**Romans 8:28-30** August 13, 2017

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*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. 29For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**The Confident Life**

Confidence, it makes an amazing difference. Two people playing a piano recital piece know it equally well in a technical way, but the confident one will play better. She plays for the enjoyment of the listeners. The less confident one, in a sense, plays worried.

Watch sports and see the difference confidence makes, not just in individuals, but in entire teams of men. Even the best players on the planet are more confident in front of their own fans, and less confident in front of the opposition’s fans. It is not that somehow players’ talents change week to week. It is simply that their psyche, their feelings change depending on the support or opposition of the crowd.

What frail creatures we are that we are willing to walk among lions one day, and afraid of our own shadows the next. What frail creatures we are that confidence or lack of confidence completely changes how we feel about life. Confidence determines whether we are defiant or depressed. And we can flip-flop on a single comment, a single look!

In the first half of the book of Romans, more than any other place in the Bible, God’s plan of salvation is systematically laid out. Chapter eight, this chapter, is the conclusion to that explanation. If you have an NIV Bible, you can see the heading, and it says “More Than Conquerors!” That drips with confidence, doesn’t it?

If there were an appropriate song from the secular world to match this portion of God’s Word, it might be that often sung 70’s song, “We Are the Champions.” At first blush that doesn’t sound very Christian. But the heading “More Than Conquerors” is a quote straight from the text. God wants us to have the confidence of conquerors. Not the false confidence of pre-game trash talk, but real confidence based on real reasons.

**I. Reasons for Confidence**

The real reasons for confidence is stated in the first verse of our reading: ***“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*** First, the almighty God works for our good, always, and second, he had it planned long ago.

You love God. You are here this morning, not sleeping in, not out shopping, not attending athletics. The great news is that, ***“In all things God works for the good of those who love him.”***

But what about when I don’t love God? When I begrudge him my time, my money? What about when my eyes linger where they ought not, when my words tear other people down, when I think that God’s rules for life and lifestyle are unloving and closed-minded. Clearly at those moments I don’t love God; I am sinning! Does he stop working for my good?

Breaking God’s will should cause us fear, it should make us uneasy. It should lead us back to God in repentance. But Christians breathe a sigh of relief when they remember that our love for God never was the reason for him loving us! Most people don’t get that.

God works out all things “for” those who love him, not “because” they love him. Which sounds like I’m playing a game with words, but it is an important reminder that the whole salvation thing did not start in us. Our love for God is not the cause, but the effect of being saved. We love him because he first loved us. God’s faithful love is the bedrock upon which we children of God endeavor to build our own little Lego-monuments of love to him.

An even better reason for our confidence is that, ***“We know that in all things God works for the good of those… who have been called according to his purpose.”*** We can be confident that God will always work for our good because it is God’s plan, and always has been!

What a wonderful plan that God would save us by taking upon himself the limitations of human flesh, and then to suffer the humiliation of being rejected, and then to suffer the punishment of other people’s sins.

But listen, it goes farther than that. Not only did God do a great and mighty thing for us, in sending Jesus to save us, but he also took care of all the details. We tend to be big-picture people *or* detail people. God is both.

God not only did the amazing huge work of saving us, he took care of all the details, too. ***“For those God foreknew he also predestined… And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”*** He didn’t just save us, he made a plan for us. He knew us before the beginning of time, before we were born, before we had done anything good or bad, he had counted us as his own.

Since he knew us, he arranged history in just such a way that we would hear the good news. How did you came to faith? Godly parents who brought you to baptism as an infant? God planned that. Did you come to faith when, in a middle-aged realization of the meaningless of a human-centered existence, at that time a Christian co-worker brought you the message of a Savior, Jesus Christ? God planned that. However you came to him, that was his plan.

And the entire plan of Jesus being betrayed and suffering and dying – God planned that too. And he knew it before the beginning of time. As another Bible passage says, *“[God] has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.”* (2 Timothy 1:9)

Faith in God means that we realize these truths: that God foreknew his people, and that he has already arranged all things for our good. So that we can truly say with confidence, ***“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”***

**II. Can We Be Confident He Really Works All Things for Good?**

There was a pastor at a men’s breakfast in farm country. He asked an older farmer to say grace. The farmer began: “Lord, I hate buttermilk.” The pastor opened one eye, wondering where this was going. The farmer continued, “Lord, I hate lard.” Now the pastor had both eyes open. “And Lord, you know I don’t care much for raw white flour.” The pastor was no longer folding his hands and was ready to stop everything, when the farmer continued, “But Lord, when you mix ‘em all together and bake ‘em up, I do love fresh biscuits. So Lord, when things come up we don’t like, remind us to relax and wait till you are done mixin’, and probably it will be even better than biscuits. Amen.”

When we say it in a humorous way like that, we can all agree. “Amen,” we say. “Yes, in all things God works for our good.” But what about when it isn’t so funny—because a lot of the time it isn’t!

In a way, this is one of the most troubling passages of the entire Bible. If you get into a discussion with people who do not have faith in Jesus, sooner or later, they will bring up this Bible passage. Oh, they won’t quote the Bible. But they talk about what this Bible passage talks about. They say it like this, “How can a loving God let all these bad things happen?” Or, “I don’t understand why he let my wife die like she did.” Or, “Do you really think all the things that are going on in the world right now are God’s will?” And maybe you are starting to remember conversations with your neighbor on his back porch the other evening.

Oh, sure, when we hear about a farmer’s humorous prayer at a church meeting, we can laugh and say, “Yes, the Lord really does use all things for our good.” But laughing just won’t do when we are faced with the worst that this world can dish out.

We once knew a woman—I have used her as an example before—but we once knew a woman who in the prime of life, about age 20, was struck with blindness. You’re not saying “Amen” any more, are you? It’s not funny. Right in the prime of life, total blindness. Career over. Friends drifting away. If you asked her, her consistent testimony always was, “Just about the best thing the Lord ever did was to strike me blind. At age 20 I wasn’t going in a God-pleasing way of life. Without this blindness, I doubt that I would be a Christian.” And now we say, “Amen,” not with a smile but under our breath, kind of hoping that God doesn’t deal with us like that because we know we actually might need it, and also because we are amazed at someone who has such faith in God to call that a blessing.

Or stand in a concentration camp, and maybe you have heard this story too, in a lice and vermin infested barracks. What misery! But one survivor testified that the scourge of those pests was God’s blessing. Because of the filth, the guards who were supposed to oversee the prisoners’ execution refused to go in. Again we say, “Amen.” Not smiling, but under our breaths, and we know the truth that ***“In all things God works for the good of those who love him.”***

And there are worse things with less happy endings than these. And some of you have lived those horror stories that happened days ago or decades ago. It isn’t just when things turn out well, when we can sit back in a lawn chair on the deck sipping on a drink and say, “Yeah, everything turned out just alright.” It isn’t just then that we say, ***“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”*** But even when we are still hurt and hurting and asking questions, yes even then God’s Word challenges us and encourages us to say, “Yes, I believe that *in all things* God works for good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Everything has a purpose in God’s plan.

This Bible passage can be accepted only by faith. Without faith, it is foolishness. Only when you see God himself in Christ Jesus willing to suffer for our good can we begin to believe, ***“Yes, in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”***

First Corinthians 13:12 says, *“Now we see through a glass, darkly… now I know in part.”* We admit that we only know in part, that we don’t see clearly. Faith requires us to leave the outcome, the future, in God’s hands. We wonder about the future knowing that long ago God saw the future and prepared all things to work for what we now see and what we do not yet know.

When you see and know and believe that God can use a cross, and lice, and blindness, and who knows what else for our good, then you have confidence. Then you have confidence to do what God wants you to do. You have confidence to cling to Jesus as your only Savior from sin, when all the rest of the world attacks Christ-centered faith. You have confidence to continue coming to worship him. You have confidence to make choices, hard choices, because you know that God will use any choice for his good plan; a plan good for you and for others. You have the confidence because you know that your seventy, eighty, ninety, one hundred years in this world are only the beginning of a much longer and better story.

May this be your comfort in life and everything that it brings to us, ***“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*** Amen.