



ROMANS Part 74

Chapter 8:28

All works together for good.



Now we are aware that God is working all together for the good of those who are loving God, who are called according to the purpose ...

Here is one of the most comforting verses in Scripture, yet some may try to turn it into a downer by asking themselves, “But do I really love God? Because if I *don’t* (the verse assumes that I do), then God is *not* working all together for my good.”

A strange thing happened to me when I was eight-years old. I was lying in bed in the dark at bedtime and for some reason began compulsively thinking that I hated God. I knew I didn’t hate God, but why did I keep thinking it? I cried out for my mom, who came in and sat down next to me. I can still feel the wonderful weight of my mother sitting next to me on my bed and putting her hand on my arm as I told her what I was saying to myself. She said, “Of course you love God. Why would you think this other thing?” I said that I didn’t know. She said again, “Of course you love God,” and that was that. I went to sleep in peace.

I blame the Catholic church for my doubts. It was the Roman Fear Factory stamping its dubious seal upon my tender soul. It may have been the nuns threatening me at school, or maybe the hulking, frightening image of the priest standing on the altar beneath the crucifix. In any case, the hammer seemed always ready to fall; the hammer of God. But a hammer is not the image of God—and neither is a priest or a nun. The image of God is Christ, and who does not love Jesus Christ, the suffering Messiah, dragging His heavy cross to Calvary so that we could raise from the dead and be with God forever?

It is not a Hallmark-style love for God that is under consideration here anyway. One needn’t work up an emotion for either God or for Christ. We do not owe Them emotions. We do not marry Them. Sometimes the emotions run hot in the worst way; we curse God. These are isolated breakdowns resulting from isolated incidents. Our hearts turn to Jesus again on the cross.

God is not punishing Him there, but offering Him as a love letter to the world, the best that He has. God is so distraught at the hour of His Son's death that He darkens the Earth. The reuniting in heaven of Father and Son impends, and the world is won. The thought of Christ reuniting with God after the crucifixion delights us. When I was a kid, this thought made me happy. Love wants the best for its object. Jesus returning to heaven after Calvary makes us all glad. Within ourselves, we are overjoyed for Jesus and God. There. That is love.

Of course you love God.

"TOGETHER"

How is God working all together for good when so many bad things happen? The good here is the ultimate good, and the key word is "together." He is not working all things for good, but all things *together* for good. Some things He works for evil, because He created evil (Isaiah 45:7). But never mind these evil things, because they do not come packaged without good. It's a cocktail. The two necessary ingredients are good and evil. In the Garden of Eden, it was not the tree of good *here* and the tree of evil over *there*. It was "the tree of the knowledge of good *and* evil (Genesis 2:17) in one place.

What if it were the other way? What if you were sitting all day beneath the tree of evil, with no relief in sight? What if you could never even *find* the tree of good? There is nothing to worry about, though. The same tree contains both fruits. You can't be sitting beneath this tree and get thumped on the head with one variety of fruit without a decent thumping by the opposing variety. It's the combination of the thumping (happy and sad; good and evil) of the disparate fruits that is divine; the ratio and the intensity are carefully orchestrated for your *ultimate* good. If you experienced all evil all the time, you would soon despair of life. If you experienced all good all the time, you would vomit out of boredom and disgust with your life, or would wander about in a vanilla haze. You would never learn anything. "All good all the time" was Adam's very condition, pre-sin, and it explains his chronic ungratefulness; he didn't know the necessary contrastive experience of evil. There wasn't a cocktail. He simply didn't care about anything.

BINGS AND BANGS

This helps answer the prayer consideration of last week: we don't know what to pray for. In our flesh, we would pray for all good, all the time. The spirit is smarter than we are because it knows about the necessary contrasts. God plays us all like musical instruments. There are the deep, disturbing notes, and then the tight, high notes rising up the other side. (Who could listen to music containing but one note?) The deep notes seem to outweigh the happier end of the *do-re-me* thing, but they don't. We are not playing this music, God is. He wrote the score. It's the score of our lives, nothing less. Only God knows what to strike when, in what order, and at what tempo. It is beyond us to accomplish any of this. The necessary combination of bings and bangs (I'm thinking of bongos now) is light years beyond our skill set.

Our lives do not seem to be *The Sound of Music*, but they are. We are all part of a classic film, but we shortsightedly call it, *The Sound of Chaos*. When I stub my toe I cry out, "Why did *that* have to happen?" I inadvertently tap



the truth, because it *did* have to happen. (Remember last week's study?) It was a bang to balance a bing. I must have been enjoying too many bings for my ultimate good. You could have fooled me. In a way, God *does* fool us, because we can't always hear the melody He's creating. We're too close to it. We must simply trust that it's happening.

It's like the tapestry analogy; it's a classic but I never tire of it. You can't see the beautiful tapestry when you're tangled underneath it, lost in the hundreds of threads; the image reveals itself only from a higher perspective. It's hard to rise up to the rarefied place, and sometimes God doesn't even let us; He keeps us down. We are not yet meant to

see. We only have to trust that it's happening.

"Tangled from below/awesome from above" also describes the close-up of a pixelated photograph. The pixels at close range look random. With the thing right up against one's nose, it's a mess. But it really isn't. Each tiny part contributes to a masterpiece that we can see only from a higher perspective. With music, the higher perspective is the master score. Is God playing us? Yes. It is a concert for the celestials, and for us as well. (The celestials watch our everyday drama; we are "a theater to messengers"—1 Corinthians 4:9). One day we will hear the completed score from the mezzanine; it will thrill our hearts then. We will be thankful to have been such necessary instruments to God. We will then see not only how brilliantly God scored our lives, but how He designed our lives to mesh with the lives of others. For we are but one of the billions of instruments on the floor of this vast hall. For now, we must simply trust that no bing is unintended, no bang an accident left to chance.

God is working all *together* for good.

ON A SOFA IN APPLE COUNTRY

What about the rest of the world? Isn't God working all things together for *its* good? Is He the sovereign of all, or merely of us? What if someone in the world truly does *not* love God? We know that there are many such people. We work alongside them; we drive alongside them on the highway; we wait in line with them at Wal-Mart. Are all things then working together for such peoples' *ill*? No. Watch what happens when we read this verse while noting which words are inspired and which aren't.

I was in Almont, Michigan, twenty years ago sitting on a sofa in apple country after a Bible study at the home of one of the world's most knowledgeable men on Paul's



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evangel: Dean Hough. Dean is the editor of *Unsearchable Riches* magazine and he completed, along with Herman Rocke, the translation of the *Concordant Version of the Old Testament*, based on A.E. Knoch's groundbreaking work. Dean is as unassuming a man as you can meet, so I always used to assume upon him. We sat on that sofa together in 1995—the upcoming, wanna-know kid and the seasoned elder—discussing Romans. Dean had insight into this passage, which is like saying that Picasso had insight

into paint. Dean did not like the Concordant translation of Romans 8:28; he thought it could be better. Dean knows first-century Greek as well as any first-century toga guy. I asked Dean how it could be better. He pointed out to me the bold and then the lightface portions of the text, showing which words reflected an underlying Greek word, and which words got added to satisfy English idiom.

Here is the verse as it currently appears in the *Concordant Literal New Testament*:

position of the spirit, 'for in accord with God is it pleading for^s the saints.

²⁸ Now we are aware that God is working all together ⁱⁿfor the good of those who are loving God, who are called according to the purpose ²⁹ that, whom He foreknew,

Dean said, "Notice how the words 'of those who are' are not in the original manuscript. Without this phrase, the verse simply reads, 'Now we are aware that God is working all together for good.' The 'the' in front of 'good' is not there, either. The phrase 'loving God' is then isolated. To whom does it apply? I submit to you that it applies to the people who are aware that God is working all together for good."

If Dean was right, then Paul was saying something completely different than we first supposed. It was not that God was working all things together for good only for those who were loving God, but that those now loving God were the only ones aware of God working *all* together for good—*period*.

The *Concordant Greek Sublinear Text* bears this out. Here are the exact order of the Greek words as Paul wrote them, and the English equivalents directly beneath:

In the literal Greek, this verse reads: "To the ones loving God, all is working together for good." In other words, we who are loving God are the only ones *aware* that all is working together for good not only for us, but for the whole world and every inhabitant thereof. This knowledge that all is working together for good is part of the secret "inside scoop" given to God's children, to the ones who now love Him and enjoy such a paternal relationship. It is as though God has set us on His lap

and whispered to us: “You are to have no worries. Do you see the troubles of the world? Do you see the suffering of the people? Do not fear! For I am working *all of this* together for good, not only for you, but for all. Because of My love for you and yours for Me, I have chosen you to know this. It will help you to bear things.”

WORK WITHOUT SWEAT

God is *working* all things together for good. Someday, God will not be working this hard. For now, He works. He never sleeps or slumbers. How else could He work all things together for good? Do we realize how many “all things” there are? It is incalculable. Yet these are the very things God works together for good. Certainly it is more amazing than a juggler laboring to keep twelve somersaulting pins aloft. See how the juggler sweats at his craft. God is working, yes, but He loses not a drop of perspiration. It is we who perspire watching Him, wondering if or when He’ll drop something. We watch in vain; He never drops a thing. Let us do less watching, perhaps, and more resting. Nothing will fail or fall, no, not a single detail of what must be.

Surely then *we* shall never fail or fall—we, who are the darlings of His heart. —MZ

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A brother in trouble; a family in need.

Our brother James Flanders is being unjustly held in prison by a government that presumes people to be guilty until they can prove themselves innocent. I tried to visit him when I was in Florida, but he is disallowed visitors; he can’t even see his own wife and daughter. This is an egregious evil. It is yet another attempt by Satan to destroy the life of a faithful herald of the evangel of God’s grace.



I had the privilege of meeting James at a conference in Sacramento in 2012, and I have taught with him at Lenny Pappano’s conference in New York as recently as 2013. I know James to be a kind, generous, faithful man of God who labors in love not only for the gospel, but for his family. He is a faithful father and husband.

“So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter” (Isaiah 59:14).

Thus is the wicked age in which we live.

Here is the website that has been set up on behalf of James and Tanya and their family, to help them through this terrible trial:

<http://www.helpjames.com/>

Additionally, you can write James and let him know that you are thinking of him and praying for him. Maybe print an article about the grace of God from the concordant.org website and send it to him with a note. Do not mention any details about the case; your letter will be censored. Send James any sort of love that you can.

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James needs to hear from us. Thank you. —MZ