

The Goal We Must Pursue  
Romans 8:28  
January 14, 2018

We have been away from the book of Romans during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays, so today I would like us to get back into our study of Romans. Last year on June 25 we began our series from Romans chapter 1 and have been going through the book ever since, and today we will take a look at the latter part of Romans 8.

Have you ever looked closely at a dollar bill? On it you will see an image of a pyramid. And have you noticed that there is an eye above that pyramid? This eye is called the Eye of Providence, and it represents the all-seeing eye of God.

The word providence is made up of two parts, “pro” which means before and “vidence” which means to see.

On the dollar bill, the Eye of Providence is surrounded by a glory and is above a pyramid. And if you look closely, there is a gap between the eye and the pyramid. This gap indicates that the Eye of Providence sees the entire world from a place that no human can ever reach.

It is a picture of how God sees the world from a place beyond time and space, and we on earth are not able to completely understand His plans. Providence can be described as the perspective of God who foresees all things. And as a symbol of trust in this all-seeing eye of God, the words “In God We Trust” is printed on the center of the bill.

In Japan, we often use phrases like “red string of fate”, “born under the same star”, “destined to happen”, and “stroke of luck”. What all these phrases have in common is that they hint at an invisible influence that determines the events in our lives.

Not to object to the use of these words, but as Christians we do not use words like luck or fate. Instead we use the word providence.

Believing in chance or luck is to roll the dice and say that the outcome is the result of mere coincidence, while believing in providence is to believe

that God placed and chose the order of the dice for a purpose. So there is a big difference between chance and providence. With these things in mind, I want us to read today's passage from Romans, it is probably a verse that many of you have highlighted in your Bible:

**“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” (Romans 8:28 NIV).**

The first thing that catches our attention are the words “in all things God works for the good”. This means that every event in our life “works for the good”.

What do you think of this statement? Here Paul says that “in all things” God works for our good. Needless to say, he really means EVERYTHING. He says that God works every event in our lives for our good. But anyone who hears this kind of statement will be skeptical at first and think, “he can't really mean ALL things works for the good”. I too feel the same way. We all experience things in life that appear to be far from good. Could it be that this statement in the Bible is merely an exaggeration? Is it just a lie?

Whether its a Toyota or a Ford, do you know how many parts are required to assemble one car? It is said that the number is approximately thirty-thousand. To build a single vehicle, each of these parts are installed in its proper location at the factory. If I were to have all thirty-thousand parts laid out in front of me, as a complete novice I wouldn't know what each part is for or where it should be installed. If we were to receive one of these parts as a gift we probably won't be excited. This is because we don't know what that part is for or where it is to be placed and it seems to have no value or purpose and is not useful to us in any way. But if even one of those parts were missing, the vehicle will not function to its fullest potential in the way it was designed to.

Believing in chance is like shaking a bag filled with these thirty-thousand parts and hoping a fully assembled car would come out of it. There is no way that would ever happen. But if there is a person with a complete knowledge of how to build a car, those parts could be assembled to make a car.

The life we are given by God could be viewed the same way. The events

we cannot understand or seem meaningless at first are all linked together to form our lives.

The passage in Romans tells us that everything in our lives work together for good, but we cannot understand this by our own strength or wisdom. This is because as humans, our understanding is limited. On that dollar bill, we are at the foot of the pyramid and cannot see the whole picture. So we can only speculate on the meaning of the various events that we experience in our lives. But God sees the whole picture and works each of these events for our good.

### **Works Together For Good**

Now we may think to ourselves, if this is true then we are only pawns in God's hand and no matter what we choose to do, God will lead our lives to the direction He pleases. This is what we call fate. But the passage in Romans says this is not true.

*This is only for those listening in English, but in the NIV, we find an alternate version of this passage in the footnotes which the Japanese translation is based on, this version reads "And we know that in all things God works together with those who love him to bring about what is good—with those who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28 NIV, alternate translation, see footnote). Here it says that "God works together with those who love him to bring about what is good". In an older Japanese translation called the Bungo-yaku, it says "all things are made good by working together".*

Therefore God brings about what is good by working together with us. This doesn't mean that we could act however we like because God will work it all out, but as we think, decide, and act together with God, He brings about what is good.

So whatever we do, we should pray that we can give it our best. When we do so, God will give His best to work together with our best efforts to bring about what is good. A common mistake is to think that trusting in God means letting God do all the work while you yourself do nothing, but instead we must first do our best and then surrender it all to God.

This means that God has entrusted each of us with our own free will. If our free will is taken away, we will no longer be able to respond to God's love as humans, but instead we will become God's robots. Without this freedom there will be no love or trust in our relationship with God. That is why God gave us free will, even though He knew the great risks involved with giving us this freedom.

How we use our free will and make our own decisions play no small part in determining the course of our lives. Even if it's God's will for us to go one direction, we may go the opposite direction, and as a result we sometimes suffer the consequences of choosing to go our own way.

But then who has the ability to choose the path God wills for them every single time? Our inability to do so is what makes us human. But the good news is that even the paths we shouldn't have taken are used by God for our good. We may look back at our failures and setbacks and realize that those times of trial turned out to be a blessing and a necessary part of our lives, and these events are a testament to the fact that God worked with us through these events to bring about what is best for us.

## **What is The Purpose of Our Life?**

Let me tell you something that is essential in understanding Romans 8:28. Without knowing this truth, we won't be able to comprehend the full meaning of this passage. To understand this passage, we must know the goal we are pursuing. In other words, we must know the purpose of our life.

There are two goals set before us. The first is our own goal that we set for our life. The other is the goal or purpose God has for our life. If these two goals conflict with each other, we will never be able to comprehend the words in Romans. This is because God does not work just to help us pursue our own goal, but He works all things for good to fulfill the greater purpose He has for our lives.

There is one important aspect of purpose. It is that the purpose of any creation is determined by the one who created it.

Several days ago at a trustees meeting, we were discussing about a

broken refrigerator (the one in Issei Hall). We discussed things like the possibility of repairing it and how much the repair cost will be, but in the end we decided to replace it with a new one.

During the discussion someone jokingly said, "it's a waste to just throw it away, it's got a door so maybe we can use it as a closet". We all went along with the joke and had fun talking about repurposing the fridge.

Maybe there really is someone out there in the world who is using a broken fridge as a closet, but person who made that fridge designed and built it specifically for storing and keeping food cold. The reason something is created and the purpose it serves is determined by its creator.

So how about ourselves? Who created us? Was it our parents? It may not be wrong to say so, but strictly speaking, they are not our creator. They may have planned and hoped for a child, but the one who gave us life and formed us in the womb is God. Sometimes we use phrases like "the life my parents gave me", but this is not completely accurate, because our life was given to us by God through our parents. Therefore God is the only one who truly has the right to determine how we should live and the purpose we live for.

A fridge is created for the purpose of keeping food cold and a car is created for the purpose of transportation. So the manufacturers will not install a steering wheel inside a fridge or an ice maker inside a car. Both are designed to cool or be driven at its full potential. In the same way, God created each of us for a purpose and works all things for the good so that we may find that purpose and live to fulfill it. Getting our dream job and raising a happy family are both important, but these are not the ultimate purpose that God has for our lives.

But most of us live without knowing or even considering this fact and continue with our own way of living. For what purpose do you think God works all things for the good? Is it for the plan you envision for yourself or the plan God has for you? If there is a disconnect between the two, we will never understand the meaning of the words "in all things God works for the good".

We are all God's creation and our lives a gift from God. If we believe this to

be true, we must agree with the words of Job who said “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised” (Job 1:21). God is the one who gave us all that we have, so even if He takes something away, we have no right to argue with Him. The Bible was written upon this foundation, but we go about our lives without knowing or even considering this truth.

When our dreams of becoming a baseball player or attaining a higher position does not come true, we don't think that God works all things for our good. But God's ultimate goal is not to make us a professional baseball player or give us a higher position at work. But there is a greater purpose He has for us and He works all things for our good so that we may fulfill this purpose.

### **Being Made in the Image of Christ**

What do you think this purpose is that Paul wrote about in Romans? We find a clue in the verse right after the one we have been reading. Verse 28 says “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”, and then in verse 29 it says “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:28-29).

God wants us to be like the image of his Son, to be like Christ. To summarize what we learned today, in all things God works for our good so that we may become more like Christ, because He knows this is in our best interest, so He uses every event in our life to lead us closer to this goal. This is how God works with us in all things to bring about what is best. I hope you can grasp this truth.

This truth helps us understand the real meaning of Romans 8:28. We think to ourselves, why did that happen to me, or why was my dream shattered. But the events that made us doubt if God is working for our good, the times when our dreams were shattered, those very moments helped us become humble and realize what's really important. If we see this truth, then we are being made closer to the image of Christ.

With this in mind, let us ponder all the things that has happened to us.

When you think of it, don't you see that every event in your life has been necessary to help you get closer to becoming like Jesus? In this way God makes all things work for our good.

And the God who works all things for our good has our entire life before Him. If it were not so, He would not be able to make all the events in our lives work together to bring about what is best for us. Like a chef who adjusts the flavor of our food so that it is not too sweet, bitter, or spicy for us, God delicately balances each event in our lives to bring us closer to the image of Christ. Our Creator who rules the entire universe works with each one of us personally to help us reach this goal. In this way it is a project that spans our entire life.

The only thing that will remain at the end of your life is yourself. You are God's one of a kind masterpiece, a collaborative work between you and God. Through your entire life God works together with you so that you may be formed into the likeness of Christ.

In verse 29 we read that we were “**predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son**”. That means that we were designed to conform to the image of Christ from the very beginning. We were created for this purpose, so it is in our best interest to live for this purpose. If the way we are living is out of sync with the original purpose we were created for, naturally we will have to face negative consequences. But if we live with the desire to be more like Jesus, we will one day look back at our lives and be amazed at the countless blessings God gave us to fulfill this purpose.

Today is January 14<sup>th</sup>, but let's still consider it not too late to make a new year resolution. What is your goal for 2018? What do you see in the road ahead? Will you consider stepping out towards the goal of becoming more like Jesus, and let God form you in His hands as His masterpiece?

**“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. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters”.**

Let us pray.