does and condemns human sin in whatever form it takes, we will be far more inclined to seek an explanation of this verse and Paul’s reference to “all things” that relates to God and what He does, not to wicked men and what they do. Nor will we seek to mystify God’s work that Paul has declared simply and with edification to the struggling and suffering saint by indirectly making demons and wicked men and all of their actions—not just some of them, as these folks illogically state—by magnifying wicked men and what they do as part of what God is doing to

accomplish His stated dual objective, no condemnation to no separation. Human sin in this context is the problem, not the solution. God will have His glory in overcoming this sin and suffering problem, despite the “Things” that wicked men and demons do, not because of them or through them.

If we consider the literary framework of this chapter and of Paul’s writing in general, we will note that Paul contextually defines and explains the terms that he uses. Left to its literary meaning alone and ignoring the context in which the words appear, “all things” is general and vague beyond any logical definition. However, if we read the greater context of Romans 8, we shall discover many logical, consistent, and even literary indicators that tightly focus these “all things” by the literary setting in which the words appear.

The lesson immediately prior to Verse 28 deals with our prayers and the assuring knowledge that the Holy Spirit takes our stuttering, faltering words and pleas in prayer through His sanctifying grace before presenting them to the Father. Not only so, but Jesus adds His own intercession to the Spirit’s help. (Verse 27)

Verse 28 begins with “For,” a connective word that relates the true point of the lesson to the work of the Spirit and of Jesus to the Father. Something in this verse adds strong assurance to the prior point. If we view the “all things” of which Paul writes here in terms of what God, Father, Son, and Spirit do on behalf of His children, we grasp the point that this verse adds powerful assurance to our faltering prayers.

Verse 29 also begins with another “For.” Why and how do “...all things work together” as Paul states? Because...what Paul affirms in the five monumental acts of God that Paul states and logically associates into one complete and unified whole in verses 29-30 all work together. God works these actions personally. “Things” have no intelligence, much less a moral compass. But God always works faithfully to His moral character, and He always works consistently with His moral character and with His eternal purpose. There is no literary or moral tension whatever if we allow the theme to flow through these verses in logical and connected sequence.

In Verse 31, Paul raises the question, “What shall we then say to these things?” Do not ignore his inspired conclusion, “IF God be for us, who can be against us?” Inherently, intuitively, there is nothing in the wicked acts of depraved men and demons that convinces us that God is for us. However, if we ponder the five things that Paul names, five things that encompass God’s timeless provisions for His chosen people, we “inherently and intuitively” grasp Paul’s conclusion. No accident; the Greek word translated “know” in Romans 8:28 is a word that refers to intuitive or reflective knowledge, yet another affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s focused intent in these words.

In Verse 32, Paul answers any question that might remain about his intent in the “all things” of Verse 28.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us **all things**? (Emphasis added)

Whether we study the words “all things” in Verse 28 and in Verse 32 in Greek, King James English, or contemporary English, they are exactly the same. In the greater context, but emphatically and undeniably in Verse 32, the Holy Spirit directed Paul to include a clear definition of what He intended by “all things” in Verse 28. What wicked men and demons do in no way contributes to either of God’s stated purposes in Romans 8, no condemnation and no separation. What wicked men and demons do cannot be artificially sanctified by false teachers or by naïve Christians to contribute in any way to either of these inspired and stated divine purposes. Further, nothing that wicked men and demons do ever intuitively and reflectively enlightens our minds to the overwhelming assurance of God’s work in and for us, work that covers every necessary step from no condemnation to no separation. Nothing about the depraved and wicked acts of men and demons convinces us to conclude, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” But if we reflect on the five divine actions of verses 29-30, we cannot logically reach any other conclusion.

But the strongest possible point appears in Verse 32. In the context of Romans 8, a chapter that begins with God’s declaration of no condemnation to all of His, all who are “in Christ Jesus,” and ends with the triumphant declaration that nothing real or imagined can possibly separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, we must resolve our focus on what Verse 39 emphasizes. The final success, the final resolution of God’s stated purpose and objective is accomplished in “Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Verse 32 answers the question about “all things” in Verse 28 in words chosen by the Holy Spirit, not in amoral philosophical speculations. 1) Through God’s not sparing His own Son, 2) through God delivering His own Son up for us all, 3) God through Him freely gives us “all things.” Paul removes all question or doubt from Verse 28 in this verse. Unless advocates of the amoral “all things” view that attempts to sanctify the sinful acts of depraved men and demons so as to morph them into a divine and mysteriously caused action can provide convincing Biblical witness that Jesus’ death necessarily, irresistibly, and inevitably **caused** all of these wicked acts, their claim that Verse 28 refers to such acts fails and must be rejected. Paul affirms that the ultimate outcome of God’s not sparing His Son, of delivering His Son up for us all results in God “...with him...” freely giving us “**all things**.”

Does this lesson belong in a thesis that deals with the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection? Indeed it does. Take note that the final accomplishment listed in Paul’s five divine actions in verses 29-30 is “...them he also glorified.” God’s work that makes His final and triumphal return and our personal bodily resurrection a certainty has been fully performed. He does not delay His return because He has not completed some necessary or desired step. He delays only because the last of those whom He loved and for whom He spared not His own Son are yet to be born. Nothing else delays His coming. Nothing!

All the good things that appear in the whole of Romans 8 God gives to us because of His not-spared Son, and He “freely” gives them to us because of His Son. And all of those things, the things that God has purposed through His not-spared Son, because they are His work, not the work of depraved men and demons, He personally ensures to work together and to work together for the good of those who love Him, those whom He has called according to His purpose. What is His ultimate purpose? Those whom He has loved in His Son He shall never allow to be separated from that love. Whatever awaits us in heaven shall be wholly and gloriously in harmony with God’s love for us. Praise God!

Scripture at times gives us brief glimpses into eternal glory. We could bear no more and survive such glory. But we may live our life and face its trials and sufferings with grace if we keep in mind God’s supreme love and His undefeatable purpose to keep every one of those whom He loved “...from of old” (Jeremiah 31:3) securely in His love. That, my friends, is God’s lesson to us in Romans 8. God help us never to lose sight of that truth, especially by the siren song of deceit that seeks to sanctify the work of depraved men and demons, as if they in some way contributed to God’s ultimate “Good” and final glory.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor