

PURPOSE

πρόθεσιν
(purpose)

As Christians, one of the most helpful things that we can learn is how to handle the trials that inevitably will come our way. Jesus explained that there are some who receive the word with joy, but their faith is only temporary. When affliction or persecution because of the word hits them, immediately they fall away (Matthew 13:20-21). They didn't expect affliction or understand how to handle it. They signed up for success, not suffering. They wanted prosperity, not persecution. Hence, they fell away when the trials hit. It is especially in times of suffering that Satan, whom Peter describes as a roaring lion, seeks to devour you (1 Peter 5:8-10). Therefore, it is essential for your spiritual survival that you know and apply what the Bible teaches about trials.

Romans 8:28 is one of the most familiar verses on this subject... ***“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”*** The ESV translates it slightly differently and, I think, more accurately: ***“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*** But either way the sense is the same. All things don't just *happen* to work out for good on their own. Rather, *God* providentially works all things together for good for His people according to **His purpose**. But while Romans 8:28 is a source of great comfort when it is properly understood, it is often misunderstood and misapplied.

It will help us all to weather the storm better if we understand this verse *before* the storm hits. In the context, Paul has given us encouragement and hope with the truth that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed to us (8:18-25). He has also encouraged us with the truth that the Holy Spirit is helping us in our weakness by praying for us according to the will of God (8:26-27). But that raises the question, “If the Spirit is praying for the saints according to the will of God, then why do we suffer? Why are we persecuted? Can such suffering be according to God's will?” In response, Paul affirms, ***“God works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.”***

Note the contrast between (8:26), ***“for we do not know how to pray as we should,”*** and (8:28), ***“we know that God causes all things to work together for good....”*** In our weakness, we often do not know what to pray for, but we can know, even in such times, that our sovereign God is working all things together for our ultimate good. Paul goes on to explain how this is so in 8:29-30. To apply this verse, we need to fully understand a basic truth:

God has an eternal purpose and He is able to accomplish His purpose.

This truth is foundational to the truth of Romans 8:28. If God doesn't have a purpose, then He couldn't work all things according to that purpose. But the truth is this:

GOD HAS AN ETERNAL PURPOSE THAT CANNOT BE THWARTED.

If a man is going to do anything of significance—build a house, found a company, or take a trip—he has a purpose and a plan to accomplish that purpose. It's unthinkable that the Sovereign God created the universe with no purpose or no plan to achieve that purpose. But we don't need to infer this by logic; the Bible often affirms that God has a purpose that can't be thwarted.

In the oldest book of the Bible, after all his suffering, Job replies to the Lord (Job 42:2), ***"I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted."*** In Isaiah 46:10-11) the Lord declares, ***"For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it."***

Notice... nothing can prevent God's purpose from being accomplished. Therefore, no matter what anyone does to you – (suppresses you, overlooks you, denies you, rejects you, oppresses you) – God has taken and factored in all those things in His plans for you already. They are not mere coincidences. So don't let those things get you down. God has everything covered. God's plan is unchangeable and nothing and no one in this universe can stop that plan. God has a plan and it will come to pass, and nothing can stop it. Nothing can thwart that plan. It has a beginning, a middle and an end. What unfolds in your life is no mere chance. The Bible tells us the steps of a righteous man are ordered of God, not the enemy, not yourselves, but of God.

Be encouraged today in the fact that God cannot be hindered, by anything or anybody. Time, circumstances and situations cannot hinder God, the MAKER of all things. It doesn't matter what is happening, how long you have been waiting, or the many obstacles placed in your way, God cannot be hindered. He has an overall plan for your situation and it cannot be thwarted. God's plan in your situation will stand. Isaiah 14:27 – ***"For the LORD of hosts has purposed, and who can annul it? And His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?"*** Our God cannot be restricted or contained.

No one can build a fence around Him. No one can set up a force-field around Him. No one can set up a situation where He can't do what is correct. He will use stumbling blocks as stepping stones to come through for you. He will turn your mistakes into miracles. He will work all things so that they turn out for your good! Trust Him. He has no limitations. He can do whatever He wants, whenever He wants. God may allow hardships, and chooses obstacles, to show His great might in situation after situation - so that He alone gets the glory.

There is a very interesting fact revealed in Romans 8:28 that I would like to end with. There are three nouns that can be translated "purpose" in the ancient Greek. The one used here is 'prothesis' – literally 'a setting forth'. It was used in Matthew 12:4 in relation to the showbread (τοὺς ἄρτους τῆς προθέσεως). Showbread (Hebrew: לחם הפנים, literally: "Bread of the Presence"), refers to the cakes or loaves of bread which

were always present on a specially dedicated two crowned table in the Temple in Jerusalem as an offering to *HaShem*. An alternative, and more appropriate translation would be *presence bread*, since the Bible requires that the bread be constantly in the presence of God (Exodus 25:30).

Therefore, Romans 8:28 could read... *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to **what is constantly in His presence.**”* Notice, God Almighty has set forth plans that are constantly in His divine presence. They are a reminder that He has a covenant with us, which He cannot deny. They are like His Word... ***Then the Lord said to me, “You have seen well, for I am ready to perform My word”*** (Jeremiah 1:12). God’s purposes are in His presence ready to be performed! Hallelujah!

Let’s also consider this... Who is constantly in God’s presence making intercession for us? Jesus, the Living Word. ***“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us”*** (Romans 8:34)

Furthermore, the two verses before (Romans 8:26-27) provide us with comfort... ***“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.”***

Ephesians 1:11, ***“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of (what was set forth before) Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.”***