**Series Title:**

**"OUR DILEMMA: GOD'S SOLUTION"**

**Paul's Letter to the ROMANS: Ch. 8:28-29**

***GOD’S ANSWER TO “WHY ME, LORD?”***

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or better or for worse. Was there ever a more all-encompassing commitment that we mortals are asked to make?!! What the heck are we getting ourselves in for when we step out in faith and make this pig-in-a-poke promise!

Some twenty-five years after Jesus’ return to heaven, in the 8th chapter of his seminal letter written to the early Christ-followers in Rome, then the world’s capital city, Paul relays three of God’s most staggering promises which will, if we let them sink in, revolutionize forever the way you and I think and live. **See if you can find them as we read Romans 8:1-39 (p. 841).**

Promise #1 NO CONDEMNATION! In v. 1 Paul says that the all-knowing, all-just, all-holy God, in whose presence no sin will ever be allowed, this God will NEVER again bring up our sins, if we’ve invited Christ to live in us as our personal Savior and Lord (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Promise #2 NO ACCIDENTS! In vv. 28-29 Paul states unequivocally that everything that touches the believer’s life is for his ultimate good, i.e., it contributes to his taking on the very character qualities of the Lord whom he now serves.

Promise #3 NO SEPARATION! In v. 39 Paul concludes this amazing chapter by saying that nothing, abso-pickin’-lutely nothing can ever pry God’s love away from those who are “in Christ.” We have an indestructible, non-recallable relationship with Him.

**WHAT PART OF “ALL” DON’T WE UNDERSTAND?**

Today we drill down into Promise #2. The King James Version of the Bible translates vv. 28-29 from the original Greek like this:

*“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. 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.”*

THE MESSAGE version of the Bible puts these verses in our English:

*“That’s why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him.”*

Life can get stinky. Your dream job becomes a nightmare. The client you’ve poured years into suddenly thinks he’ll look for another supplier. Your childhood sweetheart/spouse walks. A vicious disease intrudes. A loved one dies, along with most of you.

Nope, this ain’t Country Music; this is life. And Paul has the gall to say, “And we know that in all things Gods works for the good of those who love Him…” What’s this guy smokin’!!

Job losses, destroyed relationships, disasters, epidemics, famines, wars, Holocaust, 9/11 … Surely God can’t call these “good!”

That’s precisely why Rick Warren, in his runaway best-seller, THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE, calls Romans 8:28-29 “one of the most misquoted and misunderstood passages in the Bible.” Is Paul saying that every cloud has a silver lining? If not, then let’s hire Rick as our trail guide through this thicket of God’s inscrutable Truth.

PARSING A PREPOSTEROUS PROMISE

 “We live in a fallen world. Only in heaven is everything done perfectly the way God intends. That’s why we’re told to pray, ‘*Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10).’ To fully understand Romans 8:28-29 you must consider it phrase by phrase:

“’**We know**…’ Our hope in difficult times is not based on positive thinking, wishful thinking, or natural optimism. It’s a certainty based on the truth that God is in complete control of our universe and that He loves us.” (Understanding reality begins here.)

“’…**that God causes**…’ There’s a Grand Designer behind everything. Your life is not a result of random chance, fate, or luck. There is a master plan. … *We* make mistakes, but God never does. God *cannot* make a mistake – because He is God.” (Our choice is to see God first, then see our circumstances in that light.)

“’…**everything**…’ God’s plan for your life involves *all* that happens to you – your mistakes, your sins, your hurts. It includes illness, debt, disasters, divorce, and death of loved ones. God can bring good out of the worst evil. He did at Calvary.

“’…**to work together**…’ …. The events in your life work *together* in God’s plan. They’re not isolated, but interdependent parts of the process to make you like Christ. To bake a cake you use flour, salt, eggs, sugar and oil. … each (can be) pretty distasteful … But baked together, they become delicious. If you give God your distasteful, unpleasant experiences, He’ll blend them together for good.

“’…**for the good**…’ This does not say that everything in life *is* good. Much of what happens in our world is evil and bad, but God specializes in bringing good out of it. In the family tree of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1-16), four women are listed: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. Tamar seduced her father-in-law (Judah, the patriarch of one of the twelve tribes of Israel) to get pregnant. Ruth was not even Jewish and broke the law by marrying a Jewish man. Bathsheba committed adultery with David, which resulted in her husband’s (Uriah) murder. These were not sterling reputations, but God brought good out of bad, and Jesus came through their lineage. God’s purpose is greater than our problems, our pain, even our sin.

“’…**according to His purpose**…’ – What is that purpose? It is that we ‘become like His Son.’ Everything God allows to happen in your life is permitted for that purpose.” (If your Creator has a plan, wouldn’t it be helpful to know it, and wise to follow it?)

CHISELING DOWN TO CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

“We’re like jewels, shaped with the hammer and chisel of adversity. If a jeweler’s hammer isn’t strong enough to chip off our rough edges, God will use a sledgehammer. If we’re really stubborn, he uses a jackhammer. He will use whatever it takes.

“Every problem is a character-building opportunity, and the more difficult it is, the greater the potential for building spiritual muscle and moral fiber. Paul said, *‘We know that these troubles produce patience. And patience produces character* (Romans 5:3-4).’ What happens *outwardly* in your life is not as important as what happens *inside* you. Your circumstances are temporary, but your character will last forever.”

Paul knew trouble first-hand as he delivered the Gospel to an often hostile audience, enduring absurd pain so you and I could read what the risen Christ told him in person! Notice how he reprimands the early believers in Corinth for heeding teachers who distort the Gospel **as we read 2 Corinthians 11:22–12:10 (p. 863).**

Now back to THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN LIFE:

“The Bible often compares trials to a metal refiner’s fire that burns away the impurities. Peter said, *‘These troubles come to prove that your faith is pure. This purity of faith is worth more than gold* (1 Peter 1:7).’ A silversmith was asked, ‘How do you know when silver is pure?’ He replied, ‘When I see my reflection in it.’ When you’ve been refined by trials, people can see Jesus’ reflection in you …

“Since God intends to make you like Jesus, he’ll take you through the same experiences Jesus went through. That includes loneliness, temptation, stress, criticism, rejection, and many other problems. The Bible says Jesus *‘learned obedience through suffering’* and *‘was made perfect through suffering* (Hebrews 5:8-9).’” (NOTE: Jesus was already perfect. “Made perfect” here means He successfully completed His Father’s plan for Him, enduring suffering and persecution so He could truly identify with our human condition when He represents us, as our High Priest, before His Father.)

“Why would God exempt us from what he allowed his own Son to experience? Paul said, *‘We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through hard times with him, then we’re certainly going to go through the good times with him* (Romans 8:17).’

JESUS-LIKE LIVING

“Problems don’t automatically produce what God intends. Many people become bitter rather than better, and never grow up. You have to respond the way Jesus would.

**“Remember that God’s plan is good.** God knows what’s best for you and has your best interests at heart. God told Jeremiah, *‘The plans I have for you (are) plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future* (Jeremiah 29:11)*.’* Joseph understood this truth when he told his brothers who had sold him into slavery, *‘You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good* (Genesis 50:20)*….’*

 “It’s vital that you stay focused on God’s plan, not your pain or problem. That’s how Jesus endured the pain of the cross, and we’re urged to follow his example: *‘Keep your eyes on Jesus, our leader and instructor. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterwards.* (Hebrews 12:2)*.’*

“Corrie Ten Boom, who suffered in a Nazi death camp, explained the power of focus: ‘If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you’ll be at rest!’ Your focus will determine your feelings.

“The secret of endurance is to remember that your pain is temporary but your reward will be eternal. … (Paul) said, *‘Our present troubles are quite small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever* (2 Corinthians 4:17)*!’”* (What a comfort to know where you are at this very moment in God’s overall plan and purpose for your life!)

 “Don’t give in to short-term thinking. Stay focused on the end result: *‘If* (meaning “seeing that”) *we’re to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he’ll give us later* (Romans 8:17-18)*.’”* (By the time Paul wrote this he’d endured imprisonments, endless hours overboard at sea, beatings, stonings, hunger, pain and more. He KNEW suffering.)

“**Rejoice and give thanks.** The Bible tells us to *‘give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus* (1 Thessalonians 5:18)*.’* How’s this possible? Notice that God tells us to give thanks ‘*in* all circumstances,’ not ‘*for* all circumstances.’ God doesn’t expect you to be thankful *for* evil, sin, suffering, or for their painful consequences in the world. Instead, God wants you to thank him that he’ll use your problems to fulfill his purposes.

“The Bible says, *‘Rejoice in the Lord always* (Philippians 4:4)*.’* It doesn’t say, ‘Rejoice over your pain.’ That’s masochism. … No matter what’s happening, you can rejoice in God’s love, care, wisdom, power and faithfulness. Jesus said, *‘Be full of joy because you have a great reward waiting for you in heaven* (Luke 6:23)*.’*

“We can also rejoice in knowing that God is going through the pain with us. We do not serve a distant and detached God who spouts encouraging clichés safely from the sideline. Instead, he enters into our suffering. Jesus did it (by coming to earth in the form of man), and his Spirit does it in us now. God will never leave us on our own.

“**Refuse to give up.** Be patient and persistent. The Bible says, *‘Let the process go on until your endurance is fully developed, and you will find that you have become men of mature character…with no weak spots* (James 1:3-4)*.’*

“Character building is slow. Whenever we try to avoid difficulties in life, we short-circuit the process, delay our growth, and end up with a worse kind of pain – the worthless type that accompanies denial and avoidance. When you grasp the eternal consequences of your character development, you’ll pray fewer *‘Comfort me’* prayers (‘Help me feel good’) and more *‘Conform me’* prayers (‘Use this to make me more like you’)…

“If you’re facing trouble right now, don’t ask, ‘Why me?’ Instead ask, ‘What do you want me to learn?’ Then trust God, and keep on doing what’s right.”

**WHOM DO YOU TRUST?**

Trusting God starts with surrendering your life to Him. If you haven’t done that yet, you can’t cash in these life-giving, peace-giving promises from the God who loves you beyond all limits, the God who promises no condemnation, no accidents, no separation. Silently say to God right now, “God, I’m a sinner; we both know that. I believe Your Son Jesus was crucified to pay the penalty for my sins. I don’t get it, but You’ve given me just enough faith to believe it. Please enter my life now, and begin shaping me into the person You created me to be. Thank You. Amen.”

His Deal

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