**Text**: Romans 8:28-30 (mostly 28)

**Title:** Working for Good

**Truth**: God works all things together for good to the believer.

**Date/Location**: Sunday November 17, 2013 at FBC

Introduction

A lot of people are busy working for good causes today, but God is working for a far greater good.

I. What or Who Works the Good?

A. Varied Translations

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” (NKJV)

There are a few Greek manuscripts that have it a bit different:

“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. (NIV)

In the end, the difference in meaning is not much. This is another example of how God has preserved the text of His Word through the generations so that we have an accurate translation of them today.

B. More importantly, it is not the “all things” that do the work, despite the watered-down version of this truth that has made it into our vernacular. You’ve probably heard someone say, or said it yourself, “everything will work out ok…” That statement, apart from God and the other qualifications in the passage, is not true! It sounds nice and comforting, but not everything will turn out ok. Stage 4 cancer may not turn out OK, your child’s wayward ways may not turn out OK when they turn 18, and your job may not turn out OK.

C. It is GOD who does the work. God has providentially, sovereignly arranged all circumstances according to His unlimited knowledge and wisdom. God is weaving something together out of all these things for the benefit of believers. See Romans 11:33-36.

II. Who Benefits from the Good?

A. The benefits come to believers only. If we translated the verse literally, we would see this more clearly: “For we know that, for *the benefit of* those who love God, all things work together for good, for *the benefit of* those who have been called according to *God’s* purpose.” The words “for those who love God” are emphasized by their placement toward the front of the verse.

1. The benefits are not promised to those who do not believe or will not believe. God is still good to such people because of His benevolent kindness (Matt. 5:45), but it is not true that He will cause all things to work out for the ultimate benefit of unbelievers. To the contrary, God ensures that judgment will be carried out against unbelievers.

2. There is a question as to whether the elect, who are not yet saved but who eventually will be saved, are subject to the beneficial work of God in this regard. Does God work for the good of those unbelievers who will eventually become believers? This verse doesn’t say so because it limits it to those who love God and who are called. I believe God can and does use circumstances to direct his chosen ones to faith, but that is not promised in 8:28 in a blanket way.

B. Two-Fold Description of Believers

1. Believers love God. I mentioned this last week from Deut. 6:4-5 and Matt. 22:37-40. We do so because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). We do so in a way that is higher than all other loves and makes those other loves dim in comparison.

We do not love money (1 Timothy 6:10) or the world (1 John 2:15) or sleep (Prov. 20:13) more than God. We do not love our children or spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend more than God. We do not love our hobbies more than God. In fact, our love for God outshines all of these by orders of magnitude. We sacrificially give of ourselves to God. We believe God. We work for God. We live for God.

2. Believers are called according to God’s purpose.

i. God’s beneficial work is toward those who are “called.” To be “called” in this verse means to have been saved.

ii. Theologians speak of two kinds of calling of God. “Many are called, but few chosen” (Matthew 22:14). The first is the *general call*. Example: proclamation of the truth about Jesus through radio, bulk mail, or in a church setting on Sunday morning is how the general call of the gospel goes out. It is widely distributed, like a public announcement.

iii. The other kind of call is the specific or *effectual call*. It accompanies regeneration and justification and initial Holy Spirit indwelling and Spirit baptism all the other things that happen to a person at the moment of salvation. When you hear gospel preaching and subsequently feel like God is sending you a private instant message about your need to respond to Christ, and you know that you must respond in faith, and you do so, *that* is the effectual call. God draws you to Himself through Jesus Christ and you do not resist but rather respond.

III. How Does God Work the Good?

A. God does this through “all things.”

God uses every event, trial, disaster, test, and even sin in His plan in a way that works a benefit for a certain group of people.

God is working in and with and through the normal things that happen on a daily basis. It is not a miraculous working because God is not intervening in a direct way, but rather he Works indirectly through the myriad of events to accomplish His purpose.

B. Examples of “all things” and how God can use them

1. The argument you just had in your family this morning.

🡺 To develop patience; obedience to Eph. 4:31-32. You can see such negative experiences as character-developing and character-testing.

2. The rough patch your marriage is going through.

🡺 To see if you are living Eph. 5:22-33 and 1 Peter 3:1-7.

3. The challenge of disciplining the kids.

🡺 To strengthen your love for them when the recipients don’t appreciate that love.

4. The arthritis or other old-age problems that make it hard to do things.

🡺 To remind you of your dependence upon God and to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12).

5. The mocking of unbelievers.

🡺 To develop the character of Christ Who did not revile back, did not threaten, but entrusted Himself to the just Judge (1 Peter 2:23).

6. The difficult boss at work.

🡺 See how you are doing with submission to authority in your life.

These are just some of the ways that God can use such situations, and there are tons more than I can think of or understand.

III. What is the Nature of the Good?

Another way of asking this is to ask what is God’s purpose in His work, that is, what is he trying to accomplish? I see two main ideas given in this passage.

A. Likeness to Jesus Christ. God is working to “conform you to the image of His Son.” This means to be sanctified, to have more and more sin removed and more and more holiness imparted. Look at Jesus’ words and behavior and teaching in the gospels—and in the later New Testament books—and you will see what your life is destined to be like. Examples: humility, kindness, compassion for souls, truth. We are saved not only *from* sin, but also *to* holiness. We have a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1) in which we should walk worthy (Eph. 4:1).

B. Glorification. God is working through salvation to glorify you. Glorification is the completion of the sanctification process at which point sin will be removed completely, and you will be positively holy. See 1 John 3:2.

Conclusion

We can have absolute confidence in the sovereignty of God. We have the Biblical authority to say that God does work all things together for the good of believers. His work is purposeful and directed toward the goal of Christ-likeness and glorification of the believer.

“We know” is how the verse opens. We know these things, not only because Romans 8:28 says them, but because we know through the rest of Scripture the loving God and the nature of God’s love. It will not harm those whom He loves, but it cares for them.

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