

Introduction

1. Here is one of the most well known texts for believers. It has long been considered a soft pillow on which to rest a weary head. Thank God for its wonderful message.
2. What is not understood, however, is that the verse actually is part of a larger context on the subject of suffering. This theme is struck a number of times in the chapter (cf. vv. 18, 22). In the midst of this, the mysterious work of the Spirit of God is made known (v. 26).
3. So, what does the text teach? Simply put it is this: God holds the key to the unknown experiences of our (the true child of God) lives. It is in knowing this that the believing heart is made glad. To support this premise, seven major facets of the verse are employed. They enunciate that God's work is:

1. KNOWN

This is a great feature for the child of God. While there are many things in one's life which are hidden, it is a true concept to say "we know" in thinking of God's activity. Probably this is based on two factors: a. The Old Testament (e.g. story of Joseph in Gen. 37 ff; Saul in 1 Sam. 16:12 ff. in connection with David) and b. Paul's own experiences which may well have been known by the Romans (2 Cor. 3:16-33). The verb employed here is used 30 times in the epistles, five of which are in Romans (2:2; 3:19; 7:14; 8:26, 28). The current scene is one of doubt and question. God's Word responds with certainty and assurance to the heart of faith.

2. INCLUSIVE

Not one single thread of our lives ever slips through His fingers. The phrase "all things" must be taken in its widest sense (cf. 1 Cor. 2:15; Eph. 1:10; Col. 1:20). While many will take the wide view of things, they shrink from the more narrow view of items. But here, nothing is outside the care of God. The specific of the context is suffering and affliction (8:18, 38, 39). No wonder Paul

could write about his total experience as that in which he had learned contentment (Phil. 4:11).

3. HARMONIZED

The Greek verb used here includes two items: a preposition meaning "with" or "together" and the verb for "work." Being in the present tense, Paul affirms a most wonderful truth: nothing is by accident. God is Himself working in every event of our lives. He is seeing to it that there is a cooperation to produce a certain desired result. It must have been David's understanding of this which withheld his sword from Saul (1 Sam. 24, 26). For those who consider God as inactive, this single verb gives a resounding response to the contrary.

4. BENEFICIENT

The preposition employed here suggests action. It indicates direction. The adjective is anarthrous, hence the concept here is "goodness" in the abstract. It is true that not all things are good in themselves. Since many things are intrinsically evil, evil can never be good. But God is able to make the things of this world "work together" towards good. At least in two ways He can accomplish His goals: a. He can use all things to be means to His end; b. He can adjust circumstances to His purpose. Above and beyond all of this is that there is the mysterious and the unknown, but we do know the God who is working it all out. That is sufficient! It is thus that Paul teaches here the need to see things from God's vantage point. This translates much of life into the future (2 Cor. 4:17).

5. RESTRICTED

What is so often missed with this verse is yet so bold in the text. The substantive participle is used to limit this verse to those who practice loving God (present tense). Furthermore, in the word order of the verse, this verb is in the emphatic position. This is the subjective response to God. It is emotional. Those who love Him are quick to grasp deeper meanings to events of life (1 John 4:19). So Romans 8:28 is not for all, but the few!

6. NARROWED

Here is an appositional phrase. It is a passive verbal, but really adjectival in sense. It further describes those who are involved in the teaching of this verse. God narrows the application of this text. This word "called" is like the terms "saints, faithful." It refers to those who heard the summons of God and responded (1 Cor. 1:9, 24; 1 Pet. 2:9). It is a technical word and part of a string of others which form a chain which cannot be broken (vv. 29, 30). While this is to many an abrasive word, it is the source of comfort to the believer. God's choice of the sinner precedes the sinner's choice of God (1 John 4:19). We are not always conscious of this fact, but it is nonetheless true. Not one link in salvation is forged by man (cf. v. 30). Salvation is of the Lord (Psa. 3:8; Jonah 2:9). Therefore, it is for the "called" that this verse must find benefit, but to none other.

7. PURPOSED

The word "purpose" is found 12 times in the New Testament. The ending of the word marks it as one of action. Motion is patent in the meaning. There is no independent freedom of choice, but God's divine direction is implied (cf. 9:11; Eph. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:9). God has a decree which is free and that is intended to bring His own right into glory and conformity to Christ (vv. 29, 30). His purpose will never fail.

Conclusion When any believer sees things as God sees them, then he realizes that Romans 8:28 is a vital ingredient of salvation. Life is not haphazard and full of inequities, but directed to glorify the Lord and His purpose. Written boldly over every incident of the believer's life is "designed by God." Praise be unto HIM.