

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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God Supreme: A Class of One

Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:15–16, KJV 1900)

*...who is the blessed and **only** Potentate....*

Polytheism, the belief in many gods, dominates the non-Christian world with the two exceptions of Judaism and Islam. Man can't wrap his mind around one God who is righteously supreme over all His universe, so he creates many lesser gods, each to rule over a finite segment of creation. In the history of religious thought and human government, we see many despicable rulers, along with a few good rulers here and there. When we add the description "...blessed..." the list quickly vanishes, leaving one and only one name. Paul further emphasizes this point with the terms, "...**the** King of kings, and Lord of lords." The definite article "the" restricts the list. There are no others in this class. God, blessed and supreme, stands in a class alone. Go to the United Nations or to the capitals of the world's leading nations. Identify the strongest, most influential person in each government. When you've identified all such people, go back to this passage. God alone stands over all of them. He is King over lesser kings and Lord over lesser lords.

In all that God does as Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords, His actions consistently demonstrate that He is blessed, exclusive, that His works and person always dwell in and operate in the light, a Bible analogy for righteousness. God never intervenes in human activities in the dark shadows of sin. When the ultimate moral assessment is applied to His works, He shall demonstrate that He deserves the honor that He claims in Scripture as wholly, and always, righteous and holy. These adjectives of His supreme governance over His world in no way suggest any degree of dualistic cause or "orchestration" of sin. Both cause and "orchestration" impose moral guilt, and our God is not ever in any way responsible for or guilty of sin. President Richard Nixon learned that even human moral attitudes toward government condemned orchestration. Romans 3:1-8 affirms the same principle from inspired Scripture.

When I was a child, around nine or ten years old, I was riding with my parents to our country church. As we crossed a rural railroad crossing, we noticed the fresh wreckage of a pickup truck. When we arrived at church, we learned that the son of a

family that my parents knew had tried to cross the tracks ahead of an approaching train. The train hit the truck, and the son was killed instantly. On our way home from church that day, my folks stopped at the family's home to see if they could offer help in any way. When we arrived, the family's pastor, a devoted and outspoken advocate of Arminian, man-centric doctrine, was visiting with the family in a back room of the house. Sitting in the front room, we could hear the whole conversation. The pastor read Romans 8:28 and applied the passage to the incident of the morning. Regardless of a person's doctrinal beliefs, in times of calamity, people often cite this verse, even if their ordinary beliefs wholly reject it. This verse has likely been subjected to more misrepresentation and false interpretation than any single verse in the Bible. Since many of the common interpretations of this verse appeal to a false view of God's sovereignty and dominion, it is fitting that we here examine the verse and seek a contextual interpretation that harmonizes with Scripture and with God.

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. (Romans 8:28, KJV 1900)

The apparently universal or all-inclusive terms of Scripture more often cause problems with Bible students than any of the technical theological terms or King James grammatical forms. Do we ignore the context in which this verse appears, as well as many passages that contradict the view, and conclude that God only "permits" things that He has predetermined to orchestrate to His glory? Do we thereby force an all-inclusive meaning onto the words "all things"? Whenever someone cites this verse and imposes an all-inclusive meaning onto the word, I am inclined to refer them to any number of other passages where the same Greek word here translated "all" is translated as "all" or "every" or another similar word. Consider just one such example.

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the

grace of God should taste death for every man.
(Hebrews 2:9, KJV 1900; "...every..." in bold comes from the same Greek word)

If we are forced to impose the all-inclusive meaning onto the word in Romans 8:28, we are likewise forced to impose the same meaning onto the word in this verse. And if we conclude that Jesus tasted death for every human being who ever lived, and if we follow Scripture that teaches us that His work was wholly effectual and successful, we are thereby forced to conclude that universalism, the final, eternal salvation of all humanity, is a Biblical truth. Hell in Scripture then becomes an empty place or a superficial symbol of unpleasantness. This view contradicts many Biblical lessons that distinctly describe hell as a populated place of eternal separation from God.

However, if we respect context in both of these passages, we shall discover that neither context supports this universalistic, all-inclusive interpretation. In Hebrews the second chapter, a long series of titles is applied to those for whom Christ died, along with "...every man..." He brings many sons to glory, they are sanctified, they are His brethren, and eventually these people, none lost in the process—or in the grammar of the passage—are the children whom the Lord Jesus Christ shall present to the Father at His Second Coming. Thus, the all-inclusive definition of the word fails in Hebrews 2:9. "...every man..." in this context rather refers to all kinds of men, not just religious Jews. Revelation 5:9 affirms this truth.

As we read the context of Romans 8:29, we discover a key contextual fact that defines the term "all things" by the Holy Spirit's use of the term in this context.

*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**?* (Romans 8:32, KJV 1900; bold type of "all things" for emphasis)

How do we come to possess these "all things" in this verse? We only come to possess them because God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. We receive these all things only through and because of the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we have the Holy Spirit clearly using the same exact term, in both first century Greek and King James English, so we need not flounder or guess about the meaning of the term in Romans 8:28.

In a few minutes, we may study Scripture to discover a long list of contradictions to the all-inclusive view of "all things" in this verse.

1. **Some things do not work.** (2 Thessalonians 3:11; busybodies "...**work not at all**..." doing what God commands them to do, and thereby walk disorderly)

2. **Other things work, but they distinctly do not work together.** (2 Corinthians 6:14-16.

Here Paul lists a number of things that do not work together, including believers and unbelievers (an infidel), righteousness and unrighteousness, light and darkness, Christ and Belial,

3. **Still other things work together, but they work for harm, not for good.** How many passages describe wicked people as "evil doers"?

Thus we find abundant Bible proof that everything that exists or that occurs does not work together for good to the Lord's people.

In delightful contrast, we may conclude from Paul's inspired words in this context that everything that we receive because our Lord Jesus Christ was not spared, but delivered up for us, unquestionably works together for our good. I have asked advocates of the all-inclusive view of Romans 8:28 to give me Bible evidence that we experience sin and calamities in life **only because** Jesus was not spared but delivered up. So far I have received no such evidence, nor do I expect it.

Aside from the discord with Scripture, and aside from the black reputation such an immoral view imposes onto God, the all-inclusive view of "all things" sets up its adherents for an overwhelming disillusionment. Such a person is liable to approach life's obligations with an irresponsible attitude, for, no matter what he does, he believes that God will twist the outcome for his good. When he eventually realizes that his irresponsible and foolish actions are coming home squarely and heavily on his shoulders, and that no good is coming out of them, he will likely become disillusioned and discouraged in his faith.

Quite often advocates of this all-inclusive view will play the logical fallacy of the red herring, "Well, don't you believe that God can intervene so as to bring good out of bad things that happen?" Of course I believe that, but the statement is not a true representation of what this person believes. Why would someone so poorly misrepresent his own beliefs with a logical fallacy of this magnitude?

Another logical fallacy that advocates of the all-inclusive view often use to cover their error is to accuse any who disagree with them of believing in deism, the idea that God created the universe, set it in motion, and then wholly withdraws into passivity. This misrepresentation perfectly illustrates the horns of dilemma logical fallacy, sometimes referred to as the divided middle. The logical fallacy sets up two extreme views. In this case the two extreme views would be; 1) God causes and involves Himself in everything that occurs, sinful and righteous alike, or 2) God is a deist; since original creation, God has involved Himself in nothing. Both premises are false according to Scripture, and both are logical extremes. Thus the term, "divided middle." The view falsely presents the idea that

only these two options exist. There are no “middle ground” views between the two, views that avoid the extremes of both views. Biblical truth exists comfortably between these two untenable extreme views.

Quite often advocates of error or advocates of ideas that they view as weak and vulnerable to refutation will throw out such logical fallacies to mislead or to falsely direct their critics away from their argument’s weaknesses.

God’s supreme rule over His universe, as set forth in our last study, is not that of a cosmic puppeteer. Nor is it that of an aloof and never-involved observer. God created His universe, including a moral creature, man, to whom He gave moral commandment with consequences if man violated that moral command. Ever since that time, God has continued to give humanity, and His people in particular, moral commandments, always coupled with blessings for obedience and just consequences for violation of the commandments. And, as Scripture consistently affirms, God frequently involves Himself in the lives of His beloved children. He is no cold, aloof deistic entity. However, every act of intervention always harmonizes with His righteous nature, so that, in the end when God shows the full nature of His sovereign rule, all the righteous and glorious adjectives of our study lesson shall be demonstrated to be true of Him and of every act of His rule.

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