

A Study in the Book of Romans

19

Romans 8:26-28

Key Verse

“ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ”

Step by step, from the very opening verses of his letter to the Romans until now, Paul has been building a revelation of the wonder of the Gospel. Through **chapters 1-3**, he has described the deplorable condition of mankind, in need of rescue by God. Through **chapters 4-7**, after describing the bad news, he has revealed the good news of a Gospel that meets every need of a lost humanity. Now, in **chapter 8**, he has opened the door of revelation on the Spirit-controlled dynamic of the Christian life. Yet Paul is still building toward his great climax – the goal toward which the salvation of God is moving.

Introduction

The Gospel's Three Revelations

▶ **The Gospel's Three Answers** ◀

The Gospel's Answer to Israel

The Gospel in Action

Conclusion

With this in mind, let's explore **8:26-28**, and allow Paul to take us into the great crescendo of the Gospel, which the next few verses reveal.

The Spirit is Groaning

Read Romans 8:26

Not only is the whole of creation groaning for the glorious Day when we will be publicly revealed as the sons of God (**8:22**); not only are we ourselves groaning for this grand celebration (**8:23**); but so also, says Paul in **8:26**, is the Spirit himself. His groaning is not only the longing of God's own heart for that Day to come, but is actually the Spirit's expression of intercession on our behalf.

Our finite minds are limited in what they can comprehend of this glorious hope that is before us, so we cannot fully articulate what we are so longing for. We don't really know how to pray, says Paul. But the Holy Spirit is praying on our behalf! And he is not praying in some place a long way away from us, in heaven; he and the believer are now inseparable, for he dwells within us. As J. B. Phillip's *The New Testament in Modern English* expresses **8:26-27**:

“His Spirit within us is actually praying for us in those agonizing longings which can never find words. And God who knows the heart's secret understands, of course, the Spirit's intention as he prays for those who love God.”

The Message gives **8:26-27** a powerful punch:

“God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God.”

This “pregnant condition” is the focus of the Holy Spirit's intercession for us. And the Holy Spirit within us, Paul tells us, does two things:

- He strengthens and motivates us in prayer
- He reveals God's will so that we pray according to it

Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-12

This deep groaning of the Spirit within the believer can be seen in the Scripture to have four definite expressions – each with the ultimate purpose of bringing us, and all the saints, to the place of maturity as God's sons. These, as Paul says, cannot be articulated but are expressed in deep groanings that come from the Spirit within.

When we pray, we sometimes sense the deep groanings of the Holy Spirit's intercession for us. This is particularly the case for church leaders, who cry out in prayer for the church, and bear the burden the Lord has for those under their care. In **Galatians 4:19**, Paul revealed the intercession the Holy Spirit had placed upon his heart:

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”

Here the groanings of the Spirit are pictured as “the pains of childbirth.” Paul had so identified with the Lord and so joined himself to the intercession of the Holy Spirit that he knew that these “agonizing longings which can never find words” (NTME) and “groans that words cannot express” (NIV) were, as it were, the pains of childbirth “until Christ is formed in you.”

The Ministry of the Spirit

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to bring us to the ultimate goal of maturity in Christ and to the Day (at the Second Coming of Christ) when we will

be publicly declared to be the sons of God! God the Father conceived this magnificent plan. God the Son opened the way for it to happen. God the Spirit performs the work in us that will bring about its realization. Not only is the Holy Spirit constantly interceding on our behalf, but the scriptures reveal the vastness of the Holy Spirit's ministry to us:

- He reveals to us the wonder of God's plans and purposes – the mysteries hidden in ages past (**Ephesians 3:4-5; 1 Corinthians 2:6-10**).
- He speaks to us to bring us encouragement and correction (**Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22**).
- He teaches us and reminds us of Jesus' words (**John 14:26**).
- He gives us understanding of spiritual truths (**1 Corinthians 2:12-16**).
- He leads us into all truth, and tells us what is to come (**John 16:13**).
- He reveals the Lord Jesus to us (**John 15:26; 16:14-15**).
- He is the "Comforter" or "Counselor" – literally, the "one called alongside to help" (**John 14:26**).
- He leads and guides us in God's will for our lives (**Acts 8:26-29**).
- He empowers us to witness for Christ (**Acts 1:8**).
- He gives us boldness to live and speak for Christ (**Acts 4:31**).
- He involves us in God's purposes on earth (**Acts 13:2, 20:28**).
- He gives us spiritual gifts so that we and other Christians can be encouraged and made stronger (**1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 14:26**).
- He gives us each a special ministry so that we can impart life to the Body of Christ and cause it to grow (**Ephesians 4:16**).
- He strengthens us in the "inner man" (**Ephesians 3:16**).
- He produces the character of Christ within us! (**Galatians 5:22-23**).
- He is producing the glory of God within us! (**2 Corinthians 3:17-18**).

As we have already seen, **Romans 8** has been called "the chapter of the Spirit." And now we can see why! He's absolutely indispensable to the salvation that God has forged through Christ! The Holy Spirit brings us to birth (**John 3:5-6; Titus 3:5**), and the Holy Spirit also causes us to grow toward maturity – "from glory to glory" (**2 Corinthians 3:18**, KJV). As J. B. Phillips expresses **2 Corinthians 3:18**:

"But all of us...reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendor into his own image."

In Accordance with God's Will

Read Romans 8:27

In this verse, Paul reveals the power behind the intercession of the Holy Spirit for our lives:

- The Father knows the mind of the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit intercedes in according with God's will.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-11

What is God's will? That we might experience our public adoption as fully mature heirs of God, what the *King James Version* calls "the manifestation of the sons of God" (8:19, KJV).

God is at Work

Read Romans 8:28

Having just written of the glorious future that awaits the believer in eternity, Paul now comes "back to earth" again. He shows how this wonderful purpose that God has in store for us casts a whole new light on the events and circumstances of our lives now. He reveals two aspects of a truth that places the Christian in an invincible position in life:

- God is at work for our good!
- God is at work in all things!

For those enter into what the Gospel offers, the wonderful truth of **Romans 8:28** becomes their experience. God gets to work in *every* situation – whatever it may be – and causes it to result for their good! This involves the two areas that affect our lives:

World events

It is easy to become alarmed at what is happening in the world around us. Many people feel like things are running out of control. But the Bible reveals that this is not the case for the Christian. God is very much in control and is working "in all things" for our good!

There are three forces that are at work in this world:

- God (**Psalm 66:7; Daniel 4:34-35; 1 Chronicles 29:10-13**)
- Satan (**Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30**)
- Man (**Psalm 8:4-8; Hebrews 2:6-8; Genesis 9:23; Daniel 2:37-38**)

Since Adam's fall, mankind has been held under the dominion of the "god of this world" – Satan (**1 John 5:19**). But for the believer – who is now free from his dominion and power (**Colossians 1:13**) – comes the realization that the ultimate and final power in this world is in the hands of the Lord.

All events in history, all events in the world today, all the developments in international relations, will culminate in that great climax of the future – the Second Coming of Christ, which in turn will usher in the glorious "age to come" for those who love him (**Revelation 21:1-5**). Thus God will steer every situation in world affairs – even though not authored by God, but rather produced by man's sin and rebellion against him – towards his ultimate plan (see **Psalm 2:1-6**).

World history is accelerating towards the great Day for which Christians are longing. This wonderful knowledge that God has the ultimate control of all events in the universe has been the quiet confidence of saints throughout the ages. In the midst of persecution and suffering, the knowledge that God will have the final word has given them a sense of security, together with the strength, peace and joy to face anything that may come their way. As **Hebrews 12:1-3** exhorts us:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Read Matthew 5:10-12

Read Luke 21:25-28

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

However, this is by no means a fatalistic attitude towards world events. Far from taking a passive attitude toward the affairs of this world, the Scripture reveals that we, as God’s sons here on earth, are to be very much involved in directing the course of history. Through prayer and positive involvement, God’s children can dramatically change the plans of men. Daniel and Esther are perfect examples of this, but the Scriptures are full of such men and women of faith (**Hebrews 11:32-40**). The Bible also reveals how there are times when the Lord is looking to his children to hold back the judgment he is about to bring on a deserving generation (**Exodus 32:9-14; Isaiah 59:16; Ezekiel 22:30; Jonah 3:1-10**).

The ultimate destiny of this world is unchanging, for God by nature is sovereign and holds the ultimate control. Along the roads of history, he has had his landmarks planned out, all pointing to the great destination ahead. Old Testament men of God prophesied of them and believers down through the ages have proclaimed them even before they happened – the return of Israel once again to her land is an excellent example (**Isaiah 11:10-12; Luke 21:20-24**).

However, man is still able to determine his own life and future within the vast context of God’s blueprint for history. The climax of this plan will be at the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, when all his enemies will be put under his feet and all those who love him will join him for eternity. But many choices lie before mankind between now and then. Each individual makes his own choice as to how he will be involved in God’s plan (**Acts 17:24-27**). But for those who love God and desire with all their heart to be part of His purpose, God is working in every world event to bring about that ultimate purpose for them.

Personal circumstances

The same truth applies to the circumstances of our personal lives. Satan will try to attack and overcome the child of God (**1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9,13,17**).

He will use people and events on a daily level to attempt this. But the comforting truth for the Christian is that God is working “in all things” in order to turn them for our good. “We know,” says Paul, “that in all things God works for the good...” He is speaking from experience, for his hardest trials were the means by which the power of Christ rested upon him. In **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**, Paul explained:

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Read 2 Corinthians 6:4-10

Paul was a walking testimony to the reality of **Romans 8:28**. His hardships turned out for the furtherance of the Gospel (**Philippians 1:12-14**). The source of the persecution was Satan (working through men), but God worked in these very adverse circumstances to turn them for good!*

For Our Good

We’ve seen that God works in both world events and personal circumstances, causing them to be turned for our good. But in what way, exactly, does he work them for our good?

Our outward good

God turns every outward attack of the enemy around to:

- Bring about Satan’s own defeat (**Isaiah 54:17**)
- Strengthen and encourage our faith (**2 Timothy 4:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4; 3:1-5**)
- Bring glory to himself (**John 21:18-19**)

With each attack of the enemy, God’s grace is made available to the Christian so that he can become an overcomer in that situation (**Ephesians 6:10-17; 2 Corinthians 12:9-10**). The life and victory of the resurrected Christ is now surging through our veins! (**Ephesians 1:18-23**).

And even if a Christian experiences a seeming defeat, even this can be turned around by God to become his strength and power (**2 Corinthians 4:6-18**). Take a look at these examples from Scripture:

- Joseph is betrayed by his brothers and experiences slavery, undeserved shame and prison. The result: he is exalted to a high position in the land of Egypt and is able to save his people from starvation (**Genesis 45:4-8; 50:20**).

* For the child of God there is also the wonderful truth that there is a limit to Satan’s activity. The Lord will not permit him to go too far (**1 Corinthians 10:13; Job 1:12; 2:6; Luke 22:31**).

- Moses fails miserably in his first attempt to save his people in Egypt and has to flee the land in fear and disgrace, but he eventually becomes the great deliverer of Israel (**Exodus 2:11-21**).
- The three Hebrew men are thrown into the furnace. The result: Nebuchadnezzar worships the true God, declaring the glory of God throughout the entire empire (**Daniel 3-4; see also chapter 6**).
- The early Christians are threatened with persecution. The result: the power of God rests upon them and great miracles are done in Jesus' name (**Acts 4:17-33**).
- Stephen is martyred, and through the ensuing persecution, led by Saul, the Christians are scattered in all directions. The result: the Gospel is preached everywhere they go (**Acts 7:54-8:4**), the city of Samaria turns to the Lord (**Acts 8:5-8**), Paul eventually encounters the Lord Jesus personally (**Acts 9**) and the Gospel is released to the Gentiles (**Acts 11:19-26; 15:1-35**).
- Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown into prison. The result: the salvation of the jailer and his family, and the birth of the Philippian church (**Acts 16:19-33**).

And so it goes on – all through Scripture – all through Church history – and in the lives of Christians today!

Our inward good

But of even greater importance is the good that these adverse circumstances are working *within* us, for the Lord uses these very difficulties as instruments to develop in us his ultimate goal – the character of his Son! Just as a loving father plans the best future for his son, taking him through the educational program that is best suited for him to reach his full potential, so our heavenly Father uses life's circumstances to bring out our full potential in Christ. Through every situation the Lord has one thing in mind – the fulfillment of his glorious plan for us. And just as a loving father encourages his son through the difficulties he faces in life, wanting more than anything else that character be developed in him through his problems, so our heavenly Father's burning desire is to develop the character of Jesus in us – and circumstances become the tools in his hand for this purpose.

James tells us, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you face trials of many kinds..." and goes on to say why: "...because you know that *the testing of your faith develops perseverance*." And the end result of this quality of perseverance developed within us is that we will be "mature and complete not lacking anything" (**James 1:2-4**).

Just take a look at Joseph's life as an example. Not only did Joseph's trial result in outward good, but it was also the very trial of faith that produced in him the strength of character necessary to make him the ruler he was to become.

Read Psalm 105:17-21

Equally so for Moses. It was Moses' 40 years in obscurity after apparent failure that made him the meekest man on earth (**Numbers 12:3**). In the midst of very difficult times, Job too was able to make a wonderful declaration in **Job 23:10**:

“But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”

Read 1 Peter 1:6-7

Peter says that these trials of our faith are precious – “of greater worth than gold” – because they are producing within us the most valuable commodity there is – the character of Christ. Just as gold is purified by fire, so these trials of our faith act as the purifying force in our lives, producing “praise, honor and glory.”

It is interesting to compare Peter's statement with Jesus' parable in **Matthew 25:14-30** (NKJV). When Jesus returns for us, these trials of faith that we have endured and conquered will be for our:

- ☞ **Praise:** “Well done, good and faithful servant.”
- ☞ **Honor:** “You have been faithful over a few things; I will make you ruler over many things.”
- ☞ **Glory:** “Enter into the joy of your master.”

The Christian is invincible! Even in the worst of circumstances, God's power is available to alter the course of those circumstances so that they produce good for us! As Paul declares in **2 Corinthians 2:14**:

“...thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ.”

The Qualifications of Romans 8:28

We have been looking at the wonderful truth of how God works in all things for our good. But if you read **Romans 8:28** again, you will note that this promise from God is not unconditional. There are in fact two qualifications necessary for this truth to be applicable to a person's life:

- ☞ We must love God
- ☞ We must be called according to his purpose

Once again, Paul is referring to the two aspects of our “sonship” with God – our *personal relationship* with him and our *position of authority* with him. The “call” that Paul is speaking of is not just a call into relationship (salvation), but also a call for those who are *already* in relationship – who *already* love Him. We are called for a purpose, and it is this purpose that defines the promise of **Romans 8:28**.

For example, if a father stands at the doorway of his house and calls his son, the son will come running to him and will immediately ask, “Yes, Dad, what do you want?” He is not being called to come into relationship with his father – he is already a son – but he knows that his father has a reason behind his call, something

he wants him to do. It is the same with our heavenly Father. As his children, we are called for a special purpose.

Read Ephesians 3:9-11

It is not only the knowledge of our relationship with God that gives us the confidence that he is working in all things for our good. The understanding of the glorious purpose for which he has called us is of vital importance, for it provides the overriding reason behind each trial of faith. We know that God is working in all things for our good, for we know he is using them to prepare us for the glorious purpose to which he has called us.

The Hope of His Calling

Read Ephesians 1:17-18

Paul prayed that our eyes would be opened so that we would (as J. B. Phillips translates it):

“...realize how great is the hope to which he is calling you – the magnificence and splendor of the inheritance promised to Christians.”

As we have already seen, this hope spoken of in the Bible is not mere wishful thinking. It is the actual goal that God has for us as his children. Yes, it is in the future, but is just as definite as though it were already ours (**Hebrews 11:1**).

The Christian attribute of hope is the sure expectation in our hearts of the fulfillment of that goal (**Philippians 3:13-14**). It is an essential ingredient of the Christian life (**1 Corinthians 13:13**), for it is only hope that keeps our vision clear in a world clouded with sin and Satan’s activity. It is the vision of what will be that gives us the courage and stamina to go through the trials on the way, knowing that God is working in them to mold that vision into reality in us. With this knowledge we can, as James says, “consider it pure joy” when we go through trials (**James 1:2-3; Romans 5:3-4**).

Let’s imagine a man who, while on a camping trip, becomes lost in a dense forest. No matter which way he turns he cannot see through the density of the trees and has no idea which direction his camp is in. He decides there is only one thing to do. He looks up and searches out the tallest tree, then he scales it to its lofty height from where he can see above the treetops and scan the surrounding landscape. There, in the distance, he spots the camp and his goal. Coming down to the ground again, now knowing the exact direction to take, he wields his hatchet enthusiastically and hacks his way through the dense undergrowth to his destination.

This is what hope does for us. It lifts us above our daily circumstances, which many times seem thick and dense around us, causing us to see our destination – the purpose for which God has called us. As we see clearly our glorious goal, we can then come down to earth, pick up our “hatchets” of faith, and, with confidence,

clear our way through all the trials and testings that may face us, knowing that each step takes us closer to our destination.

Our Great Example

Jesus is given as our great example of hope. He stands as a testimony to God working in all things for good, and also as a witness to the power of hope in the most severe of circumstances. It was because of his understanding of his Father's great purpose that Jesus was willing to suffer the horror of the Cross.

As **Hebrews 12:2** tells us, he endured the Cross for the "joy set before him." That "joy set before him" was not only his own resurrection and the return to his former glory with the Father (**John 17:5**), but the fact that he was going to take many sons back to glory with him (**Hebrews 2:9-13**). So, having the example of Christ Jesus himself, we are exhorted in **Hebrews 12:3** (Phillips):

"Think constantly of him enduring all that sinful men could say against him and you will not lose your purpose or your courage."

It is only as we know the Father's call upon our lives that we can truly understand how he is now working in all things for our good. Because of relationship (the fact that we love God) and purpose (the fact that we are called by God to his purpose), we are able to declare, in the words of the *New Living Translation*:

"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good...!"

As the *Amplified Bible* expounds:

"We are assured and know that [God being a partner in their labor], all things work together and are [fitting into a plan] for good to those who love God and are called according to [His] design and purpose."