

## Do you trust God enough to know He wants the best for you – always

As we read through St Paul's letter to the Romans we reach Chapter 8, with the most wonderful promises following on from one of the toughest promises to understand – the promise of verse 28. This 3<sup>rd</sup> reflection on St Paul's letter to the Romans is on Chapter 8 verses 28-39:

<sup>28</sup> We know that all things work together for good<sup>[a]</sup> for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> 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 within a large family<sup>[b]</sup>. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. <sup>31</sup> What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### Footnote:

<sup>[a]</sup> verse 28 - Other ancient authorities read "God makes all things work together for good", or "in all things God works for good"

<sup>[b]</sup> verse 29 - Greek "among many brothers"

Verse 28 is one of the toughest promises of God to hold on to when life is difficult and there is suffering, pain and disaster happening in our lives and around us. The footnote shows the better translation "IN all things God works for good" and the verse continues "for those who love Him and who are called according to His purpose". This is a promise from God but how can things that cause us such pain be "good"? We know from Job that God does not cause suffering but allows it, but we know God is good, all the time, and loves us more than we could ever imagine so how do these two seemingly opposite things work out.

The key is in verse 28 "God's purposes" – only He has the big picture. The analogy with a tapestry is helpful: when you look at a tapestry from the underneath all you see is lots of threads, and you might wonder why the grey and black threads are in there, and why it is not all gold, silver and white – nice bright colours. Only when we view the tapestry from above does it make sense. The threads are all the things that happen in our lives, even what we would consider trivial and inconsequential – God is in charge of, and responsible, for everything, and He is omniscient (knowing everything). But note the verse says "for those who love God" and "are called according to His purpose" so the good only applies to those people not to everyone. So for people who do not love God and for whom Jesus is not their Lord and Saviour (so those who have not been called) then suffering makes little or no sense and must be avoided. C.S. Lewis famously said "pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world" – it's His wake-up call that there is more to life than this world and what we have here. For those who are called and who love God (Christians) God uses the difficult times to prune us (John 15:1-2), or like a furnace to remove the dross from the pure gold within (1

Peter 1:7) so He gradually shapes us into the wonderful beings only He knows we are. We will be those beings for eternity (sometimes referred to as “our glory selves”) and we will be like Jesus (verses 29 & 30). Notice the verbs in verse 30 are all in the past tense, completed actions. This takes a bit of getting your head around: God chose us before time began (remember God is outside time), called us (we didn’t make a decision to follow Him), justified us through Jesus’ death and resurrection and glorified us. The “glory self” is inside us already but sin messes up the image; the desires of our hearts need changing not just the outwards signs of sin (sinful actions, words and thoughts) and this is the area God is working on in us to prune, and the dross to burn away. God seeks our godliness so we become like our brother Jesus (see footnote to verse 29). This is God’s purpose for us; He is not working for our health, wealth and happiness nor for our comfort in this life. When we see things from God’s perspective the view is different, but pruning, or being exposed to the intense heat of a furnace, is painful at the time. We still tend to focus on this life being all there is rather than it being the ante-room for eternity with God. A trivial analogy – imagine you are invited to Buckingham Palace for a full day tour with Her Majesty the Queen as your personal guide. You are taken there blindfolded so you can appreciate all the splendours there when the blindfold is removed. But you start in the cloakroom or cleaner’s cupboard. If you decided to spend the whole day there it would be a very strange thing to do when the wonders of the palace with the Queen for company waiting on you herself all day (note Luke 12:37 which is a surprising promise). If you are not a royalist you can come up with an alternative analogy but it gives a glimpse as Christ is King, and it is “His Universe” in place of a palace.

So if we focus on eternity can we be really sure we are going to get there, can we trust God’s generous and gracious promises that we will inherit along with our elder brother Jesus? Verses 35 to 39 give us the answer – what can stop us.....**nothing!** St Paul lists all sorts of obstacles, hardships, persecution, and even death, but nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The key question therefore is: “Is He really our Lord (master) and Saviour (Christ, Messiah) whom we rely on completely in all circumstances and at all times – or do we revert to being in control ourselves in “doing it my way” mode? If He is our Lord, and we love Him, and completely trust Him, and know that **IN** those tough times God has a greater purpose in mind as He shapes us, then we can ask for His strength to endure those tough times, and be “more than conquerors” (v37). God is “for us” (v 31) because “He did not spare His only Son” (v 32) in order to save us – yes, **YOU are that precious to Him**. Knowing that God gives us the courage and endurance to get through, and that He is on our side despite suffering and hardships, is the comfort we need in those times. **Nothing can separate you from God** - what a promise.