

Let's Quit Abusing Romans 8:28

By Roger Turner

There are numerous passages of Scripture that I believe members of the church of Christ are misusing by taking them from the original context and applying them to something the author, or writer, did not have in mind. One of these is Romans 8:28 which reads, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

As we study the marvelous book of Romans, we are presented almost immediately with the thesis of the Roman letter—the faith, or the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is striving to show how God, His Son, and the Holy Spirit have united in giving us the law of faith—the Gospel of Christ—and how all the plans of God for centuries have worked out for good to those who will benefit themselves by accepting and obeying the law of faith as it is revealed in the New Testament.

In a very brief scan of Romans, we see the following: chapter one shows the Gospel is for all; chapter two reveals that no one, not even the Jews, can please God without the New Testament law of faith; chapter three gives further teaching that all sin, and that obedience of the Gospel of Christ by all is an absolute necessity to please God; chapter four uses some Old Testament characters to help show the importance of accepting and obeying the law of faith; chapter five shows that we are justified by obedience to the law of faith as given by God's grace; chapter six teaches the necessity of becoming servants of righteousness by obeying the Gospel of Christ; chapter seven shows that the Christian (in obeying the Gospel, the law of faith) becomes married to Christ and is no longer in subjection to the Old Testament law; chapter eight gives the assurance of salvation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the law of the Spirit of life in Christ; then in chapter nine, we see Paul's great love for his people and his desire that Israel would accept and obey the Gospel of Christ, along with the Gentiles, who have been called; chapter ten finds Paul continuing his desire for Israel (and all) to do God's righteousness and not their own. He shows further God's plan for many ages past has been now revealed in the law of faith; chapter eleven finds Paul still trying to get the Jews to see that the reception of the Gentiles and the salvation available to all is a result, or end, of centuries of planning by God to give man the Gospel which is His power to save all who obey it. Beginning with verse 33 of this chapter, Paul bursts forth with a declaration of praise to God for His great wisdom in this wonderful scheme of redemption He has planned and put into operation for man. Then, as we continue into chapter twelve, Paul gives in concise form, one of the grandest sermons ever preached as to the kind of life the Christian is to live; chapter thirteen continues with how the Christian is to live, including our responsibility to the civil powers; chapter fourteen finds Paul dealing with yet another phase of Christian living—how we are to treat a weaker brother; and chapter fifteen continues with admonitions to the stronger and sundry admonitions to Christian living, along with his desire to continue to preach to the world;

then chapter sixteen consists of many salutations to Christians who have obeyed this Gospel he has been discussing for some fifteen chapters.

Now, in all this, it is evident that Paul's number one topic is the Gospel — the law of faith — of which many prophecies and plans were made and put into action by our God and Father, which shows forth His great love and wisdom. Many things, in fact "all things" necessary for our salvation which was planned and put into action by God, work out for good to all who obey His plans. I contend that the "all things" which work out for our good are all the things God has done to enable us to have the great and wonderful law of faith — the Gospel of Jesus Christ. All the facts of the Gospel, all the commands to be obeyed, and all the promises to be enjoyed are all included in the "all things."

Now, "all things work together for good" to whom? To those who answer the Gospel call (cf. II Thessalonians 2:14), and obey His Gospel, thus putting themselves in position and relationship for all these plans to work for their good — their salvation. All the plans God has made — these "all things" — which God has given to enable us to be saved certainly work together for our good when we love God and His plan enough to obey.

This Scripture then, applies to the law of faith, God's plans for giving it, and the promises to be enjoyed by those who obey, and not to anything else.

To take this passage away from this context of the saving Gospel and try to apply it to every conceivable event, whether good or bad, that can happen to a child of God, is misusing the passage in a most absurd manner. I have heard this passage quoted by my brethren, and applied to every gory, gruesome, catastrophic event that could happen in one's life. Just picture the bloody car wreck, the untimely death of a husband, wife, child, or other relative, etc., and someone will take Romans 8:28 away from its beautiful setting and try to apply it to such. Paul did NOT have any such in mind when he penned our text. He wasn't discussing catastrophic events that might occur in the life of Christians. He was discussing things much more beautiful in God's plans for mankind.

Let me cite an example. I know of a Gospel preacher who had been to a neighboring town visiting the sick. On the way home, a drunk slammed into his car and killed him, leaving his wife with a family to raise. Many sons of Christian families have been killed in service of the country placing many hardships on numbers of people. Such could be multiplied thousands of times, but these will suffice to illustrate my point and to show the absurdity of taking a sweet beautiful passage from its setting and try to apply it to such gruesome events.

The Roman letter was NOT written about such matters, consequently, the application of Romans 8:28 to such things is a grave misuse of God's Word. I am aware that in some instances of "bad luck" one might be able to point out some point of good later on, but this would be an unusual thing, and would not come under the teaching of our text.

Brethren, let us leave Romans 8:28 in the beautiful setting and lesson which .Paul was discussing and quit abusing it by trying to apply it to events that he was not discussing. Let us "speak as the oracles of God."

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