

God's Purpose for Your Life (Romans 8:28-30)

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When a father received word that his son, a brilliant lad, had been killed in a railway accident, he turned to his pastor and cried in desperation, "Tell me, sir, where was God when my son was killed?" And in that tense and terrible moment guidance was given to the counseling pastor. "My friend," said the pastor, "God was just where He was when His own Son was killed!" Yes, this was a time of heartache and despair, and a time of indescribable pain. We all pass through difficult experiences, and yet, behind all of the trials, tough times, and terrors that we face in life, the believer can say, "God was there all the time fulfilling His stated purpose for my life." Friend, God is in control of the events of our lives (Ex. 4:11; Ps. 115:3) and He will always bring His sovereign purpose to pass for our lives - all the time! This is especially true when it comes to God making His own children into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the unfailing purpose that God has for all of our lives, as His children, and is the message of Romans 8:28-30.

Romans 8:28-30 declares:

"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."

Yes, we are "called according to his purpose." Someone has termed Romans 8:28 as the brightest jewel in God's Word. It's also been called a soft pillow for a sorrowing saint and medicine for our soul! The comforting truth of this verse is based especially on one attribute of God - His sovereignty. God knows what He is doing and is bringing His purpose to pass in our life.

Let's do some groundwork for this study. Everything in these verses is built around God's "purpose." The text of Romans 8:28 concludes

that we are “called according to his purpose.” This is the sovereign and all-encompassing purpose that God has ordained for our lives. In Romans 8:28, we see that God is working all the events of our lives together to fulfill His one unfulfilling purpose for our lives, which is conformity to His Son, Jesus Christ. In Romans 8:29-30, Paul reassures us that God’s saving purpose was completed in eternity past (“conformed to the image of his son” – vs. 29) , so His present purpose for our lives will come to pass today, which is Christ-likeness. The two are actually connected together. What God determined or decreed in eternity past (our conformity to Christ) will gradually come to pass in the present, as we become more like Christ. God’s purpose is unfulfilling, unalterable, and unchanging. If God has called us to experience His sovereign purpose (Christ-likeness), then we will pass through it, be better for it, and ultimately enjoy its blessing forever.

1 John 3:2

“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

We shall be like Him! This is God’s ultimate purpose, as outlined in Romans 8:28-30. It’s revealed as being “conformed to the image of his son” (Rom. 8:29) and “glorified” (Rom. 8:30). It’s a purpose that was decreed and done in eternity past, but a future purpose that will be fully experienced at Christ’s coming for His saints (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

“Yea, justified! O blessed thought!
And sanctified! Salvation wrought!
Thy blood hath pardon bought for me,
And glorified, I too, shall be!”

There are two time zones related to God’s purpose.

Don’t worry; I’m not going to write in the twilight zone!

I. God’s present purpose (vs. 28)

Romans 8:28

“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.”

God’s present “purpose” (becoming more like Christ – vs. 28) is coming to pass in our lives, since God ordained this purpose to come to pass in eternity past (vv. 29-30). We will see this later in our study.

Notice:

A. The reassurance of God’s purpose

I need reassurance today that God is on my side and that He is working on my behalf. I need reassurance that God is with me and for me. Friend, we can be reassured that God’s purpose is coming to pass in our lives today. God is working in our hearts and lives to make us more like Jesus Christ. He’s not finished with us! God has not given up on us. His purpose will come to pass just as He decreed.

This reassurance is described in four ways.

1. Unshakeable conviction (“we know”)

We can have the reassurance that God is bringing His purpose to pass because of the unmistakable conviction that we have in our hearts about God’s unfailing work and desire to make us more like His Son. Notice the contrast. In verse 26 “we know not” how to pray, but when we get to verse 28, we can know by conviction that God has a purpose for our lives and that He is bringing it to pass. We may not always know what God’s will is for our lives, as we pray, but we can be sure that God has a design and purpose for our lives.

What do we know? We can know through inner conviction that God has a plan for us in the never-ending circle of life. We can know by conviction that God has a purpose for our lives and that His purpose is coming to pass every day of our lives. We should possess the unmistakable conviction that the purpose of God will never be thwarted!

We must remember that God is not only at the end of the verse; He is at the beginning of the verse. In short, God is behind the scenes allowing all the events of our lives to accomplish His purpose and plan (Christ-likeness). It's actually God who is causing all things to work together for our good! We can know that this is true. God is working! Romans 8:28 begins with God! He is at work in our lives making us more like Christ. This is wonderful to contemplate and it's a conviction that we must share.

Many people feel that life is like a roll of the dice – sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. But this is not the case for God's children. The Bible says that everything which happens to our lives is designed by God to bring about His sovereign purpose for our lives. God is at work in our lives – not luck, or chance, or blind fate!

What is God's purpose? The text is suggesting that there is one, general, primary, specific purpose that God has for our lives. It's a broad-sweeping purpose, an all-encompassing purpose that brings God's ordained plan to fruition for our lives. The one grand purpose which is coming to pass in our lives is God's plan to conform us to the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ. This "purpose" (Rom. 8:28) is suggested in the following verses that describe God's eternal plan for our lives.

Romans 8:29 reveals, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son..." God's ultimate plan and purpose in the past was to conform us to the moral likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ, through predestination and glorification. Therefore, this purpose is sure to come to pass in the present, as we make our way to this ultimate end.

2 Corinthians 3:18

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

What God ordained in the past (conformity to Christ-likeness - vv. 29-30) is gradually coming to pass in the present (vs. 28), as we move toward the future day and our final destiny, when we will be fully like Christ (1 John 3:2). What God predestinated us to be from the very

beginning will surely come to pass (Isa. 14:24), and we can see it taking place in our lives today, as God changes us into the likeness of His Son “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). God never moves without purpose and plan! His plan is to mold us into the likeness of His Son Jesus Christ through building up our Christian character and virtues.

“More like the Master I would ever be,
More of His meekness, more humility;
More zeal to labor, more courage to be true,
More consecration for work He bids me do.

More like the Master I would live and grow;
More of His love to others I would show;
More self-denial, like His in Galilee,
More like the Master I long to ever be.”

This is God’s purpose for our lives today. God’s purpose is not to make us happy, materially prosperous, or famous, but to make us Christlike. What God has decreed, declared, and determined to come to pass (Rom. 8:29-30) will begin to take place throughout the course of our lives (Rom. 8:28). Nothing can thwart His sovereign purpose from taking place in the lives of His children, which is to change His saints into the likeness of His Son.

How does Romans 8:28 fit into the context of the previous verses. Paul had been talking about sanctified saints (Rom. 8:1-17), groaning bodies (Rom. 8:18--25), and the Holy Spirit groaning or praying according to God’s will for our lives (Rom. 8:26-27). In all of these matters we can know that God’s purpose is coming to pass. Why? Because in sanctification we can become more like Christ, in trials we can become more like Christ, and when the Spirit prays for God’s will to be done in our lives, we will also become more like Christ!

Since the Holy Spirit is always making our prayers into the will of God before the throne, we can be assured that whatever happens is connected with God’s sovereign plan and purpose for our lives, and is something which is ultimately designed to make us like Jesus Christ.

The text begins by saying, “And we know.” This is a deep conviction. Do you know this? You should be aware of this, in fact, all Christians

should know this! The word “know” speaks of knowing something through our own senses, observations, and experiences. In other words, we know that God’s plan to conform us to Christlikeness is coming to pass in our lives, since we have watched Him do it time and time again. God’s children know that He is working on them, that He is moving them, stirring them, inviting them, convicting them, to be more like His Son Jesus Christ.

We may be rough and uncut, but God is patiently chipping away at us. Nobody has to tell a Christian that God does not have a purpose for their lives to live holy, right, and become more like His Son Jesus Christ. We know it, when we are walking close to Him (1 John 1:7); we know it when we are straying from Him (Heb. 12:6); we know it when we are faltering, failing, and finding our way in life. Deep down, we know God is not finished with us and that He is still working on us.

This knowledge (“we know”) is the unshakeable conviction that all Christians possess. They know that God is not going to stop working on them and in them to bring them to the place where they are walking more like Christ, talking more like Christ, and living more like Jesus Christ in this world. We know this by unmistakable conviction! God will not let us go! We are His forever and He’ll never stop loving us and working on us! Never!

Romans 8:38-39

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

God is not finished with us and we know it! He is constantly loving us and seeking to bring His purpose to pass in our lives which is to change our lives into the likeness of His Son. We know this to be true! We can possess the unshakeable conviction that God is bringing His purpose of sanctification and Christ-likeness to pass in our lives (2 Tim. 1:12).

“He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be.
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,

The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars.
How loving and patient He must be, He's still working on me."

2. Unlimited course ("all things")

We can also have the reassurance that God is bringing His eternal purpose to pass in our lives because He is working "all things" together to produce the desired end. There is no limit ("all things") to what God is using to bring His purpose to pass. God uses the good, the bad, and the ugly things of our lives to ultimately fulfill His purpose for our lives, whether it involves broken marriages, shattered dreams, financial instability, prosperous times, or blessings in life. The complete course or path of our lives falls into the broad sweep of God's purpose. Every event that occurs in our lives is designed to bring about God's ordained purpose, which is to produce Christ-likeness.

What reassurance! God has no limit on what He uses to bring His purpose to pass in our lives. Everything that happens throughout the course of our lives is designed to bring us closer to Christ and His moral likeness. All the events and situations we pass through in life are designed to bring God's unfailing purpose to pass. Everything from trials, temptations, tragedies, and triumphs is designed to accomplish God's purpose for our lives.

All things! Does this include the worst that happens to us? Yes. Does this include the things that hurt us deeply? Yes. Does this include the times when we are brokenhearted? Yes. Does it include the times when we sin and stray from God? Yes! Our sin is not good for us, but it can "work together" for our good, when God draws us back to Himself and we become closer to Him and more like Him.

God uses the difficult and pleasant experiences, the ups and the downs of life, the good times and the bad times, the days of health and the days of illness, times of prosperity and times of adversity, and days of joy and sorrow to "work together" for our good. Everything that takes place in our lives is designed by the sovereign hand of God to ultimately lead us in some way to Christ-likeness and conformity to His Son. Yes, God even uses the times of sadness and sorrow to teach us His many lessons and make us more like Christ.

“I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way.
But was none the wiser,
For all she had to say.
Then I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she.
But, oh, the lesson I did learn
When Sorrow walked with me.”

Is God's purpose really coming to pass when His people pass through terrible tragedies in life? What about a woman missionary who is raped? Is this something that God can use to bring His purpose to pass? What about the mother's baby who is born with a birth defect or without a functioning brain? Can God use this to bring His purpose to pass? What about those Christians in Haiti who have gone through a terrible earthquake and lost loved ones and everything they have? What about a heart attack or cancer? Can God use these events to bring His purpose to pass? He most certainly can, since it's during these times that God draws His people closer to Himself and shapes our lives into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ, as we learn to develop greater patience, faith, thanksgiving, and humility.

Colossians 2:7

“Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”

What about those times when we are sinning and straying from God? Can God use these times to bring His purpose to pass in our lives? He most certainly can for it's during these times God makes His true children miserable, chastens them (Heb. 12:6-8) and begins to drive them back to a place of restoration and Christlikeness.

Psalms 119:67

“Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.”

The Bible says that God uses every event in our lives (“all things”) to bring His purpose to pass. All things! All the events of our lives, our sins, failures, triumphs, and victories, are part of God's purpose, which is to lead and draw us closer to His Son. Nothing is beyond the

overruling and overriding scope of His providence and sovereign control (Isa. 14:24; 45:7; Dan. 4:35; Amos 3:6; Ps. 115:3). Nothing gets passed God's providential purpose. God's providence speaks of His continuous activity and control in guiding and directing the events and affairs of the world and His people to their intended goal or purpose (Ps. 135:6). Therefore, God can use all of the events of our lives, even our failures and sins, to bring His all-encompassing purpose to pass, which is to mold us into the likeness of His Son. Of course, God has not ordained that we sin! Nor is God the direct author of sin (James 1:13). However, He has ordained that when we sin, we can be drawn back to Himself and become more like His Son, Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). God is building us into something better and greater than what we are today. The building process often involves hurts and trials that result in our strengthening and Christ-likeness.

Job 23:10 declared:

“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”

“God never moves without purpose or plan
When trying His servant and molding a man.
Give thanks to the Lord though your testing seems long;
In darkness He giveth a song.

O rejoice in the Lord, He makes no mistakes.
He knoweth the end of the each path that I take.
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.”

Some people think Romans 8:28 is teaching that God will always turn a tragedy into a blessing. This certainly is not always the case and it certainly is not what Romans 8:28 is teaching. This may sound good in fairy tales, but it's not for real life. What do you do when a little child dies, or when a missionary dies on the mission field at a young age, or that you get a divorce after 23 years of marriage? God doesn't necessarily reverse these tragedies and bring a personal blessing into our lives. However, He does promise that He can use all these tragedies and bring His overall purpose to fruition in our lives, which is to become more like His Son in our everyday living.

We must also remember that the Bible never asks us to pretend that tragedy isn't tragedy or to pretend that our pain isn't real. Some well-meaning people will say, "This just appears like it's a tragedy, but in God's plan it is not a tragedy; it's a blessing in disguise." This is a cheap explanation that will sometimes cause us to lose our faith. The point is this; we must see God's active involvement and purpose in everything, which is ultimately designed to bring us closer to the likeness of His Son. We don't deny tragedies, nor do we blame God for the tragedies that are sometimes our fault, but we acknowledge God's purpose in them.

Romans 8:22 also begins with something we should know. We are reminded that "all the things" which occur in our lives, from groaning (vs. 23) to guidance (vs. 27), are part of God's unfailing purpose for our lives, which is to mold us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Please note that God's Word does not say "all things are good" but "all things work together for good." Our sinning is not good! Our stupidity is not good! Our sickness, suffering, or serious injury is not good. Your defeat, depression, divorce, departure, the death of a child is not good; however, God can use these tragic things to draw us back to Himself and His Son's likeness. Of course, it would be better to bypass all of the above and we would march toward Christlikeness much quicker; however, when we do sin and depart from the Lord, it's then that we can be convicted and drawn back to God and once again be changed into the likeness of Christ. Yes, God can use even the bad and evil things which take place in our lives, even temptation, and turn all of these events around for our ultimate good, which is to become more like Christ.

Romans 8:28 is sometimes misused when it is thrown into the face of those suffering. Those who are hurting will eventually discover that Romans 8:28 is true, but what they need is 1 Peter 5:7, which says, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." A child who is scared of the dark does not need a dissertation on Romans 8:28; he needs a father to climb in bed with him and say, "Don't be afraid, I'm right here with you." However, like it or not, Romans 8:28 is in the Bible. This verse won't go away and we can still believe it!

Yes, all these things can work together for our good! They can in God's grand providential scheme eventually and potentially bring us

closer to Jesus Christ and mold us into His likeness. We may not always see the goodness immediately, but we can know, as God's saints, that something good is going to take place in our lives through our times of difficulties. God in His providence can use anything and everything that takes place in our lives and turn them around for our good. He will use the triumphs as well as the tragedies, the tough times and the good times, to bring His purpose to pass!

So can we really believe that all things work together for our good? Yes! God uses "all things" (Rom. 8:28), the sad as well as the glad, the painful as well as the pleasant, the things that perplex and disappoint, as well as the things we eagerly strive and pray for, to further His eternal purpose for us. And God's purpose is once again to produce Christ in our lives. In God's infinite wisdom, He knows what is needed to bring about our transformation. For some of His saints, He may need to use a hotter fire and strike them with harder blows in order to bring about the formation of Christ's image in them. Some believers may be more resistant to His efforts to make them more like His Son; therefore, they need a bit more pruning (John 15:2).

Here is something else to reflect on. Paul does not say that we "feel" God is doing all things for our benefit or good. He said that "we know." Often we do not feel that God is doing good at all. We feel exactly the opposite. We feel that we are being ground down and beaten in life. Remember that Paul had been persecuted, beaten, stoned, and shipwrecked. Paul did not go around singing "It's a Wonderful World" or saying how pleasant his missionary endeavors had been. On the contrary, he reported that he had been "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8-9). Paul came through the things that pressed him down and perplexed him because he knew that God was working out His own greater good and purpose through these events, which ultimately was to make Paul more like Christ. We can that know that God is working out His purpose, even when we don't feel like He is. Our optimism is based on what we know to be true and not what we feel.

3. Unbreakable connection (“work together”)

We can have the reassurance that God is bringing His purpose to pass, since He is weaving together all the events of our lives, in order to make us more like Christ. This is God’s conclusion and it should be ours as well. We can know that there is an unbreakable connection or link between all the events that occur in our lives. Everything that happens to us is somehow and in some way connected with God conforming us to His Son’s likeness. The Bible is teaching that all the events and daily concerns of our lives work together for our good, or benefit, much like the cogs in an intricate piece of machinery, or the parts of a computer work together. Everything is working together to draw us closer to Christ and bring out His likeness in our lives. This is God’s conclusion! All the events of our lives are designed to draw us closer to Christ and make us more like Christ. They are working together to bring God’s purpose to pass.

God has erected a sign over the unexplainable mysteries of life, a sign that reads, “Quite, God at work.” Of course, all things (all the events of our lives) do not automatically work themselves together into a pattern of goodness. Something must be behind them and that something is God’s guiding hand. It’s understood in this verse that it’s the sovereign guidance of God that is the undergirding and directing force behind all the events of our lives and it’s God who works them together for our ultimate good.

The point is this; God is working! God is always working! If all things work together for good (all events, all circumstances, all trials, all happenings, circumstances, etc.), then it follows that God must be over all things (providence) and in control of all things (sovereignty), which He allows to come into our lives. This is the wonderful truth that an all-wise, all-loving, and just God is in complete control of everything that He allows to come to pass in my life.

The expression “work together” is one Greek word and it means that God is weaving together all the events of our lives to bring His sovereign purpose to fruition. God is the great Designer that is working out His master plan in our lives, even when we make wrong decisions, experience difficult circumstances, and follow a wrong path. Of course, it would be much easier to choose the right path and

save ourselves from a lot of heartache, hardship, and misery. However, even when we make wrong choices, we can know that God will use these choices and often self-created circumstances, as a tool to drive us back to Himself and His purpose for our lives, which is to be more like His Son. We may not be able to undo our wrong choices, but we can learn from them and be brought back to God's purpose through them.

There are many ingredients that go in to making a cake, and many of these, if taken by themselves, are not good tasting. For instance, not many people enjoy eating raw eggs, flour, or shortening! But if you put all of the ingredients together they work together to make a great tasting cake (the end product). In a similar way, God takes both the bitter and sweet, the hard and easy, the bad and the good, and works all these events together for our good, which is to bring us to the end product – Christ-likeness.

“Oh! to be like Thee, oh! to be like Thee,
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.”

4. Unchanging cause (“our good”)

We can also have the reassurance that God is bringing His purpose to pass because God is using all the events of our lives for our good, which is greater conformity to Christ. For many of us, “good” equals things like health, happiness, long life, money, food on the table, meaningful work, and a nice place to live. In general, we think the “good” life means a better set of circumstances. But this is not necessarily what Romans 8:28 is teaching. This verse is teaching that all the events of our lives, even the tragedies, turmoil's, and tough times are working together for our good. We can know that God is weaving all the events of our lives together to accomplish His purpose. God is working! God's cause is unchanging; He is working everything together for our good, benefit, and well being. God's cause never changes! God wants to make us more like His Son, so our lives can experience His goodness and blessing. Yes, God can even use the bad and evil things which take place in our lives, and turn all of

these terrible things around for our ultimate good, which is to shape our lives into the likeness of His Son.

The truth of Romans 8:28 is so important that God has set apart nine chapters in the book of Genesis to illustrate it in the account of Joseph's life. Some very terrible and evil things happened to Joseph. His brothers hated him, tried to kill him, and sold him into slavery (Genesis 37) and later Joseph was falsely accused by a wicked woman (Potiphar's wife) and thrown into prison (Genesis 39). But God had a plan and purpose for Joseph, who was a man who loved God. God was bringing His purpose to pass for Joseph's life through the tragedies and tough times that he experienced.

Joseph's father did not understand the truth of Romans 8:28. He said at one point in Genesis 42:36 that "all these things are against me." But Joseph understood that God's sovereignty had allowed them to take place.

Genesis 50:20

"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

The terrible things that happened to Joseph were actually used by God, as the means by which he would save the children of Israel from famine and death, and bless the seed of Abraham. In this case, God worked through the bad things of Joseph's life and turned them around to produce something good. The same is true in relationship to our lives. God uses even the tragedies, which we face, and turns them around for our good, which in Romans 8:28-30 is referring to our conformity to Christ.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of Romans 8:28 is found in the life of Christ Himself. Many terrible and evil things were done to the innocent and sinless Son of God. He was denied, betrayed, falsely accused, wrongly tried, found guilty though innocent, scourged, beaten, mocked, spit upon, and finally crucified. Could any good come out of this? Indeed, THE GREATEST GOOD OF ALL, even the salvation of man! The crucifixion of Christ worked together for the provisional salvation of all men (1 Timothy 4:10). Yes, even in the

most sinful deed ever carried out by men, God had a purpose and a plan that He was accomplishing.

Acts 2:23

“Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”

God uses wicked and unreasonable people to sometimes bring His will and purpose to pass. This was true in relationship to Christ’s beatings and death upon the cross. God brought good (the salvation of souls) out of evil (the slaying of God’s Son) and triumph out of tragedy. He can do the same for us, when we allow our trials and tests to reshape our lives into Christ-likeness or conformity to His character. When we allow ourselves to be brought to the place of humility (James 4:6), pruning (John 15:2), transformation (2 Pet. 1:5-8) and renewal (Ps. 23:3), we will come out of the test better than when we went into it.

Romans 8:28 concludes that “all things work together for good.” 2 Corinthians 4:15 gives a similar conclusion: “For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.” God has a purpose for everything that happens in our lives. He wants to draw us closer to His Son (James 4:8) and make us like His Son (Eph. 2:10).

Ephesians 5:20 reminds us:

“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We can give thanks for “all things,” not because all the things that happen in our lives are good, but because our trust is in a sovereign God, who works all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28). Have we thanked God for our trials and tragedies? Have we grown enough to give thanks to God for the tough times and difficult times that you face in life?

“I thank You Lord, for the trials I feel inside,
That You’re there to help lead and guide me away from wrong.

And I thank You Lord, for the patience those trials bring;
In that process of growing, I can learn to care.

And I thank You Lord, for the trials that come my way,
In that way I can grow each day as I let You lead.
Cause You promised Lord, that with every testing
That Your way of escaping is easier to bear.”

We have now investigated the reassurance we have in God’s purpose (Rom. 8:28). But we must go from here. Romans 8:28 is often quoted without the ending of the verse!

B. The recipients of God’s purpose

This verse is not directed to the unsaved and unbelieving crowd of Christ rejecters, but to those who are actually part of God’s family. This is because only God’s saints can experience His unfailing purpose of Christ-likeness. The unsaved are not eligible for God’s purpose.

The recipients are characterized in two ways:

1. They love God.

Again, Romans 8:28 is a wonderful truth, but it can’t be claimed by everyone. There is a qualifier. This truth is only for "them that love God" which is a description of those who are true believers (1 Cor.2:9; 8:3). We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Paul is not speaking of a special class of believers who love God in contrast to other believers who do not love God. While it is certainly true that some believers love the Savior more than others, and demonstrate this by their faithful obedience to His Word, it is also true that there is a sense in which all believers love Christ.

1 John 4:7-8

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

Only a person who loves God, a Christian, can expect all things to work together for his good.

2. They are called by God.

This refers to God's predetermined call and choice in eternity past to bring an elect group of people to salvation based upon His elective purposes to save a corporate body of people. The ones who are called are identified as the ones who have been foreknown, predestinated, justified, and glorified from eternity past (Rom. 8:29-30). As we will see, these are facts that are true of each and every believer. Only a person who has been called by God, a Christian, can expect all things to work together for his good.

This brings us to the next time zone related to God's purpose.

II. God's past purpose (vv. 29-30).

Romans 8:29-30

"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."

God's present purpose to make us like Christ (Rom. 8:28) is based upon His past purpose (Rom. 8:29-30). There is a bridge from the past to the present. The connective preposition "For" is explaining the reason why God's present purpose is coming to pass in our lives today. God's purpose (conformity to Christ) is coming to pass in our lives today since God's saving purpose for our lives has already been confirmed in the past. Paul uses God's ordained purpose in the past (our salvation and conformity to Christ) as the reason why God's purpose will be brought to pass in our lives today. In other words, if God promised and confirmed our salvation and Christ-likeness in eternity past, we can be sure that He will start bringing this promise to pass in our lives today. God's purpose can never be thwarted. Never!

Several years ago my wife and I went to Epcot in Orlando Florida and we went on a ride called "Soarin." It was a new animated and

computerized ride that allowed you to have the experience of soaring through the sky. My wife had to coax me to go on it! The ride started moving across the country with all kinds of animations flashing and taking place before our eyes. My feet almost hit the Stature of Liberty!

Friend, put your seatbelts on. We are about to soar back into eternity past! This is because everything mentioned in Romans 8:29-30 is in the past tense and relates to God's primary saving purpose, which is to make us like His Son Jesus Christ.

God's saving purpose is explained in five ways.

1. Confirmation ("Foreknown")

In eternity past, God confirmed that a corporate group of people (1 Pet. 2:9; 5:13), which is the Church (Eph. 1:4), would become His children. This was God's choice and determination (Eph. 1:8-9). There is a certain line of teaching that says God looked down the corridor of time and saw that we would believe in Christ, and therefore He chose us to be part of God's elect, since He knew what we were going to do. However, this verse says "for whom he did foreknow," not "that which he foreknew." In other words, God did not know because of something we did; He knew because of something that He did. What did He do? God chose a corporate group of people to be His children and on this ground He foreknew us to be His child. The word "foreknow" speaks of God's favor and decision to elect a corporate group of people to salvation. This word speaks of a predetermined choice to set His love on us and establish an intimate relationship with us – His Church (Eph. 1:4). All this happened in eternity past.

2. Conformity ("Conformed")

After the confirmation comes the conformity! This is the ultimate purpose of our salvation – conformity to Jesus Christ. Predestination means "to mark out, appoint, or determine beforehand." The corporate group that God chooses, He also destines for His chosen end - which is likeness to His Son! The word "predestined" means that God determined the destiny of an elect body of people for

salvation and to be like His Son. And this destiny was marked out before Creation.

God does not predestinate anyone to hell nor does He desire that people go to hell (2 Pet. 3:9; John 3:16). Let's study our Bibles! God predestines or predetermines that people will be saved and conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. This was God's purpose for our lives! It was His saving purpose for our lives (Rom. 8:29), which He is bringing to pass today (Rom. 8:28), as we become more like Christ. Think of it! What began in eternity past is coming to pass in our lives today. Predestination is best explained as being "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). The ultimate goal of God's predestined purpose for His own people is that they would be made like Jesus Christ. This is the "prize of the upward calling" (Phil. 3:14).

Again, all this happened in eternity past! Furthermore, when Jesus returns in the Rapture (John 14:1-3; 1 Thess. 15:51-52) and all His saints are perfectly made like Christ (in actual experience), it's then that Jesus Christ will be exalted as the "Firstborn among many brethren" or brothers. In other words, the resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ who rose from the dead (1 Cor. 15:22-23) will possess the highest privilege and position (Col. 1:18) over a new race of humanity (Christlike saints), which have been purified from all sin and prepared to live eternally in His presence. What a glorious day and destiny awaits us!

3. Calling ("called")

Once again, this points to God's predetermined call or choice in eternity past to bring an elect group of people to salvation. It's God who made the decision to call and save a corporate group of people (2 Thess. 2:13; Eph. 1:4-5), or body of believers, and determine their salvation and conformity to Christ. Election always occurs within the parameters of God's corporate purpose and allows God's elective purposes to be open and enjoyed by all (Rev. 22:17).

"He called me long before I heard,
Before my sinful heart was stirred,

But when I took Him at His word,
Forgiv'n, He lifted me.

From sinking sand He lifted me,
With tender hand He lifted me;
From shades of night to plains of light,
Oh, praise His Name, He lifted me!"

God's initial call for our salvation happened in eternity past.

4. Clearing ("justified")

Our past and future sins are taken away forever and we are cleared of all our guilty charges before God and declared legally righteous in God's holy presence (Rom. 5:9). All this happened in eternity past!

Friend, our salvation begins and ends with God. Salvation is of the Lord (compare Jonah 2:9). God gets all of the credit and all of the glory for our salvation (1 Cor.1:29, 31). Man cannot boast (Eph.2:8-9) and say, "Look what I have done!" No, salvation is "OF GOD" (1 Cor.1:30; John 1:13). We don't thank ourselves, but we say, "THANK YOU LORD FOR SAVING MY SOUL!" God does all the saving. Of course, this does not take away man's responsibility. Man must do the believing (John 3:16-18; Acts 16:31) and man is blamed for not doing so (2 Thess.2:10-12; John 5:40; compare Matthew 23:37), but God and God alone must do the saving.

5. Christlikeness ("glorified")

Glorification refers to the time when we will receive our new glorified bodies. It's that joyous moment when the Church will become just like Jesus Christ, morally and spiritually, in our new bodies. To be glorified is another way of saying that God's children will be "conformed" (Rom. 8:29) to His Son; which is God's ultimate saving purpose for our lives. No longer will we "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23 – the moral glory of God).

Paul writes about all of these blessing in the past tense! He is saying that all of these salvation blessings have already happened from God's perspective and in God's mind! All this happened in eternity

past. Our destiny to be conformed to the image of God's Son was confirmed in eternity past and is slowly coming to pass today (Rom. 8:28). But there is coming a glorious day when we will be exactly like Jesus Christ in moral virtues and practice. We will one day be like Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2).

Ray Stedman said:

"We are being prepared for something -- we can't really tell what it is, specifically, but we are getting ready for something. And one of these days, at the end of our lives, if not before, we will step out of time into an incredible experience of glory, something that begs description -- a glory that Christ himself shares, and that we all shall share with him."

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

God decrees our salvation and Christlikeness in the past and you will note that no one will be lost in the process of bringing all this glorious transaction to pass! Our salvation was sealed, secured, and signed as a done deal in the past! So here is the point. God never moves without purpose or plan. And His plan in eternity past was to save us and make us into the likeness of His Son. Beloved, what God determined in the past, will come to fruition in the present. There is an unbreakable chain that extends from eternity past to eternity present. No link can be broken! This is why we can know that "all things" (Rom. 8:28), or all the events of our lives, are working together to bring God's grand purpose to pass, which is to conform us to the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. We can KNOW that God is bringing His purpose to pass which He has ordained in eternity past.

Of course, Romans 8:28 does not answer all our questions. Why does a tornado destroy one house and leave another one untouched? Romans 8:28 does not give us all the answers why God allows certain events to take place in our lives. Friend, we must stop trying to explain the unexplainable! We simply must be like little children looking into the face of an infinitely wise Father. We don't

always know all the reasons and have all the answers why God allows certain events to come into our lives, but Romans 8:28 reminds us that God knows what He is doing, and that He is using all the events of our lives to bring us closer to Him and conform us to the likeness of His Son.

Let us never forget that God's purpose in Romans 8:28:

- Includes everything ("all things")
- Connects everything ("work together")
- Gives perspective on everything ("for good").

When Elisabeth Elliot received news that her missionary husband had been martyred by the Auca Indians in Ecuador, she was shaken, but not to the point of despair. She had appropriated the truths of the Bible and was walking in daily fellowship with the Lord. She also believed that her Heavenly Father had permitted this seeming tragedy for some good and greater purpose. The confidence she had in the all-wise God enabled her to write a letter to a friend, saying, "Only in acceptance lies peace -- not in forgetting nor in resignation nor in busyness. His will is good and acceptable and perfect (Rom. 12:2)."

Romans 8:28

"And we **know** (unmistakable conviction) that **all things** (unlimited course) **work together** (unbreakable connection) **for good** (unchanging cause) to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

To this we say, amen!