

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE (LESSON TWENTY-NINE)

THE SECURITY OF THE CHRISTIAN (PART TWO)

In **Lesson 28**, we commenced our examination of the doctrine of the security of the Christian's position in Jesus Christ. In that Lesson, we stated that the Scriptures clearly indicate that the position of an individual who has been saved by the grace of God is very secure. We noted that the security of such an individual is bound up with **the sovereignty of God, the unchangeableness of His purpose, and the constancy of His good pleasure**. This security is based upon Christ's perfect and finished work on the cross of Calvary, not upon the merit of any individual. **It is the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ and not the faithfulness of the saved individual that guarantees this security.**

In that Lesson, we considered ten passages of Scripture which speak directly to the issue of the security of the Christian's position in Christ. In this Lesson, we will be focusing on only one passage, **Romans 8:28-39**, with particular reference to verses **28-30**. Perhaps there is no other passage in the Holy Scriptures that so forcefully speak to the Christian's security being bound up with God's sovereignty, the unchangeableness of His purposes and the constancy of His good pleasure. In light of this fact, we will look at this passage in some detail.

ROMANS 8:28-39

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

29 *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*

30 *Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

31 *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*

32 *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

33 *Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.*

34 *Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*

35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

36 *As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*

37 *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

38 *For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,*

39 *Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In verse **28** Paul writes, *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

The **New Living Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.”*

This remarkable verse is often quoted by the saints in moments of great distress, and rightly so. It needs to be explored, however, in light of its context. Paul is informing us that all things work together for good, not in respect of every human being, but only to those who are the called, or the elect of God. The reason why all things work together for the good of God’s elect is simply because of the fact that God is absolutely sovereign and therefore, no purpose of His can be thwarted. Although we cannot see it now, everything will one day be seen to fit into God’s perfect plan.

Paul says emphatically that *“**all things** work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”* All things! Prosperity and adversity; joy and sorrow; success and failure; victory and defeat; fullness and lack; life and death; all are included in this statement! Brothers and sisters, it is not only what we ourselves personally experience but also what is outside the ambit of our personal experience that is included in Paul’s statement. The following entities are among those that are sovereignly ordered and directed so that they work together for the good of God’s elect: The elect angels, Satan and his host, the rulers of this world, wicked men and women and even the times and seasons. What a blessed assurance we have in this verse! But how many of the saints of God really believe what Paul has written here?

Brothers and sisters, it is not possible for any of us, no matter how long we have been saved, to be completely at rest until we are convinced that all things that happen to us are happening according to a divine plan. As soon as we become persuaded of this fact, we experience peace within our own souls. We experience peace within our own souls because we are at peace with God our Heavenly Father.

How may we be assured that all things that happen to us are happening according to a divine plan? We may be persuaded in two ways. Firstly, we may accept by faith the declaration of this particular verse and others like it, that there is such a plan, and that we have been called according to God’s purpose.

Secondly, we may be persuaded by the entire logic of biblical revelation. Any person who gives serious attention to the Bible will eventually come to the conclusion that God is working all things out according to His eternal plan.

The first proof that there is a divine plan lies in the fact that God is perfect. We know that the Bible everywhere teaches the perfection of God, and the truth of His divine purpose must flow from His very nature.

God is perfect in His power - He is omnipotent. God is perfect in His knowledge and wisdom - He is omniscient. God is unchanging and unchangeable – He is immutable. God is eternal in His being - He has always known all things and He always has the ability to do all things.

God is the Creator - all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. Since God created all things, He created Lucifer. When He created Lucifer He knew that this creature would rebel and become Satan. God could have created Lucifer otherwise than He did, if He had wished to. We must conclude, therefore, that God has an eternal plan that includes all things, even the fall of Lucifer and the entrance of sin into the universe.

God is perfect in His holiness. Therefore, when sin entered the universe God perfectly judged it. As a result of God's perfect judgment of sin, all the laws of sin including sickness, decay and disintegration entered the universe. We conclude, therefore, that the horrors that are in this world of sin came from the perfect judgments of a perfect God.

Let us not insult God by imagining that His divine plan needs the support of human beings. The plan of God rests on its own foundation and needs no other support. The plan of God is centered in the glory of God, the glory of Christ, and the glory of the elect whom He chose before the foundation of the world. The most amazing thing about God's plan is the truth that it includes the glory of the elect, the glory of those who are the called according to His purpose.

Brothers and sisters, our lives are not the haphazard results of chance. All that comes to pass in our lives is according to the eternal plan of the all-wise, all-powerful and all-loving Father. When we understand this, we will have the assurance and consolation that Horatio G. Spafford wrote of in his famous hymn:

*“When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul!”*

We will be persuaded that God's plan comes from the mind and heart of the all-loving Father. It is for this reason that we are well assured that everything helps to secure the good of those who love God, those whom He has called in fulfillment of His purpose. As we read the entire Bible, we can come to no other conclusion than this.

The fact that we have been chosen according to God's eternal purpose means that we are always surrounded by the protective care of the Holy Spirit. Nothing can touch us until it has passed through the will of God.

This verse informs us of the very practical truth that we may have the absolute assurance that the plan of our own individual lives has been fixed in God. He is pursuing a definite purpose leading to a definite end, and we may live in quiet assurance that all is well with us, even though we are passing through deep waters.

Paul does not say “And we **hope** that all things work together for good...” He does not even say “And we **believe** that all things work together for good...” He says emphatically “*And we **know** that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*” We **know**! That is the tremendous fact of this verse. I suppose it would be very pleasant if all things worked together for our good without us knowing about it, and we later discovered that this was the case. But Paul wants us to know, **right now**, that all things work together for our good. To lay hold upon this truth is a most wonderfully reassuring and stabilizing thing. It brings peace, rest and confidence to the whole of life. I shall not be greatly moved if I **know** that nothing can touch me unless it passes through the will of God. God has a plan for **my** life. God is working on **my** life according to a fixed, eternal purpose.

But someone may ask, “What about sin. Does sin work together for good to those who love the Lord?” In the fear of the Lord, I answer “Yes!” I answer yes from two standpoints. Firstly, I believe that something that affects my life as the result of the sin of someone else, may work together for my good.

The Bible gives us many such examples. It was the sin of Naomi’s son in marrying Ruth the Moabite, when the law forbade such a marriage, that ultimately brought Ruth into the fold of God. She would never have had Naomi as a mother-in-law if this sin had not been committed, and she would not have been able to say, *“Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; whither thou goest I will go; whither thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God”* (**Ruth 1:16**). The sin of her husband in marrying her and his death after marrying her, brought her to widowhood which later allowed her to marry the Bethlehemite Boaz. This put Ruth in the line of the mothers of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. She had been chosen by God for this purpose and the Lord caused the events of human living, including human sin, to bring about His purposes.

The same is true of Jonah whose disobedience was used by God to furnish Jesus Christ with an authentic sign of His authority and messianic claims (**Matthew 12:39-40**). God also used Jonah’s disobedience to reveal Himself to heathen sailors who would, otherwise, never have known about the true and living God (**Jonah 1:8-16**).

Of course, the greatest illustration of the way in which sinful acts may work together for the good of others, is in the culmination of all evil which poured itself out against the sinless Son of God and, thereby, worked together for the eternal good of all who are saved in the redemption which resulted from His crucifixion. Satan meant the death of Christ as his ultimate act of rebellion and defiance, but God turned it into salvation from sin, and through that death took multitudes from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of His Son. Human beings meant it as the final gesture of the enmity which the carnal mind holds against God, but God turned the fruit of that very hatred into the plan of salvation which showed His love to the universe and made it possible for us to become the sons of God (**1 Corinthians 2:8**).

But can something that affects my life as the result of **my own sin** work together for my good? We turn to the story of Joseph and his brothers for our great illustration.

Joseph’s brothers were very jealous of him. He had, unwisely perhaps, told them of his dreams which clearly indicated that he would have the preeminence over them one day. They became upset at the thought of their father and mother and they themselves bowing down before him and serving him. In the process of time they conspired against him, and after first plotting his death, sold him into the hands of the Midianites, who took him into Egypt.

After being sold as a slave to Potiphar the Captain of the Guard, the lustful fury of a woman scorned brought Joseph down into prison. Finally, the forgetfulness of the Pharaoh’s butler whom he befriended doomed him to years of wasting away in the dungeon.

Suddenly, however, we see God’s hand in all this and we find Joseph delivered from prison, exalted to being the Prime Minister of Egypt, and in charge of all the economy of that land. Soon the riches of the nation are in his hand and the famine which follows forces the little band of Jews to come down under the patriarch Jacob and live in the land in great prosperity.

God had promised to make of this family a nation, and what better way to form them into a people than to take them out from the alien tribes which surrounded them and bring them into a place of protected plenty where four centuries could pass upon them and see them grow to power and strength.

Now it is easy to see that the evil actions of the sons of Jacob worked together for the good of Joseph and Jacob, and for the good of the wives and children of the murderous brothers. When Joseph made himself known to his brothers, he said to them, *“Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt”* (**Genesis 45:4-8**).

Years later, when Jacob died, the brothers were seized with terror as they thought of themselves without their father. They supposed that the presence of Jacob had kept back the merited wrath of Joseph, and now that the patriarch was dead, their brother might deal harshly with them. But listen to Joseph once again: *“Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them”* (**Genesis 50:19-21**).

We can apply this whole story, to show how evil perpetrated by wicked persons can bring good to God’s people. But this example shows that the evil of these brothers ultimately saved **their own lives**, and preserved the posterity of the whole nation of Israel, and brought the full historical plan of God into its course of accomplishment. The God who brings life out of death can and does bring good out of sin.

We must, however, never be deluded into thinking that God ever condones sin in any way. The truth is that God could never have worked with the human race if He had not worked with them as sinners, for all have sinned. We are sinners, and the whole pattern of the life of each of us is comprised of the interweaving or the connection of the acts of our Adamic natures and the results of those acts. Even when we have been born again, the flesh is present with us, and even after we know that we have been joined to Christ the living Head of our new spiritual relationship to God, we are aware of the continuing presence of the body of death within us.

Certainly, those who are ignorant of the Scriptures and the power of God, and others who are either perverse or misguided, will cry out that we are teaching that men may go ahead and sin if they are Christians because God will cause it to work together for good. We teach nothing of the kind. Paul had the same accusation brought against him. In **Romans 3:8**, he addressed the issue. With scorn he writes, *“And some people even slander us by claiming that we say, ‘The more we sin, the better it is!’ Those who say such things deserve to be condemned”* (**New Living Translation**).

Paul says that all things work together for good *“to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”* He describes Christians as those who not only love God, but who do so because they are called according to His purpose. The verse goes straight to the heart of the fact that our salvation begins with God and that he planned and executed it. In **1 John 4:19** we read, *“We love him, **because** he first loved us.”* And earlier in verse **10** John writes, *“This is real love — **not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.**”* (New Living Translation).

There have always been those in the church who have tried to manufacture a love for God. They have sought steps and followed formulas and pursued programs which would, supposedly, enable them to love God. But biblically speaking, none of these things are called for, because they are not desirable, because they are false in their very roots. Men are, by nature, dead in trespasses and sins. They will do anything, including becoming very religious, if they can remain master of their own wills and get credit to themselves for some imagined salvation which they have worked for. As long as the flesh is permitted the slightest degree of merit, the smallest root of self-help, human beings will recite creeds, sing songs, bow in prayer, and go through long rituals of religion. But at the moment, they are brought face to face with their utter spiritual bankruptcy and left naked before the sovereignty of God, they rise in rebellion to defy the true God of the universe who found the source of love in Himself and came alone to redeem man for Himself in a chain of irresistible grace forged for us in eternity. It is the love of this God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, that we return to him!

We may be sure that all things work for our good, not only because we love the God who works all things, but more importantly, because the God who works all things loves us and chose us, and carries us through the successive steps of our spiritual life. The calling that Paul speaks of here and elsewhere in this chapter is the working in us, of the everlasting purpose of God. By this purpose, God decreed before the foundations of the world were laid, that He would deliver those whom He chose in Christ out of mankind, from curse and damnation and bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation.

There is no limit and no exception to the promise of this verse. All things work together for our good. There are no exceptions to the sweeping breadth of this statement. And if all things work together for our good, then all the attributes of God, all the works of Christ and all of the gifts and powers of the Holy Spirit are at work for our good. There is no will or act of creatures, men, angels or demons that can do other than work for our good. No dog can bark against us, no man or woman can speak or act against us, no sinister power of evil can be against us, but all must be for our good. There is no phenomenon of nature be it fire, flood, storm, earthquake that can ultimately work against us. The law of gravity cannot trip us up or cause anything to fall upon us unless it has first been approved by the will of God. All things work together for our good; otherwise, the Lord would not permit them.