

Security \* Romans 8:28-39

April 10, 2022 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

The passage of Scripture that we're going to look at this morning opens with one of the most famous verses in all of the Bible - Romans 8:28:

"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."

That verse is pretty consistently in the top three, top five Bible verses looked up on online Bible websites and for good reason. It is incredibly encouraging to know that 'in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.'

That means that in every situation, in illness, in trials, even in Ukraine, God is ultimately working for the benefit of His people.

One of the top scholars in the book of Romans, Douglas Moo, writes: "Essentially, it promises that nothing will touch our lives that is not under the control and direction of our loving heavenly Father. Everything we do and say, everything people do to us or say about us, every experience we will ever have – all are sovereignly used by God for our good. We will not always understand how the things we experience work to good, and we certainly will not always enjoy them. But we do know that nothing comes into our lives that God does not allow and use for His own beneficent purposes."<sup>i</sup>

Now that is a very encouraging statement, but it's a very bold one for Douglas Moo to make. Frankly, it was a very bold one for Paul to make in the first place. ALL things work together for good in God's purposes? I can think of some things that don't seem that good. What gives Paul the confidence to say that no matter what happens to us, no matter what situation we find ourselves in, we are secure in God's hands?

Well, as it turns out, the rest of Romans 8 answers that question, and to be honest, these are some of my favourite verses in all of the Bible. I've already told you about the end of Romans 8 and my first experience of depression; this passage of Scripture is actually the very first passage that I ever preached on, in one of Doug Martin's preaching classes (I didn't even look at that one – I shudder to think what it was like) and it is just such a powerful passage with existential implications.

Fan-boying aside, Paul I think lays out for us here three reasons why we are safe in God's hands, even when the world seems to crumble around us. Three reasons why we are safe in God's hands – one theological, one legal and one relational. Paul gives us a theological reason to have confidence when things fall apart, a legal reason to have confidence and a relational reason to have confidence as children of God. So join me in Romans 8, starting in verse 28 and I'll show you the theological reason, the legal reason and the relational reason why we are safe in God's hands. So Romans 8:28.

As we pick it up here, Paul has just been saying how the Holy Spirit prays for us even when we don't know what to pray and then he says, verse 28,

28 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. (Rom 8:28 NIV).

Or, as the New Living Translation puts it –

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (Rom 8:28 NLT).

If we love God and have responded to His call on our lives, then we can have absolute confidence that whatever happens in our lives, God is ultimately using it for our eternal wellbeing. God takes whatever life throws our way and brings it together in a way that accomplishes His good and perfect will and is ultimately for our benefit.

And we know that because of what Paul says next.

Verse 29 -

29 For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

30 And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

This is the theological reason for confidence that all things work together for good. If we belong to God, our security is ensured. Over the years, Christians have called this the ‘golden chain of salvation’ and you can see how it got that name. ‘Those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become like Christ. And those whom we predestined, He called. And those whom He called He justified. And those whom He justified He will glorify.’

Paul describes the Christian life as a series of interconnected steps, one step leading to the next. Before the beginning of the world, God knew His people and so He predestined them to become His children. Having predestined them, that is, having set into motion a plan to transform them from sinners to saints, He called them. And those whom He called, they answered with faith, and so they were justified. They were made right with God. And if they’ve been justified then they will be glorified, transformed forever into heavenly bodies free forever from sickness and sin.

Some people call that the ‘golden chain of salvation;’ I think you’d probably do well to call it the golden escalator of grace. Because of God’s sovereign control over all things, once you get onto this escalator, there’s no turning back. The escalator of grace is carrying you irresistibly upwards, through whatever comes your way, to the ultimate destination of eternity with God in a glorified body. Once you’re on the escalator, nothing can keep you from reaching the top.

This is the theological reason that we can be sure that all things work together for good – because of God’s sovereign call, we are secure in His hands.

Now I know that some people get uncomfortable with the idea of predestination; I mean, I used to have serious reservations about it because it seemed to override, at least to some degree, our own human will. Two thoughts though have changed my mind on it. First is the reality that if God left it up to us, none of us would ever get on the escalator. Remember Romans 8, without the Spirit it is impossible to please God? Remember Romans 3, no one seeks after God, not even one. Unless God graciously intervened and said ‘Graham, you’re coming up,’ then I’d be lost. We’d all be lost.’ So that’s the one thought, our utter need for someone to step in and save us from our own sinfulness. Second is this, I

remember in university having this conversation with a girl whose heart was just full of God, and I said 'I don't know if I like this whole predestination idea because why can't we choose for ourselves?' and she said 'ok but look at the flip side. If it depends on us, it can fail. The chain could come apart. But if it's all because of God, and it's all in His hands, then our security is sure both here and now.' We are held safe in the hands of the God who has called us and claimed us as His own.

That's the theological reason that we can be sure that all things work together for good – because of God's sovereign call, we are safe in His hands.

That's the theological reason; let's move on to the legal one.

Now Paul, you'll remember, was an expert in the Law. He had one of the sharpest legal minds of his time and he turns that mind to consider the possibility that God might go back on His promises. The Golden Chain, the Golden Escalator only holds if God holds it together; is there any reason why God would cease to do so? Could God arbitrarily decide to disqualify us and thus open us up to things that don't 'work together for good'?

Well, let's see -

31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

The idea that God would give up on us is utterly ridiculous. God has already demonstrated His unfathomable love for us in that He has already given up His own Son for us. While we were still sinners arrayed against Him, God graciously rescued us from ourselves; why then would God go back on that and give up on us? He wouldn't. God is for us. God is in our corner. God is utterly committed to our best interests as His people and His children.

And in the next few verses, Paul unpacks that with a series of rhetorical questions.

33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Right? There is no higher court to go to than God. And God has already acquitted us of all wrongdoing and determined that we should be justified by grace through faith in Jesus. If God has made us right with Him, no one can accuse us of anything that would change our legal status as 'justified people.'

34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Who is there that could level a charge against us? I mean, just on a human level, all of us are equally sinners before God so there's no one who can cast the first stone. But even beyond that, would Jesus bring a charge against us? I mean, we weren't there but we kinda were when He was nailed to that Cross. It was my sin that held Him there. Might He decide to condemn me because of it?

No, of course not; in dying, He was choosing to die for undeserving sinners like us. He laid down His life for us, and if that's not enough to convince us of His commitment to us, Paul reminds us, not only that,

He was raised and then set Himself up at the right hand of God to intercede for us day by day, 24/7, 365 days a year. He is NOT GOING TO CONDEMN US!

God has demonstrated His utter commitment to us in this – He has paid the price and acquitted us of all our sin. No higher court exists to reverse that ruling; the judge of the whole earth looked at you, sin and all, then looked at Jesus who paid for that sin and then looked back at you and declared ‘not guilty.’ We know that all things work together for good because of this ruling. God will not arbitrarily throw our offences back in our face; He will not allow any other person to jeopardize our freedom; God’s acquittal means that we are secure in His hands.

That’s the legal reason for confidence; God is for us and His acquittal means that we are safe in His hands. Finally, there’s the relational reason. And this, to me, is the most compelling of all.

Paul gets right down to it, because he knows that troubles happen in our lives; he knows that tragedy intervenes sometimes to threaten our security as children of God and so he asks one last question.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Paul recognizes that life is not all sunshine and rainbows. He quotes Psalm 44 to bring out the point that as children of God, we often face even greater trouble because we don’t belong in this world. We belong to the Lord and sometimes the world doesn’t like us because of that.

But look at what Paul says.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ...

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Now I’ll let you in on a little secret – one of the only things I remember about my very first sermon on this passage comes from this verse. In my defense it was more than fifteen years ago, but I remember this.

When I lived in France, the way they emphasized things was to put ‘hyper’ in front of a word. We might say ‘those shoes are SUPER cool;’ they would say ‘those shoes are HYPER cool.’ Even we use that in English – hyperactive, hypertension. You know who else uses ‘hyper’? Paul. Right here. He says ‘In all things’ we ‘hyper’ triumph because of Christ’s love for us.

It’s a hard thing to bring into English and that’s where the conqueror language comes in, but Paul uses a verb here and says ‘we don’t just triumph over these things (famine and nakedness and danger and sword), we hyper-triumph over them’ because of God’s love for us. We know that in God’s sovereign care, ‘all things work together for good’ because God’s love for us causes us to hyper-triumph over them.’ God’s love takes every trial for uses it for our spiritual benefit.

And then He goes on to lay out just how unstoppable God’s love is:

38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,  
39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's the relational reason why we believe that all things work for our benefit – because there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Look at this list. Neither life nor death. Nor angels, nor rulers. My first Bible, the Living Bible, put it like this – 'The angels won't and all the powers of Hell itself cannot keep God's love away.' Nor things present, nor things to come – again, the Living Bible says – 'Our fears for today, our worries about tomorrow' – they can't separate us from God's love – nor height nor depth – nor anything else in all creation. It's like Paul is trying to enumerate every possible thing that could conceivably separate us from God's love BUT CAN'T and then he says 'forget it. NOTHING in all of Creation can separate us from the love of God.' He wants us to see that there is NOTHING that can keep us apart from God's love.

John Stott writes: "This is the love of God which was supremely displayed in the cross (5:8; 8:32, 37), which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (5:5), which has drawn out from us our responsive love (8:28), and which in its essential steadfastness will never let us go, since it is committed to bringing us safe home to glory in the end (8:35, 39). Our confidence is not in our love for him, which is frail, fickle and faltering, but in his love for us, which is steadfast, faithful and persevering."<sup>ii</sup>

That's the relational reason we have to be confident that all things work together for our benefit; nothing can separate us from God's love and because God's love will always work for our good, we can be sure that we are safe in His hands.

God's call, acquittal and love mean that we are safe and secure in His hands.

Now that being said, let's bring this all back around to the beginning. There are some really wonderful things going on in our lives right now, but there are some pretty crummy ones too. Why should we believe that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him?

Well, first, He's called us. If you are here and you are listening to learn, then I think it's safe to say that God has called you. Whether you've responded yet or not (and I would encourage TO respond), you are His child. That means that you are on the golden escalator of grace. No one and no-thing can knock you off it. You've been called and justified and glorified and there is nothing that will stop you from receiving the eternal reward that God has promised. Nothing. Trials may refine us, they may redirect us, but they will never prevent us from entering into the eternal rest that God has secured for us. Have confidence, knowing that God has called you.

Second, be confident, knowing that God has acquitted you. Two weeks ago, when I was away with COVID, I really wanted to be here with you to sing 'No condemnation now I dread/Jesus and all in Him is mine.' Cause that's it! There is no more condemnation for us because Jesus has dealt with our sin.

God doesn't have some secret file hidden away with a big list of all your sins that He's going to whip out at some arbitrary time and say 'Ha, ha, got you! You're condemned!' No, He's thrown those sins into the depths of the sea, burned them up in the hottest fire, wiped the slate clean, blotted them out, covered them over by the blood of Christ. Jesus went to the Cross for the express purpose of dealing

with your sin, paying back the debt, leaving them in the past, reconciling you to God. He went to the Cross to do that and then what did He say?

It is finished. God has acquitted you. Don't go on accusing yourself. Don't let Satan accuse you. Jesus will not throw your sins in your face; He died to deal with them. More than that He is raised and seated at the right hand of God to intercede for us.

When things go wrong, it is not God punishing us for our sin; He may discipline us in order to refine us, but even that is God working for good. We can have confidence knowing that God has acquitted us.

And finally, third, be confident knowing that God loves you. Nothing can separate you from the love of God. What more can I say? I mean, this is the verse that got me through my first experience with clinical depression. This verse was the basis for the first song I ever wrote. This verse was the verse my very first sermon was based on. This truth is foundational in my life and I hope that it will be in yours as well.

Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or sword? Does God let some things slip through that are not 'for our good'? No, in all things, we hyper-triumph, we super-prevail because of God's love for us. Let that fill your heart. Let that buoy your spirit. You are loved with the same love that brought Jesus back to life. Live in it. Cling to it. Walk in it.

God is for you. Who can be against you? There is nothing that will separate you from the love of God. Know that in all things, you are secure in His hands.

#### BENEDICTION

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

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<sup>i</sup> Douglas Moo, *Romans*, (NIVAC) 278.

<sup>ii</sup> John Stott, *Romans* (Bible Speaks Today), OliveTree digital, on Romans 8:31.