

# False Hope in Romans 8:28

by D. Matthew Brown

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

Romans 8:28 is one of the most beloved and most-oft quoted verses in the whole of Scripture. All Christians find consolation in these words penned by the Apostle Paul two-thousand years ago, even Arminians who detest the providence and eternal decrees of God. The reason for this is clear. In this most blessed verse, the Apostle gives Christians a great comfort in times of grief and anguish by solacing them with the fact that all things in this life, no matter how small or painful, work together for the good of those who love God. That is, God in his sovereignty, takes the evils that abound in this life and knits them together in an omnipotent fashion that is most beneficial to the children of God. The question then is—what is the nature of this good for which the Apostle writes?

Before answering the question at hand it may be profitable to explore a common misconception held by a large portion of Christians today. How do Christians today commonly view the text of Romans 8:28? I would venture to say that most look at this text and say something to effect, "When troubles come my way, God is using those troubles to bring about greater blessings for me in my future here on earth." Though, in God's providence, that statement may be true in some cases, I do not believe that is what this text is saying concerning the good that God brings about.

What then is the nature of this good that God brings about in all situations? Notice first to whom the good comes. It comes to those "who love God..., who are called according to his purpose." Those who love God and those who are called according to his purpose are the same persons. They who love God are bound to God's purpose in the salvation of sinners and in the purpose of creation. What then is that purpose? The ultimate purpose in the salvation of sinners is found in the 2 Corinthians 4:4 phrase, "The gospel of *the glory of Christ*," and the ultimate purpose of creation is found in Psalm 19:1, saying, "The heavens declare the glory of God." All things that exist therefore are bound to a single task—the proclamation of the glory of God.

Therefore when Paul says all things work together for good to those who love God, I believe that he is saying that all things work to the glory of God, which is the good of his children. In other words, God's glory is the greatest good of the elect. Therefore, as Christians—those who genuinely love God, we should be able to rejoice in all situations, not because God is going to eventually make our situations in this life better, but because God will see to it that his glory will be attained and manifested to the greatest degree possible. Paul makes this very point in Romans 5:2 by saying, "we rejoice in hope of the

glory of God." Since God's purpose in the universe is to bring glory to his name, we as lovers of God must be about that same purpose.

The inherent problem that exists in every person is that no one naturally desires for God to be glorified. As a matter of fact, men by nature despise God and his glory. Paul writes in the first chapter of Romans that natural men who had not received written revelation (i.e. Gentiles) "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." They, in their fallen state, chose ugly, created beasts over the beauty of the Eternal Creator-God! There is no way to measure the atrocity which they committed against the One who breathed into them the very breath of life. Though their crime was great and afforded them eternal damnation in the fires of hell, how much greater is the crime of those who have heard the Gospel of the glory of Christ and have traded it for televisions, cars, magazines, video games, houses, and retirements! Ask yourselves, all you who fear God, what do you treasure as your good? Surely there awaits a much hotter flame in the depths of hell for those who have heard the glorious Gospel and have cast it aside as something common.