

Gamma

Romans 8:28-39

Study 15 Living with confidence

Case 1

Clarise Gim had a favourite verse that had guided her all her life.

It was Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose

She was with a nice Christian boy dating for several years and then they broke up and Clarise was devastated and sought solace with her friends in church who brought up this verse in Romans. She clung on to the fact that God has in mind for her something much better in the future which helped her cope with her emotional pain.

Months later on she fell in love with a handsome athletic man who was 5 years her junior. He attended church sporadically, said he was a Christian although there was little evidence to suggest it. She drew comfort from Romans 8 :28 and believed with all her heart that this was the “good” that God had worked out for her. She was pushing 37 years of age and desperately wanted children and was so in love. She did not want to wind up miserably single for the rest of her life and so when he proposed she accepted.

Her new husband was great , very kind and loving. They had 3 children , one of which was born autistic. Her husband refused to let her kids go to church, turned to alcohol and started to beat her regularly at the slightest provocation. The beatings were not severe and no police report was made but she was miserable. She turned to her group leader at Gamma for advice

- 1. Did Clarice properly interpret Romans 8:28 ? and how did that affect her life? If she had consulted you before she decided to get married to her current husband what would you have advised?**

Clarice like many people has made the wrong interpretation because the “good” is not circumstantial good like finding a nicer handsomer husband as these are short term “goods”. The good is related to the ultimate purpose for us which is to conform us to the image of Christ. Her husband at the time was from the information on the case history provided a nominal Christian at best or even a non Christian. A union would have been wrong and God does not want her to get

her involved with a wrong. The best advice would be to get counseling esp pre-marital counseling to work out issues. The Lord did not use Romans 8:28 to instruct her to get married to this man. She did it all on her own.

- 2. Clarice decided that she had indeed misinterpreted Romans 8:28 to devastating effect. Hence she reasoned that her current problems were due to the fact she made an error in judgment so the best way out of her misery was to divorce her husband as he was not the "good" that God had planned for her in the first place. He turned out to be "bad" as her children could not even worship God. What do you think?**

Notwithstanding her misinterpretation of Romans 8:28 the fact is that God had allowed the marriage to take place. God understands there has been problems in the marriage and the man has changed and become violent not in small part to the devastation of having an autistic child. Even this evil God has allowed to happen to Clarice which will be in the long run to used to do "good" in terms of conforming her to the image of Jesus. The verse *gives us confidence that we cannot really ruin God's good purposes for us*. "All" really means all. That means she can say that it includes even her backsliding and her sin. Now sin is always bad, always a terrible thing, and we will always live to regret the painful consequences in our lives that sin always brings. But God is so great that he weaves it into our ultimate good. He can use even our sins and failures to humble us and teach us what we need to do to bring us to our final glory. He makes use of sin to show Christians our weakness, frailty and fallibility.

Divorce is not the answer as the husband has not chosen to leave her and is still committed. Her life is not in any danger.

- 3. Clarice had increasing difficulties praying to God because she had felt that she had messed up. Her life was a mess and she did not glorify God. She had fear and anxiety every day. She felt so guilty as her real motives for marrying her husband was that she just did not trust God enough to wait for the right one or remain single. The spiritual lives of her three young ones were now hanging in the balance. How can you comfort her based on Romans 8:28-39?**

Clarice is certainly responsible for the reasons she went in to the marriage. There may be the fact of sin because of the lack of faith in God or refusal to get counseling. However as children of God we all have our sins. She is now

grieving for the right reasons not sorry for the consequences of her actions but more because she is disgusted with her own lack of trust and grieved God with her life. There is and should be repentance.

Secondly Romans 8:28-29 *removes general fear and anxiety*. if God is “working” in “all things,” then it means his plan includes what we would call her messed up life or “senseless” things. Ultimately there are no accidents. Compare Proverbs 16:33 – “The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposal thereof is from the Lord.” God must be “working in” even flips of a coin. This must lead to some ability to relax! We are not in the grip of blind chance or fate. The Greeks thought that even Zeus was subject to the fates — not us! The universe is not a mechanism run by blind chance, but is run by a person — the Father. Sum: We don’t need to fear life and circumstances.

“... it is one of the most glorious things we can ever know about ourselves. Do you know that as a Christian all things are working together for good for you? Do you know that God is over-ruling everything in the whole cosmos for your good?... You cannot know it and be depressed at the same time; for such knowledge and depression are mutually exclusive.”

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 8:28-30

Thirdly, *it helps us see God’s purpose in difficulties*. If God is working for our “good” in *everything*, then we see that *both* the good things *and* the bad things serve the purpose of furthering the good in our life. This wonderful text leads to the following logical deduction by John Newton made years ago:

“Everything is necessary that he sends; nothing can be necessary that he withholds.”

This means that if we think we require some *good* thing that God has withheld from us — in reality we don’t absolutely need it. It also means that if we feel our life has been ruined by some *bad* thing — in reality it is playing some very important role in your life. It is teaching you, molding you, enriching you, humbling you, and so on. Sum: We learn to look at the troubles in our life as being part of God’s loving purpose for us.

On the other hand she needs to understand that God has provided her good things , her three lovely children albeit one autistic which means more love and character moulding will be occur in her life because of this.

She needs to understand that God is not against her because of any mistakes or sin of hers in the past (v31)

How can God be against her when he did not spare his only son, if He could do that for her then any complexities in her marital life and the life of her children would be nothing to the power and love of God

She needs to handle her guilt and cling on to v 33-34. Yes she can be guilty of sin and may have made wrong decisions in her life and can be suffering the consequences of these decisions but God is the one who justifies which means she is righteous in the eyes of God. When God looks at her He sees the righteousness of Christ. God does not see her own righteousness. She need to grieve excessively over them because there is no longer any condemnation Romans 8:1.

She needs to be reminded that it is Christ who now sits on the right hand of the Father and is constantly interceding on her behalf. He is constantly like a lawyer presenting her case before the Father because based on the Law she is absolutely not guilty. Jesus demands justice for her and in the eyes of the law and God she is not guilty. The Devil continues to accuse her to try to get her to diminish her trust in the work of Christ. To loose her grip on the cross the Devil has to magnify her sins.

She needs to be reminded that she still has a role in this marriage

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, 2 when they see your respectful and pure conduct

(1 Peter 3:1-2 ESV)

If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy

(1 Corinthians 7:13-14 ESV)

Her faithful presence will be a blessing to her family but she needs to pray and have others in the family pray with her

4. Clarice is confused and always thought that Romans 8:28 was always about victory in God bringing only good things to us. Look at Romans 8: 29-30 How does vv.29-30 explain what God's ultimate "purpose" in history is, and also what our ultimate "good" is in vv.28?

The word “for” shows the close connection to v.28. vv.29-30 are actually Paul’s explanation of what God’s “purpose” actually *is* — what God is “working out” in all the circumstances of life. Why did Paul add verses 29 and 30 instead of leaving us only v.28? Because v.28 is *not* meant to tell us that when we have troubles, they will just “work out” in some general or abstract sense. Rather, he means *everything that happens to us is working out for our final and ultimate sanctification and holiness and salvation*. Everything is working together so we will be “conformed to the likeness of his son.” This shows us that “the good” God *always* is working for us is character change. He is making us as loving, noble, true, wise, strong, good, joyful and kind as Jesus is.

This is an extremely important interpretation of v.28. Some people read v.28 as teaching that God gives more good things or different kinds of circumstances to Christians over non-Christians, but he is not really saying that. Paul is not promising Christians an easier or more comfortable life. He is not saying that Christians will have a higher percentage of “pleasant” over “unpleasant” circumstances than unbelievers. Rather, Paul says that “all things” — the same basic range of good and bad things which happen to all people — God uses in our hearts so we are taught, humbled, and refined into the likeness of Christ. As we said above, the same circumstances have a different effect on unbelievers.

So God’s purpose for all of history is seen in this phrase, “to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” It is an astounding statement. It teaches:

He is “conforming” us. It means God has a master design or form (“his Son”), and now every circumstance — “all things” — is designed to shape, polish, melt, smooth, sculpt, frame, cast and contour us into that master design. He is re-pouring us into the mold of Christ’s perfect greatness. The idea of “form” does not mean a superficial likeness, but something total. We are being remade from the inside out, from the depths. It is a likeness of essence. Compare: “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” – 2 Cor. 3:18

b. We will be his “brethren.” We are not just legally adopted into God’s family (see 8:15), but we are also getting his “family resemblance.” We are told that when we are born again, we get God’s very nature, his “DNA.” (II Peter 1:4 “you may participate in the divine nature.”) Through the circumstances of life, God is drawing that out and shaping us into brothers and sisters of Christ, who resemble him and our father. Compare: “In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.” Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says: ‘I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.’ –

Heb.2:10-12

Ultimately, the proof of a right approach to these doctrines is that you find in them the greatest urge to holiness and sanctification. If your belief of these doctrines has not driven you to holiness you are in a dangerous condition... You are misusing them to say, 'Well, it is all right with me, it matters not therefore what I do. I am saved...' No one can truly see these doctrines without being humbled

– D.M.Lloyd-Jones, *Romans* 8:28-30 (p.20)

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Meditation

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers

(Romans 8:28-29 ESV)

What wrong attitudes do I need to repent of

What is it in these verses that bring comfort.

What is it in these verses that build me up

Meditate on these for the next week and come back to share with each other how God has spoken to you through the Holy Spirit.