

I. Safe In God's Hands – a review

A. I want to begin by reminding you that Romans 8 does not stand alone. It is a continuation of what God has been saying from the beginning of Romans about sin, judgment, justification, sanctification, and our need for God's empowerment and assistance to live the Christian life.

1. Paul begins Romans 8 with an emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life – for the indwelling Spirit is the primary way God empowers and assists us with living the Christian life.
2. Paul then talks about the role of the believer in response to the role of the Holy Spirit, and he says that suffering with Christ is the natural result of being led by the Spirit and a condition of being glorified with Christ.
3. While talking about suffering with Christ, Paul begins to emphasize the fact that in spite of any pain and loss experienced in this life, no one can take away God's enduring presence, or His great love, or the inheritance and eternal glory He has for us.
4. Therefore, though the pain is real, it is temporary, and though the losses may be great, they are losses confined to life on this earth. Therefore, the pain and losses are insignificant when compared to lives redeemed, spiritual growth gained, and eternal glory.
5. Jesus addressed this comparison of temporary treasures to eternal treasures when He told His disciples, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!" (Luke 12:4-5)
6. In other words, wisdom says to value that which lasts forever over that which is temporary. And I am certain none of us will regret suffering with Christ when we finally hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).
7. Therefore, like Christ and that great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, I encourage each of us to trust God and treasure the eternal so much that no matter how great the pain and loss we experience in suffering with Christ, we will deem it insignificant compared to the eternal glory, honor, and treasure that is to follow.

B. From here, Paul moves on to several more examples that show just how safe we are in God's hands in spite of our earthly circumstances.

II. Safe in God's hands – The Holy Spirit prays for us

- A. Romans 8:26-27 . . . In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings (*i.e., to long for something so as to earnestly and intently strive after it, and groan in doing so*) too deep for words; [27] and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
1. Paul begins vs 26 with the words, "In the same way," which is a reference back to the fact that in spite of the pain and loss we experience in this life by suffering with Christ, God protects our eternal treasures – such as our shared inheritance with Christ and our glorification with Christ. Therefore, in the same way God protects what is eternally valuable to us, the Holy Spirit works to keep us safe by helping us pray when, in the midst of suffering, we don't know what to ask or how to say what we are thinking and feeling in a way that remains within the boundaries of God's will.
 2. For an example of how difficult it is to pray within God's will when faced with suffering, consider Jesus, who the night before He was crucified, anguished in prayer in Gethsemane. Now if praying in the face of suffering was so intense and apparently difficult for Him, surely we, who have yet to rise to His level of faith and spiritual maturity will find it hard to know what to pray when faced with situations of suffering.
 3. For example, do we pray for comfort and encouragement, or for courage to forge ahead even if it feels like we are going it alone? Do we pray for protection from injustice and for release from mistreatment and torture? Or do we pray for strength to endure and to remain faithful, even unto death? Do we, like Hezekiah, plead for longer life, or do we rest in God's decision that this is the end of life for us? When suffering painful persecution or even torture, do we pray to be bold and courageous, or pray for the release of a quick death? Do we plead with God to keep us alive for the children's sake or the ministry's sake, or do we trust Him to care for our children and fulfill the ministry, knowing He can do it far better than we can? What do we pray?
 4. Add to this the reality that we are at different levels of faith and spiritual maturity. After all, the church is made of up new Christians, older, mature Christians, and everyone in between.
 - a. It is probable that many of the older, mature Christians will know how to discern the will of God in the face of suffering, and pray accordingly.

- C. To summarize these two verses: we know God wills for us to willingly suffer with Christ so that we can be glorified with Christ. And yet, suffering with Christ includes significant pain and loss, here and now, which will surely drive us to prayer. However, we may not know what we should pray. Therefore, God has given the Holy Spirit the task of praying for us in ways that fully and accurately expresses our thoughts and longings while remaining within the boundaries of God's will.

III. Safe in God's hands – God works all things out for good

- A. Romans 8:28 . . . And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

- 1. We often use this verses as if it is a promise from God that stands alone and can therefore be applied to all Christians in all situations. And that is a good use of this verse. However, today I want us to consider this promise in light of its context.

- a. The "And we know" words point back to knowing it is God's will that we suffer with Christ, that the leading of the Holy Spirit will result in suffering with Christ, and that the Holy Spirit prays for us when the suffering leaves us unsure of what to pray.
- b. But the "And we know" words also point forward to the fact that even though those who are persecuting us are intending to hurt us for the purpose of stopping us from being salt and light in the world, God is at work fulfilling His purposes.
- c. And God's purpose spoken of here is that of using the evil intentions of our persecutors and the specifics of our suffering to bring about a great good – a good that honors Him, furthers the spread of the gospel, builds His kingdom, add converts to the church, and gives us a reason to look back with joy that we could serve God by suffering with Christ.

- B. However, this promise of causing all things to work together for good comes with two conditions.

- 1. First, God does this for those who love Him. This condition should not surprise us, because Jesus made it clear that the first and foremost commandment is that we are to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength (Mark 12:30).

- a. Jesus also made it clear that love for God and obedience to God are inseparable, or in other words, they go hand-in-hand. And

to this, Jesus added, that loving and obeying God result in being loved by God, being indwelt by God, and enjoying communion with God (John 14:15, 21,23).

- b. The truth stated in these scriptures and their relationship to Romans 8:28 follows this logical progression. If we love God above all else, that love will compel us to willingly obey God. Those who obey God (*i.e., live according to what they know about God*) are justified by God (Romans 2:4-11,13). Those who are justified by God are given the Holy Spirit to empower and assist them in living a godly life and to lead them in the way of God (Romans 8:1-4, 12-14). Those who are led by the Holy Spirit will be led into situations where they will suffer with Christ (Romans 8:17). And because they love God and are suffering with Christ because of that love, God will not only glorify them one day in the future, He will cause all things to work together for good, here and now.
 - c. The Psalmist said it this way, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Psalm 84:11).
 - d. And James put it this way, “Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).
2. The second condition to the promise that God causes all things to work together for good is that of being called according to His purpose or plan – a purpose or plan that is larger in space and time than each of us individually, and yet it includes each one of us in very specific ways.
- a. God’s universal purpose for all mankind is to save us from our sin, reconcile us to Himself, and bring us into intimate fellowship with Him for eternity.
 - b. Of course, God has more purposes or plans than that, but vs 28 is not intended to cover all God’s plans, just those having to do with us repenting and coming to faith in Christ, being justified, given the Holy Spirit, living a life of faithful obedience, being led by the Spirit, suffering with Christ, and ultimately being glorified with Christ.
 - c. In other words, as used in vs 28, to be called according to God’s purpose and to live according to that calling is to be a true child of God, a true believer, or a genuinely born again Christian.

3. Therefore, God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him and genuinely belong to Him.
- C. I want to conclude today's teaching on Romans 8:28 with an example from the Old Testament of someone who experienced this truth. I could use Abraham or Moses or David or Elijah or even Jeremiah, for each of them experienced God's great grace and love in working everything out for good. But today I want to talk about Joseph, the eleventh son of Jacob.
1. Simply stated, Joseph was the favorite son of his father, he was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers, he was falsely accused by his master's wife and imprisoned, and he was finally made Pharaoh's Prime Minister.
 2. Joseph was 17 years old (Genesis 37) when his brothers sold him to slave traders who took him to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard. Imagine having to deal with that challenging change of life circumstances. And given the way you tend to deal with unwanted and unjust suffering now, how would you have handled those circumstances?
 3. During his service to Potiphar, the Lord blessed his work and he served Potiphar with great success. Of course, he was still a slave a long ways from home. However, the time came when Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of making sexual advances toward her, so Potiphar had Joseph thrown into jail. Imagine life getting bad, finding a ray of sunshine in the bad, and then life getting worse.
 4. During his time in jail, God again blessed him so that he was given a position of authority by the chief jailor. Of course, he was still in jail and still a long way from home. During these years in jail he learned that he could interpret people's dreams by the power of God.
 - a. As you recall, Joseph interpreted two dreams, one for Pharaoh's cupbearer and one for Pharaoh's baker. And all he asked of them was to appeal to Pharaoh for his release once they were released from prison.
 - b. And as you may remember, the baker was put to death and cupbearer reinstated, yet he promptly forgot all about Joseph.
 5. Two years later (Genesis 41:1) (*Imagine being used by God in some great way and then being left in your suffering two more years. How would you make sense of that?*), Pharaoh had a dream, and finding no one to interpret it, the cupbearer told Pharaoh about Joseph, who came and interpreted the dream. As a result, Joseph, who was 30

years old at the time, was made Prime Minister of Egypt – second only to Pharaoh himself.

6. Now the point of reviewing this story is to remind you that Joseph suffered unjustly for 13 years – and yet his suffering had a God ordained ultimate purpose he couldn't see.
 - a. In addition, it wasn't until the second seven years – which was the seven years of famine, that he saw and therefore understood and experienced first hand God's purpose of bringing about a great good out of his suffering – a good which saved his family from starving during the famine.
 - (1) Did Joseph suffer unjustly at the hands of evil and angry people for 13 years? Yes. Could he see the end from the beginning? No!
 - (2) Was he safe in God's hands the whole time? Yes!
 - b. And there is something else I want you to see. This experience of suffering helped transform Joseph into a man of great faith, spiritual maturity, and a healthy insight into God's ways, so that he could say to his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive (Genesis 50:20).

IV. Conclusion

- A. God calls us to suffer with Christ, and there is no doubt but that such suffering includes pain and loss that is difficult to endure.
 1. But if we will suffer with Christ, we will one day be glorified with Christ, and on that day, no one will look back with regret.
 2. Yet God does not stop with future blessings, He blesses us and others now, in and through our suffering as a Christian – just like He blessed Joseph and Joseph's family as a result of Joseph's suffering.
- B. Therefore, the vital question today is, "When going through a time of suffering as a Christian, will you put your well-being and the good of all God wants to do through you, in God's hands, and trust Him to bring a great good out of it?"
- C. May we, like so many others before us, place our confidence in the goodness of God and the promise that He causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.