

And We Know.....

For many who have any knowledge of God's Word, except for John 3:16, Romans 8:28 is probably the most comforting verse in all Scripture. Pastor Dr. Reuben A. Torrey called it "a pillow for a tired heart." *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purposes."* The context of this verse makes it clear that this promise applies to all who are saved through faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior and who are thereby God's sons and daughters, for whom else can love God in a way consistent with Scripture?

The comforting comes from the "all things" which means that even during our darkest times of pain and suffering, sorrow, doubts, adversity and despair, somehow, these things are working for our good. During such times, this may be difficult to believe, but we must believe this because this is God's promise to each of His own. To doubt, is in effect, to call God a liar. A major test of faith of the saved soul is when that faith does not weaken or waiver under these extremely challenging and trying circumstances. I once heard, or read, of a Christian father whose son had just died. His prayer at the funeral, as I recall the story, was not of great lamenting on the tragedy, for he knew his son was safe in heaven. Instead, it was a prayer asking God to make clear the message that this tragedy was providing to the family so that it not be wasted. Here was a biblical, trusting, faithful and loving soul who knew and doubted not that God was in charge. Here this father was actually living and relying on the "all things" portion of this wonderful verse. In his grief he could not see the "work for the good" part, but in his unshaken faith he knew it was there somewhere and was simply asking God to reveal it. Surely this is an example of an unwavering faith in God under a most trying time.

When the Holy Spirit provided these words of comfort to us through Paul, it seems evident that the love on which He conditioned this promise was an agape love, a totally committed love, a love that could not help but reflect itself through its owner's words,

deeds and way of life. This love serves as a major piece of evidence in determining whether or not one is saved. However, its intensity may vary with each individual. Because Jesus commanded us in Matthew 22:37 that we are to love God with all of our heart, soul and mind, each of us is severely challenged in our quest to qualify for eligibility regarding Romans 8:28. Such intensity of love for God does not happen instantly. It is a progressively growing commitment and dedication to Him that I believe God examines and tests. I believe that this is a very important precept. A vital measure of one's growth as a Christian is the ever-increasing love for God, our Creator God. The existence of that growing love is most likely the telling evidence of the existence of one's salvation! God knows we cannot instantly produce this love that requires all of our heart and soul and mind. He knows that no one can reach such a state within an entire lifetime. This will only, but surely, happen between here and heaven, when the soul finally leaves the confines of the corrupt body. Progress! Forward movement toward the commanded goal! That is what we are to be exhibiting through our thoughts, actions and deeds, and in every other way we conduct our lives. Too difficult? No it isn't. A snails pace will do. His love is patient and long suffering, and He has lots of time. Remember this; His love for us is infinite. But I believe that He does measure it out. Also remember that our hearts are "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). Where can there be God's love in such a place? There can not. We have no eternal love of our own. Any such love we acquire is His love, which He gives so that we can give it, back to Him, that is, to love Him and others.

Perhaps we are all born with a love valve for this special love. Due to our inherited sinful nature, that valve always comes closed. Only God can open that valve to let His love in. By His sovereign will, He has chosen not to even open it except under one condition. That condition, under the present dispensation, is that we choose to believe and have faith in Christ Jesus. The greater that faith grows, the wider God's love-valve opens, and the more fully we are able to love God and also our brethren, as well as our enemies, as He so commands. Remember it's His love that He pours into His own sons and daughters who are to use it in accordance with His directions. If we are in the proper state to receive this love, we are also fully capable of using that love, as He requires us to. God

adjusts the flow of His love to the exact rate we are able and willing to properly use it. We should pray, each of us, that we are capable of serving Him with a wide-open valve. As we all know, the word love is over-used, and mis-used, bantered about in the world in every imaginable context. But there is no doubt that God has bestowed all of mankind with the capacity to love, but this love is not the same love with which God endows His children; this is a different love. It may feel, look, act and taste like the same love. In some cases it may seem to be even more intense and more committed, but it is, nevertheless, not the same love. For one thing, God's love, which He passes through His sons and daughters, is eternal; it transcends physical death. The love in the hearts of the redeemed is not extinguishable by physical death, but grows to a final all encompassing intensity the second the soul has shed the limiting confinement of the physical body. The natural man's love ends when he dies. There may be temporary vestiges of it in the form of concern for those left behind, as there was with the rich man in shoel as he called across the abyss to Abraham asking him to send to his living brothers a warning to repent so that they could avoid his fate. But ultimately, in the eternal lake of fire, there will be no love, only the pains of regret.

Perhaps this analogy may be useful in describing the difference between the love flowing in the hearts of the redeemed and the look-alike love that can fill the heart of the natural man. The Epistle of Jude verse 10 states: *"But these speak evil of those things which they know not; but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves."*

Here Jude is describing apostate teachers of these end times. The first time he uses the word "know," it is the Greek word "eido" which speaks of mental reasoning and comprehension, deeper knowledge which can include a whole range of invisible (spiritual) things. It is the "know" that only the Holy Spirit can make real in one's heart! Jude says, the apostates, the unsaved, don't know of these things. These are above their level of comprehension. The second time he uses the work "know" he is describing the type of things they can understand. For this, Jude uses the Greek word "epistamai" which simply means to understand in the sense of a skill or handicraft, a knowledge of

palpable things, an animal sense, the physical sense of feel, taste, hear and smell. The difference between the ability to comprehend the reality of the eternal nature and the limited ability to comprehend only the palpable, temporal things of this world separates what the believer can know and what the apostate is limited to understand. The “know” of Romans 8:28, as we would correctly expect, is *eido*! And so I believe it is with love. Just as only the born-again man can know (*eido*), so also only he has a new heart in which the Holy Spirit dwells. In the same way, just as the natural man only knows (*epistamai*) so also does he have only the old natural heart. It’s through the indwelling Holy Spirit in the new heart that God infuses His unique love.

Having, I pray, identified which love it is and that it is a prerequisite “to all things for the good” let us now examine the other condition that must exist before this blessed promise can be claimed. The promise belongs to those who not only love God, but who are also called according to His purposes. This is not a requirement of the saved, which is unique to this verse. Everyone who is born-again is spiritually grafted into the body of Christ. What does that mean? Paul says it best in 1Corinthians 12:12-26. It might also be said that each member of the Christian Body is like a single cell much like the cells of the human body of which there are a trillion or more. Each has a specific purpose or function within the body. One might say that God called each human cell, “according to His purpose” in order that collectively they would form a healthy living body. Paul’s analogy is most beautiful in its simplicity and relevance. He describes each component in more easily understood terms such as arms, legs, feet etc. with the head being our blessed Lord Himself. The subject verse tells us that those who have been saved have been called for a purpose, His purpose. That means the called, the saved sons and daughters of God, each has a specific purpose within the Body of Christ. What is that purpose? Is it to fill a pew seat once a week, or to rest on one’s laurels for having said the sinner’s prayer and an occasional rote mumbling of the so-called Lord’s Prayer? Anyone who has truly received the Holy Spirit knows and worships far, far better than that. If you don’t, then quickly and with fear and trembling, examine your faith to see if it really exists in your heart. Do so with the Holy Bible in your face, and an urgent

prayer in your heart, asking the Holy Spirit to point you to His truth, and to how you can really have that which you have not, but presumed you had.

Being called according to His purpose means exactly what it says. If you belong to Him, then He has a purpose for you. Your job is to ask through prayer, and in all sincerity and single-mindedness, to have Him explain that purpose. Single-mindedness means a singular, sincerity of petition, genuinely desiring to know His purpose, and absent of any fear, dread or misgiving regarding what that purpose might be. The prayer to know your purpose must be anchored in a sincere and eager desire to begin that purpose out of a profound gratitude for what He did for you on the cross. Whatever the purpose is, whatever you are called to do, is far beyond your ability to do it, guaranteed! But you must believe that it will never be through your strength or your ability that His purpose is to be accomplished. It will be 100% by Him through you! You may or may not already have the required attributes. But fear not, for if you already have them, it's because He foreknew everything and prepared you for His purpose in advance. If you believe you lack the necessary qualifications, know that He will provide them, and as much as they are needed, for His purpose. You bring nothing of yourself to this purpose except your love and your sustaining willingness. He will provide everything else.

Perhaps we should nail this down a little more firmly by considering one additional comment on this "who are called" requirement. This is no incidental or perfunctory requirement on which our Lord conditions His promises regarding "all things work for the good." God's calling demands a response! If you believe that Romans 8:28 applies to you, and you are not seriously pursuing that for which you believe you have been called, or haven't even heard a call, it is on-your-knees time. God's calling demands a response and He will receive it one way or another, because His calling is His words, which will not be spoken ineffectually. This is made clear in Isaiah 55:11 where God spoke through Isaiah saying, "*so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper where I send it.*" If He called you for a purpose, that purpose will be accomplished because He said so. The word void in the Hebrew is "rayjam" meaning,

ineffectual, without cause, void. God says that will not happen. It is evident that this calling for God's purpose is the calling that places one into the Body of Christ and into that position as an eye, or hand, or foot, or whatever, as Paul so graphically depicts the Christian Body.

What is your condition in this context? Have you been called? Have you answered that call effectually? And are you pursuing that to which you were called? If your answer to these last two questions is a prayerfully attended to yes, then it indicates that you are qualified under this second pre-requisite to receive the blessing offered by Romans 8:28. However, what if you haven't heard His call or what if you have heard His call, but for whatever reason you chose not to answer it, then it seems reasonable to conclude that in either case, at this point in time, He has not called you, and you have flunked this part two of the test. Because there is no such thing as God's words returning to Him void, that is, not having accomplished their mission, you didn't miss the call, and you didn't get a call, which you chose to ignore. You have not been called! To that I would, and you should too, prayerfully add YET!

I must carry this point a little further because it's much too important to let any discernable point be missed. As noted, in the beginning of this essay, Romans 8:28 applies to all genuine born-again believers, and only to them. Because it applies to all believers, then all believers must both love God and be called to His purpose. Therefore, one has to conclude that if there has been no calling, there is no salvation, YET!

If you have that love and calling, praise the Lord and seek always His wisdom, His discernment, His knowledge, His understanding, and all things He is willing to provide in order that you may do the very best to serve Him for whatever purpose He has called you. Nothing in your life can, or should, be more important.