

## Meditation on Romans 8:28

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*"... in everything, as we know, [the Spirit] co-operates for good with those who love God and are called according to his purpose.*

*... With all this in mind, what are we to say? If God is on our side, who is against us? He did not spare his own Son, but surrendered him for us all; and with this gift how can he fail to lavish upon us all he has to give? Who will be the accuser of God's chosen ones? It is God who pronounces acquittal; then who can condemn? It is Christ-- Christ who died, and more than that, was raised from the dead-- who is at God's right hand, and indeed pleads our cause.*

*Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, peril, or the sword? 'We are being done to death for thy sake all day long' as Scripture says; 'we have been treated like sheep for slaughter'-- and yet, in spite of all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us.*

*For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths-- nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." -- Romans 8:28, 31-39 (New English Bible)*

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In my Sunday School class last week we discussed Chapter 8 of Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.

This chapter is full of powerful words of hope. It begins with:

"There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ...we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.... provided that we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us!"

Then follows a puzzling verse, which in the King James Version reads:

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

Or, as J.B. Phillip's translation puts it, "Moreover, we know that to those who love God, who are called according to his plan, everything that happens fits into a pattern for good."

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God..." If only we did know this! If only for the Christian things will just work out for the best on their own!

Is this your experience? Is it what you observe happening to others? Does the Christian experience only good things in life? In your experience, and those of your Christian friends and relatives, do "...all things work together for good to them that love God..."?

Must we infer that, if not all things work together for good for someone, therefore it follows that he or she doesn't love God? Do we add to the burden of the young couple who have given birth to a mentally handicapped child, by suggesting that their love of God was not strong and sincere enough, since not all things did work together for good in their case?

Is so-called "Christian Science" right when it says that evil is not real and doesn't exist?

I, for one, think not!

If we honestly observe life in this world, we see that not all things work together for good to those that love God. Death of a child, sickness, birth of a severely handicapped child, accidents that kill or maim children or other loved ones... A young father in our congregation died from a brain tumor, leaving a wife without her husband and four young children without a father.

Surely these are not good things, but evil things. Can Paul really say otherwise?

Well, if we look at some other translations, we find an important difference. While the New Revised Standard Version (the "revised revised standard

version") follows the KJV here, listen to some of the others:

NIV: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him...."

RSV: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him...."

NEB: "In everything, as we know, he [the Spirit] cooperates for good with those who love God...."

These translations, it seems to me, correspond to human experience. Bad things do happen to people who love God! (Why this is so, if God is truly all-powerful and could prevent it, is a mystery to me.)

But in the midst of these bad things that happen to those who love God, God remains present with them and continues to work for their good. It is often in the things and times which seem most to deny his goodness that he is found to be most present, helping to bear the burdens.

When left to our own resources, suffering is more likely to harden and to make us bitter.

But to those who love God, while they are not immune or guarded from the evil of this world-- from the many sources of pain and suffering-- God is able to take that pain and suffering and to work for some good, some profit out of it.

This doesn't mean that things work out so that those who love God preserve their comfort and convenience. Rather, this work on God's part allows these difficult experiences to assist in their salvation, and the salvation of those near to them.

We shouldn't welcome suffering--

Paul, earlier in Romans, after explaining that our sin provides an opportunity to receive God's grace, asks the question, "What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" and then immediately answers his own question: "By no means!"

Suffering shouldn't be welcomed in order that God can work for good in that suffering. "By no means!" Suffering is evil and to be avoided-- God's love for us is such that he suffers also in our suffering.

The evil things we suffer remain evil, but even though bad in themselves, they have lost the power to defeat us, because of God's suffering with us, and working for good for us.

Paul says, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us!"

And, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? NO! In all these things we are conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!"

I'd like to close with Psalms 3, as paraphrased in the book *Psalms/Now*, by Leslie Brandt:

*O God, the obstacles that confront me today are so many!  
And even as they press in upon me, there are people about me  
who laugh at my childlike dependence on You.  
They claim that my faith is futile, that God is not interested in  
my petty problems.*

*But, God, You have surrounded me with Your love.  
You envelop me with concern and undergird me with grace.  
When I reach out for You, You are close enough to hear and to  
respond.*

*Whether I am awake or asleep, You are near to me and will  
watch over me.  
I do not have to be afraid of these problems that assail me.  
The conflicts of my life will not separate me from You.*

*I constantly seek Your deliverance from all that hurts or hinders.  
You are able to rid my life of everything that may threaten my  
relationship to You.  
You will, in Your own good time, set me free from every human  
fault and frailty.  
But even while I seek Your ultimate deliverance, help me to sense  
Your presence and power in the midst of my many conflicts.*