

In All things, God works for the good of those who love Him 《 Ro 8:28-32 》

Prelude: It's difficult for man to see God's love. It isn't that we do not know God loves us, but it's the limitation and weakness of our humanity that make us blind to His love. Our limitation causes us to be ignorant of the many things concerning the past and eternity, and the many matters that are related to us in this life. Besides, our weakness cause us to only focus on the current circumstances (the pain sentiment, non-ideal environment, powerlessness etc), thus unable to link them to the grace that God's given us in the past, now, and future. God knows our limitation and weaknesses, thus in the bible, He gives us the most beautiful promise to those He loves, that is "God works for the good of those who love Him", and then He gives us Holy Spirit who helps us to receive all of His blessings from this most important promise. Actually, often we are severely deceived by our own feelings (eg: the sense of poverty, defeated, hopelessness, unloved, unable to come out of sins etc), and the scariest is when our feelings are shaped into our mindset and directing our living – that is the moment we are controlled by the incorrect voice. As a result, many people slip into a life of sinning. But thank the Lord for His great love for us; He will not allow those He knows to be engulfed by sin. He will definitely intervene in their lives to save them. To us who have been saved, He has given us the Counselor Holy Spirit to safeguard the grace in us so that we will not lose faith, after that, His sustaining help (interceding through groans) enables us to be filled with His glory increasingly. Today, in receiving the help of Holy Spirit, we ought to know a very fundamental element, ie we who are born as creations, ought to know clearly "the promise of God" and "God's sovereignty" in all things, and get these 2 into faith ideology. As human, there're things we should know and must know, and we meet and come near to God through what we know. Also, there're things that we can never know, or do not need to know, in this we surrender fully to God and enjoy His blessings through our submission. Actually, there are far too many things we do not know, of which some are gradually understood and felt after some time and related experiences; some matters are understood only when we meet the Lord, but Lord promised us that in all things, God works for the good of us. Try asking: as a man who is limited and weak, why do we care to fight against this promise? Does our suffering last forever? Can our feelings decide everything? We need to be cautious in that we should never let the "self-centered mentality" to occupy us. When we put "me" (feelings, environment, problems, experiences etc) as everything, our spirit will enter into a state of self-exaltation. At that moment, we can neither look upon the promise of God nor see His love, soon our spirit will lose the dignified heart of children of God. In fact, God has called us in His eternal love, and He loves us through all things. Therefore, if a believer can enjoy His love through all things, it is the most obvious path to receive glory (sanctification, becoming like Christ). Hence, <Ro 8:28> does not bring us temporal positivity, instead, it wants to bring us to the current submission.

1. Relationship between God, all things, and me 《Ro 8:28,32》

1) God has given promise to His children

① **God absolutely reigns and works in all things.** Despite all things have become nothing and bring no benefits to men, or become man's enemy, they are still subjected to God's sovereign leading and instruction. Man, environment, time, disasters, fallen angels are not things we need to be fearful of, neither should they be the reason why we feel helpless; ② **God works in accordance to the good of His people.** God is of complete goodness, and He works all things in accordance to His goodness, so that His people will receive the good, and we receive the final happiness. Therefore, we should never think that God's goodness serves to benefit Him and our benefits and happiness are sacrificed in the process; ③ **God's works cause people who love Him to enjoy benefit.** We see an emergence of one condition here, that is "love God". This shows that the works of God will not give people a positive view of things that has no depth, this is seen in many positive thinking which leads people into a kind of hope and joy that is without foundation. The "love God" here refers to people who are born again (enable them to know that all sufferings in their lives will bring their blessedness today), but it also includes when a person who belongs to God love God with all his heart and all his mind, he will see the supernatural presence, guidance, help, teaching etc of God in various situations; ④ **God describes all who love Him as "people called according to His purpose".** Firstly, a person who is chosen and called in God's will has the evidence of loving God in his life. Also, God has the will to save man, He also has His will in doing all things, and the will last eternally. Therefore, when God works in all things, He will maintain the goodness of His people. Although there're various situations in life, sometimes full of sufferings and agony, if we can believe that God saves and calls us in accordance to His sovereignty, then we need to believe all the more that in this life that appears empty, surely there is His absolute glorious purpose in it.

2) Our spiritual problems cause us to despise or doubt this promise very easily

* In trials and suffering: (1) We do not accept that this is part of God's good plan, thus we do not come before Him. Instead, we keep seeking ways in an attempt to change our current situation; (2) We always put off the Holy Spirit conviction and reject the help He is giving us, only to pursue the good which we define on our own; (3) Because of that, we resign to fate and lose the motivation to live, or remain in a lamenting state. Actually, since the fall of men, they have entered a state of not able to regard God's goodness as genuine goodness. When men live in their self-exaltation, they will treat their feelings or the things they deem good as absolute, therefore, when the word of God is incompatible with what they think of feel, they deny the truth immediately. These are revealed to us through the symptoms of end times. Eg: homosexuality, abortion, feminist movement etc. Why these special rights emerge? Why men pursue these rights ceaselessly? In fact, when men receive extreme accusations in these bondages, they hope to receive approval or resonance, but they are unwilling to come to the truth of God and be dealt with. Even after believing in the Lord, there remain inclinations that are unwilling to forsake self but to let self live. Indeed, we need to experience the help of the Spirit through the promise of God.

3) How can we enjoy this promise?

① The cross has combined the sufferings we have and God's glorious plan. We need to know that it is not that God does not care about our feelings. Although our feelings cannot direct us, our feeling is part of our humanity. There're works of God in all our emotions, and these emotions are one channel through which we cry to God. However, we need to know that the harmony of man's feelings and God's perfect plan is in this Cross of Christ. The Cross tells us, "God became man and went through suffering for us, how would He not know our humanity and needs?" It also tells us, "God had offered His most glorious son, saved our eternal souls. In the sufferings and hardships we are in, will He not have higher and more perfect plan in it?"

② The bible says, "we know". Actually, this does not mean that we have complete clarity of God's work, neither can we welcome it without internal struggle. It is also not implying that God works for the comfort of our flesh. Here, it serves to bring us a "reminder", or an "awakening", so as to bring us back to reality from our weakness. When Holy Spirit intercedes for us with wordless groans, He wants to bring our hearts and minds to the unchanging truth first, that is the promise of <8:28>. This is just like Joseph telling the brothers who once harmed him in <Gen 50:20>, and God promising the people of Judahs who were to be taken captive <Je 29:11-13>. In fact, we know, and we need to be reminded repeatedly.

③ We need to confirm, seek and submit practically to see the promise of "all things work for the good of us" in the situations we are in. Often, we are waiting in grievances for God to liberate us from our sufferings, but the help of God is already in all things. For eg: if a mother is only waiting for her disobedient child to change, and does not practically confirm, seek and submit to the perfect will of "how to build a relationship with her child and educate him", she can hardly see how God has always been helping and fulfilling her good deeds.

2. God's foreknowledge and predestination lead to Him calling and justifying man, enabling man to receive glory 《8:29-31》

1) God's foreknowledge and predestination are God's absolute sovereignty 《8:29》

* In church circles, there are some bible interpreters who say that God has foreknown who will believe, then predestine them as the chosen people. This saying is not rooted, because if it is so: (1) God's sovereign predestination is subjected to man's decision; (2) If God's predestination is because man will believe, then man

claims all merits and glory in the matter of salvation. Therefore, foreknowledge and predestination are the special authority of the Creator of all things, displaying His supreme wisdom and authority. Actually, no matter how much controversies and debates exist in this matter on God's foreknowledge and predestination, deep in our hearts, we know that the salvation of man comes from God's sovereignty. One theologian (Dr Parker) mentioned 2 things: (1) Why are we ever grateful for our salvation? Why do we give thanks in all things? This is because deep in our hearts, we know that our intelligence and will can never earn our salvation, it is God who executes salvation and fulfills it; (2) Why do we always pray for others' salvation? If salvation depends on the intelligence and eloquence of evangelists, or decisiveness of people who listen, then we do not need to pray. The fact that we intercede for others proves that we know that salvation is the work of God, no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them <Jn 6:44>. Hence, it is completely the mysteries of God's foreknowledge and predestination for a man to receive Christ' redemption.

2) The things God is accomplishing on me in His eternal will 《8:30》

① **God wants to exalt Christ as His firstborn**, so that all that is in heaven, on earth and under the earth acknowledge Him as Lord. Hence, the glory (crown) we receive and the relationship we enjoy are decided by how close we image the firstborn, Christ. Although we cannot understand this completely in this life, we need to confirm in our hearts that the degree of our glory today is absolutely compatible with how close we conform to the image of Lord Jesus.

② **Cause us to transform become like His firstborn, Jesus**. We often cannot appreciate our transformation in our weaknesses, but actually, the work of the Spirit has already begun in our spirituality and character today. The process of renewal and refinement is a mystery. Whether we can feel it or not, this transformation happens in our lives daily, including the discipline we receive from our Father in the process. Just like the moment Stephen was martyred or Paul who served Lord to the end of his life, they both firmly believed in the promise of God, and followed faithfully to the end. Eventually, they became like our Lord Jesus Christ.

③ Therefore, **God calls those He knows(love) effectively** in His irresistible grace, enable them to be **justified by faith**, and **receive glory**. The beginning of glory is when a born again person enters into sanctification (actually, the sanctification of children of God is the beginning of glory), until the day of the redemption of the body.

3) Therefore, can we remain unconvinced? 《8:31》

* When we see the eternal will of God does not only safeguard the harmony of all creations, but more importantly, to save, sanctify and glorify His people through His son so that they can receive the ultimate goodness, we cannot help but once again re-examine if we have the heart of doubt and disobedience towards God. When God put our salvation as primary concern in His eternal will, and cause all things to work for our good, we ought to ask is there any situation or reason today that can stop us from believing in God's love? Is there any more grudges which we cannot let go? Is there any weakness which cause us to remain in accusations, and unable to be liberated? Actually, God wants to persuade us, and let us know of His heart that truly loves us, only then can we reciprocate to His kindness.

3. Need to remove misunderstanding and doubt concerning God's predestination

1) Will predestination cause man to be proud?

* Many who oppose predestination say that those who are chosen will boast about themselves because they have received the confirmed status, and boasting about the blessed and greatly loved identity he has received from now on only, not working out their salvation diligently (or: do not train in godliness). Actually, in contrary, predestination removes all self-boast in man for it causes one to realize that his blessedness today comes from God's mercy, there's no self-merit in it. As a result, people who've receive this grace will be even more humble before God, and live by boasting the glory of this grace.

2) Will predestination cause one to doubt his own salvation?

* Some people deem that predestination is like putting the final call of salvation in God's sovereignty, causing one to still remain in an uncertain and worrisome faith living despite receiving Christ, for he is not assured that he will enter into the kingdom of heaven on the last day. Actually, the reason why such a person doubt his own salvation is not because of the problem of predestination but the fact that he has not met God from the beginning to the end. If a person had once made the decision to surrender the sovereignty of life to the Lord, being set free from the forces of sin, continue to be rooted in seeking evidences of I'm loved and blessed in his faith, and even in weakness, he knowa that his life has the seal of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, this seal does not only give us affirmation when we are full of faith, instead, it disciplines us when we are far from God, comfort us when we are in tribulations, therefore, it is even more genuine.

3) Will predestination cause people to become lukewarm?

* Some people generalize that since salvation is completely God's work, it has nothing to do with man. Therefore, man has no responsibility before God. Such argument is not truth because the emphasis of God's sovereignty in the bible has never reduced man's responsibility, but God and men's responsibilities are a kind of antimony. This is like Jesus said, " No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw them" <Jn 6:44>; but on another side he said, " yet you refuse to come to me to have life" < Jn 5:30>. Then, these people cannot, or unwilling to come to Jesus? The most precise answer is they cannot, and are unwilling; they do not belong to God, and are unwilling to yield to God. This is why they are condemned. But to those who are predestined to be saved, they become repentant because of God's grace and are willing to repent, but there remains weakness in the flesh, hence they have to live by seeking God's will continuously. Often, they need to strike a blow to their bodies and make them their slaves.

4) Will predestination cause man to enter into non-legalism?

* "Once saved, forever saved" is a crucial teaching in the doctrine of salvation predestination, hence non-legalist often use this to justify that they will not lose the salvation and that they can continue to be "blessed"; even if they have sinned, they can be saved. Slowly, such saying becomes the excuse people use to comfort themselves when they sin, yet we cannot see how they are imitating Christ in life. Although there is nothing wrong in the teaching of perseverance of salvation, we need to know that Christ chose us and enables us to be holy, without fault <Ep 1:4>. It is not merely comforting us in our weakness without putting death to sin; it is also not finding excuse for our own transgressions. Actually, when such doctrine is not being applied or expressed under the right situations, the church will start to have fake Christians who trample grace, or remain in complacency; not pursuing holy living and carrying the Cross.

5) Will predestination cause people to stop evangelizing?

* The most common misconception of predestination is that predestination cause people to stop evangelizing, because since God has predestined to save those He intends to save, He will surely save them in the end. This weakens the need to evangelize. Is it really so? Firstly, when we talk about God has predestined the people He wants to bless (eg Abraham and his descendants), we need to know that blessing is to cause all nations to be blessed through him, so that all know about the righteousness and glory of God. Therefore, the blessing of predestination surely includes the action in that blessing, that is those who are blessed will spread the gospel to all people. If not, this is a kind of superficial blessing. Also, will God's predestination cause people to slack? Surely not! In <Ac 18:9-11>, Paul encountered a lot of resistances and persecutions in Corinth, he could be thinking about giving up and go to another city, but God told him that there were many people whom God had predestined to save in the city, and instructed him to continue to preach, and not to remain quiet. This is because the people whom God has predestined are uncovered when the gospel is preached. Actually, a believer who truly knows God's predestination will not find excuse to stop evangelizing, instead, he will rely on the unchanging predestination of God and restore resoluteness towards the great commission, for he knows that only when the gospel is continuously preached can the hearts of stones turn into hearts of flesh, only then God's people can be uncovered. It remains a mystery who is God's people. Some are stubborn half of their lives, yet by God's predestination, there're intercessors beside him, family and friends who evangelize to him.

Therefore, in the end, he is saved from the bondage of devil. Actually, no one can fathom God's wisdom, but to those who truly know the spirit of God's predestination, he will surely endure the hardships and do the work of an evangelist.