

Union Baptist Church

31 Manhattan Avenue
White Plains, New York 10607
Pastor Verlin D. Williams, D.Min.

PROMISES OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

LESSON 6: The Promise of God's Providence

SCRIPTURE:

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

"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."

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Romans 8:28 is widely regarded as one of the most beloved, quoted, and cherished verses in the entire Bible. It has brought comfort to the grieving, strength to the suffering, hope to the hopeless, and courage to the fearful across twenty centuries of Christian history. Yet to fully appreciate the profound depth and life-changing power of this promise, we must understand it within its proper biblical and historical context.

The Book of Romans

The letter to the Romans was written by the Apostle Paul, most likely around A.D. 57, while he was in Corinth during his third missionary journey. It was addressed to the church in Rome — a community of believers Paul had never personally visited but deeply longed to serve. Romans is widely considered Paul's most systematic and theologically comprehensive letter, presenting the fullest and most complete exposition of the Gospel of Jesus Christ found anywhere in Scripture.

The letter unfolds in a carefully structured progression. In chapters 1-3, Paul establishes the universal sinfulness of humanity and the just condemnation that all people deserve before a holy God. In chapters 3-5, he introduces the magnificent doctrine of justification by faith, the declaration that sinners are made right with God not by their own efforts but through faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. In chapters 6-7, Paul addresses the ongoing struggle with sin in the believer's life and the role of the Law. Then, in chapter 8, widely considered the greatest single chapter in all of Scripture, Paul brings the argument to its glorious summit, presenting the full panorama of the believer's security, freedom, and hope in Christ.

The Context of Romans 8

Romans 8 opens with one of the most triumphant declarations in all of Scripture: *"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus"* (Romans 8:1). From this

liberating starting point, Paul unfolds the magnificent privileges and realities that belong to every believer:

- The indwelling of the Holy Spirit who gives life and freedom (Romans 8:2-11)
- The Spirit's work of adoption, assuring believers that they are children of God (Romans 8:14-16)
- The promise of future glory that far outweighs present suffering (Romans 8:17-18)
- The groaning of creation as it awaits its own redemption (Romans 8:19-22)
- The intercession of the Holy Spirit who helps us in our weakness and prays for us with *groanings* too deep for words (Romans 8:26-27)

It is precisely within this context, a discussion of present suffering, weakness, and the groaning of both creation and the believer, that Paul anchors the promise of Romans 8:28. The believers in Rome were not living comfortable, trouble-free lives. They existed in the shadow of the most powerful empire in the ancient world, facing persecution, social marginalization, and very real threats to their lives and livelihoods. Many had lost family members, businesses, homes, and social standing because of their faith in Christ.

Paul was not writing Romans 8:28 from an ivory tower of theological abstraction. He was writing as a man who had personally experienced shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, betrayals, hunger, and constant danger (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). He knew what it meant to suffer. And it was from that place of hard-won, Spirit-confirmed experience that he wrote: "And we know that all things work together for good."

The word "know" is significant, it denotes a settled, certain, experiential knowledge. Paul was not speculating or offering a hopeful hypothesis. He was declaring a divine certainty a truth so firmly established in his personal experience and theological conviction that it could not be shaken by any circumstance, no matter how painful or perplexing.

The Providence of God

The theological concept at the heart of Romans 8:28 is divine providence, the doctrine that God is sovereignly, actively, and purposefully involved in every detail of His creation and in the lives of His people. The word "providence" comes from the Latin, meaning "to see ahead" or "to provide for." It speaks of God's foreknowledge, His governing hand, and His ability to direct all events both great and small, both joyful and painful toward the fulfillment of His perfect and eternal purposes.

Providence does not mean that God causes all things including evil, tragedy, and suffering. It means that God is sovereign over all things and can weave even the most painful and seemingly destructive threads into a tapestry of purpose, redemption, and ultimate good. The greatest biblical example of this truth is the life of Joseph, sold into slavery by his own brothers, falsely accused, and imprisoned for years yet ultimately declared: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good"* (Genesis 50:20). The ultimate example, of course, is the Cross of Jesus Christ the most horrific act of injustice and violence in human history, sovereignly orchestrated by God to become the greatest act of love and redemption the world has ever known.

EXPLANATION OF VERSES

Romans 8:28 — *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."*

1. "And we know..."

Paul begins not with "we hope" or "we believe" or "we suspect" but with "we know." The Greek word denotes a deep, settled, confident, and certain knowledge, a conviction born of experience, revelation, and the witness of the Holy Spirit. This is the language of absolute assurance.

This is faith anchored in the unchanging character of God. Paul had lived long enough and suffered deeply enough to know from personal experience that God does not waste pain. He had watched God transform imprisonment into opportunity, persecution into proclamation, and weakness into divine power. His "we know" was the testimony of a man who had seen God's providence at work in the most unlikely and unwelcome of circumstances.

For the believer today, this word "know" is an invitation to move from anxious uncertainty to anchored confidence. We do not need to understand every detail of what God is doing in our lives. We do not need to see the complete picture. We simply need to know with the same settled conviction that Paul possessed that God is at work, that His purposes cannot be thwarted, and that He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion (Philippians 1:6).

2. ...that all things...

The scope of this phrase is nothing short of staggering. Paul does not say "some things" work together for good. He does not say "most things" or "the good things" or "the comfortable things" or "the things we can understand." He says "all things."

The Greek word meaning all, every, the totality of things, leaves absolutely nothing outside the reach of God's sovereign, providential purposes. All things includes:

- The painful things — grief, loss, illness, disappointment, and heartbreak.
- The confusing things — the unanswered questions, the unexpected detours, and the shattered plans.
- The shameful things — past failures, mistakes, and sins that have been forgiven and redeemed.
- The frightening things — the diagnoses, the crises, the sudden changes, and the uncertain futures.
- The seemingly insignificant things — the ordinary, mundane, unremarkable details of daily life that God is nonetheless weaving into His greater purpose.
- The unjust things — the betrayals, the false accusations, the closed doors, and the unfair treatment that God can still use for His glory and our growth.

This does not mean that all things are good in themselves. Tragedy is not good. Sin is not good. Abuse is not good. Injustice is not good. What Paul is declaring is that God is so sovereign, so wise, and so powerful that He can take all things, including the very worst things and work them into something that ultimately serves His good and eternal purposes. He is the divine Weaver

who takes the tangled, broken, and seemingly ruined threads of our lives and creates from them a masterpiece of grace.

3. "...work together for good..."

The phrase "work together" comes from the Greek word from which we derive the English word "synergy." It speaks of multiple elements cooperating and combining to produce a result that none of them could produce individually. Paul is painting the picture of God as a master craftsman who takes all of the varied, seemingly incompatible, and often painful elements of our lives and orchestrates them together into a unified, purposeful, and ultimately good outcome.

The word "together" is crucial. It reminds us that no single event, season, or circumstance in our lives should be evaluated in isolation. What appears to be a senseless tragedy when viewed as a standalone event may look entirely different when seen as part of the larger tapestry that God is weaving across the whole arc of our lives. We often make the mistake of judging God's faithfulness based on a single chapter when He is authoring an entire story.

The word "good" does not primarily refer to our personal comfort, happiness, or temporal success. In the context of Romans 8, the "good" God is working toward is defined by the very next verse (Romans 8:29), conformity to the image of Jesus Christ. The ultimate good that God is pursuing in our lives is not our ease but our transformation. Not our comfort but our character and our eternal holiness. God is always working toward making us more like His Son, and He uses every experience including the painful ones as instruments of that divine shaping.

4. "...to those who love God..."

Paul now introduces the first of two qualifications that define the recipients of this promise. The promise of Romans 8:28 is a guarantee for every person who is in relationship with God. It is a covenant promise made specifically to those who love God.

The love described here is the deep, committed, covenant love of a person who has been transformed by God's grace and responds to that grace with devotion, obedience, and trust. It is the love Jesus described when He said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). It is the love that persists through difficulty, that chooses to trust God even when circumstances are painful and confusing, and that keeps returning to God in faith even when the heart is broken.

Loving God is both the evidence of salvation and the posture of the heart that positions us to perceive and receive God's providential working in our lives. Those who love God are not promised a life without pain they are promised that in every pain, God is actively and purposefully at work on their behalf.

5. "...to those who are the called according to His purpose."

The second qualification "the called according to His purpose" provides the theological foundation for why God's providence operates so powerfully in the lives of believers. The word "called" refers to God's effectual call, His sovereign, gracious summons by which He draws people to Himself through the Gospel. This calling is the specific, personal, transforming call of God that results in genuine faith and new birth.

The phrase "according to His purpose" reveals the ultimate reason why all things work together for good: because God is operating according to a deliberate, eternal, and unshakeable plan. His purposes were established before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), they cannot be frustrated by human failure or satanic opposition (Isaiah 46:10), and they are always moving toward their appointed end. When our lives are caught up in God's eternal purpose, even the most chaotic and painful events become purposeful instruments in the hands of a sovereign God.

Paul goes on in Romans 8:29-30 to describe what this purpose looks like in what theologians call the "Golden Chain of Redemption": foreknown → predestined → called → justified → glorified. This unbreakable chain of divine action assures every believer that the God who began the work of salvation in their lives will ****most certainly complete it**** — and that every experience along the way, however difficult, is part of that glorious, eternal, completed plan.

CONTEMPORARY SUMMARY

There are moments in every believer's life when the promise of Romans 8:28 is a lifeline. The phone call that delivers devastating news. The relationship that falls apart without warning. The dream that collapses after years of faithful investment. The door that closes just when it seemed ready to open. The diagnosis that changes everything in an instant. The loss that leaves a wound so deep that words seem entirely inadequate.

In every one of those moments, the Spirit of God whispers the eternal certainty of Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good."

This is a sovereign declaration from the God who sits outside of time, who sees the beginning and the end simultaneously, who holds every broken piece of our lives in His nail-scarred hands, and who guarantees that nothing not one single thing will be wasted in the lives of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

This promise speaks directly to the most pressing concerns of contemporary life:

- To the single parent struggling to hold the family together, God is working.
- To the student who failed the exam and feels their future is ruined, God is working.
- To the minister whose church has fallen apart, God is working.
- To the widow or widower who cannot imagine life continuing, God is working.
- To the recovering addict who has relapsed and is drowning in shame, God is working.
- To the believer who has prayed faithfully for years without seeing the answer, God is working.

The challenge this lesson places before every believer is to choose trust over despair, faith over fear, and confidence in God's providence over anxiety about circumstances because the God who made the promise of Romans 8:28 is faithful, sovereign, wise, and good and He has never once broken a promise He has made.

Joseph could not see the palace from the pit. But God could. And He was working the whole time.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Paul writes "we know" rather than "we hope" or "we believe" in Romans 8:28. What is the difference between hoping something is true and knowing it with settled certainty? How does a believer develop this kind of confident, experiential knowledge of God's providential working in their lives?
2. The promise says "all things" work together for good not just the pleasant things but also the painful, confusing, and unjust things. Can you share a personal experience where something that appeared negative at the time was later revealed to be part of God's greater purpose and plan? What did that experience teach you about God's providence?
3. Paul defines the "good" that God is working toward as conformity to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). How does this definition challenge or expand the way you typically think about what is "good" in your life? Are you more focused on God working things out for your comfort or for your character? How can we align our definition of "good" more closely with God's?
4. The promise of Romans 8:28 is specifically given to those who "love God" and are "called according to His purpose." How do these qualifications shape the way we understand and apply this verse? What does it look like practically to love God in the middle of a painful and confusing season of life?
5. Romans 8:29-30 describes what theologians call the "Golden Chain of Redemption": foreknown, predestined, called, justified, glorified. How does understanding that God's purpose for our lives was established before the foundation of the world give you confidence and peace in the midst of life's uncertainties and struggles?

MEMORY VERSE

"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." Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

Write it. Memorize it. Live it.

Union Baptist Church

31 Manhattan Avenue
White Plains, New York 10607
Pastor Verlin D. Williams, D.Min.

STUDENT WORKSHEET

Lesson 9: The Promise of God's Providence

Romans 8:28

Name: _____ Date: _____

SECTION A: MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the letter of the best answer for each question.

1. Romans 8:28 is found within what is widely considered the greatest single chapter in the New Testament. What is the opening declaration of Romans 8 that sets the tone for the entire chapter?

- A. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."
- B. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."
- C. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
- D. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

2. The Greek word used for "know" in Romans 8:28, describes what kind of knowledge?

- A. Academic and theoretical knowledge gained through formal study
- B. A hopeful wish or optimistic feeling about the future
- C. A settled, certain, experiential conviction that cannot be shaken by circumstances
- D. Knowledge that is shared exclusively by church leaders and theologians

3. The phrase "all things work together" in Romans 8:28 comes from the Greek word from which we get the English word "synergy." What does this word picture communicate about how God works in the believer's life?*

- A. That God works independently of human circumstances and keeps believers completely isolated from suffering
- B. That God orchestrates all of life's varied elements — even painful ones — to cooperate together toward a purposeful and good outcome
- C. That God only works when believers pray continuously and without ceasing
- D. That the good things in life naturally combine to cancel out the bad things over time

4. In the context of Romans 8:28-29, what does Paul specifically identify as the ultimate "good" that God is working toward in the lives of believers?

- A. Financial prosperity, physical health, and personal happiness
- B. Social acceptance, professional success, and a comfortable life
- C. Conformity to the image of Jesus Christ — spiritual transformation and Christlikeness
- D. The accumulation of theological knowledge and church ministry experience

5. Romans 8:28 contains two qualifications that identify the recipients of this promise. Which of the following correctly identifies BOTH qualifications?

- A. Those who attend church regularly and those who tithe faithfully
- B. Those who have never sinned seriously and those who have memorized the Scriptures
- C. Those who love God and those who are called according to His purpose
- D. Those who fast weekly and those who have been baptized in water

6. The theological concept at the heart of Romans 8:28 is divine providence. Which of the following best defines what divine providence means?

- A. God's occasional intervention in human affairs when people pray hard enough
- B. God's sovereign, active, and purposeful involvement in all things, working every detail of life toward the fulfillment of His perfect and eternal purposes
- C. The natural tendency of good things to happen to good people over time
- D. God's decision to step back and allow human beings to control their own destinies

SECTION B: TRUE OR FALSE

Write "TRUE" or "FALSE" on the line provided.

1. _____ Romans 8:28 promises that all things in a believer's life will feel good, look good, and be immediately understandable as part of God's plan.
2. _____ The Apostle Paul wrote Romans 8:28 from personal experience as a man who had suffered shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonments, and persecution, yet had seen God work through every difficulty.
3. _____ The promise of Romans 8:28 applies universally to every person in every situation, regardless of whether they love God or are called according to His purpose.

4. _____ The life of Joseph in the book of Genesis, sold into slavery by his brothers yet ultimately used by God to save nations is a powerful Old Testament illustration of the principle found in Romans 8:28.

5. _____ Romans 8:29-30 describes the "Golden Chain of Redemption" foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified, which assures believers that God's saving purpose for their lives will be completed without fail.

SECTION C: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Answer the following question in 3-5 sentences.

Think of a difficult, painful, or confusing season in your own life past or present. How does the promise of Romans 8:28 challenge you to view that experience differently? What would it look like for you to genuinely trust that God is working all things together for good in that situation?

"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." Romans 8:28 (NKJV)