

“A Verse That Baffles Me.”

Text: Romans 8:28-29

A friend recently sent me this humorous story:

TWO LITTLE BOYS, AGES 8-10, ARE EXCESSIVELY MISCHIEVOUS. THEY ARE ALWAYS GETTING INTO TROUBLE AND THEIR PARENTS KNOW IF ANY MISCHIEF OCCURS IN THEIR TOWN, THE TWO BOYS ARE PROBABLY INVOLVED. THE BOY’S MOTHER HEARD THAT A PREACHER IN TOWN HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN DISCIPLING CHILDREN, SO SHE ASKED IF HE WOULD SPEAK WITH HER BOYS.

THE PREACHER AGREED, BUT HE ASKED TO SEE THEM INDIVIDUALLY. THE PREACHER, A HUGE MAN WITH A DEEP BOOMING VOICE, SAT THE YOUNGER BOY DOWN AND ASKED HIM STERNLY, “DO YOU KNOW WHERE GOD IS, SON?” THE BOY’S MOUTH DROPPED, BUT HE MADE NO RESPNSE, SITTING THERE WIDE-EYED. SO THE PREACHER REPEATED THE QUESTION IN AN EVEN STERNER TONE, “WHERE IS GOD?!” AGAIN, THE BOY MADE NO ATTEMPT TO ANWER.

THE PREACHER RAISED HIS VOICE EVEN MORE AND SHOOK HIS FINGER IN THE BOY’S FACE AND BELLOWED, “WHERE IS GOD?!”

THE BOY SCREAMED AND BOLTED FROM THE ROOM, RAN DIRECTLY HOME AND DOVE INTO HIS CLOSET, SLAMMING THE DOOR BEHIND HIM. WHEN HIS OLDER BROTHER FOUND HIM IN THE CLOSET, HE ASKED, “WHAT HAPPENED?”

THE YOUNGER BROTHER, GASPING FOR BREATH, REPLIED, “WE ARE IN **BIG TROUBLE** THIS TIME! GOD IS MISSING, AND THEY THINK WE DID IT.!”

At seems like every day I learn about an event that jars me.

In our city of Antioch this past week a birthday party for a 16 year old girl turned into a shooting leaving six people wounded. “That’s just awful.” I said.

Sometimes in my life I felt God was missing. I remember that Christmas eve when I left Parkland Hospital in Dallas after spending several hours with a couple whose little baby had become suddenly ill and the doctors could not save him. A deep cloud of sadness hung over my spirit as I celebrated Christmas with my family that evening.

[The communicator only has to read the daily paper or watch the television news to find fresh evidence to identify events that are difficult to understand.]

Events like this on a daily basis leave us shaking our head as we ask “Why?” The ancient prophet Habakkuk was bold enough and honest enough to ask God, “Don’t you read the newspaper?” (My literal paraphrase.) See Habakkuk 1:1-4. Didn’t our Blessed Savior in the Calvary Hour of suffering cry out, “Why have you forsaken me?”

So, many incidents are unexplainable, but according to the Bible they are not surprising. In Romans 8 the apostle explains what is happening in these every day dramatic events.

He identified three groans:

1. Romans 8:20-22 The Genesis couple put the earth in numerous stresses and chaos. Storms, quakes, floods, and fires have brought a multitude of calamities to earth since Adam’s sin. Paul speaks of the earth being in bondage and decay. It struggles under a curse.
[Transition]
Not only the earth groans, but also, the earthlings. Read
2. Romans 8: 23. In one way I am living closer to the Scripture than when I first began preaching. I get out of bed in the morning only to hear shouts of groaning from the members of my body...my back, my knees, my neck, and my feet. The “old body” is groaning in hope for the new body that awaits those who believe in Jesus.
[Transition]
3. But there is a third groaning that brings relief while we wait for the liberation that is to come. With so many dilemmas, chaos, confusion, challenges, and crimes we some times find we do not know what or how to pray. ...we sigh, we doubt, we question and whisper mutterings. It is then that

the Holy Spirit groans on our behalf. So the third groan that Paul introduces is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit translates to the Father the deepest needs of our Spirit. V. 26. He brings comfort when the darkest moments come and the deepest hurts are felt. He reveals a promise for us to embrace. Read verse 28.

He challenges us in those first words, “And we know.” This knowledge speaks of an intuitive knowledge. This knowing is based not merely by experience which might be uneven, but it is a deep seated confidence in God’s eternal plan. It is the essence of a Biblically based world view. Let’s unpack vv. 28-29 in order to allow these verses to grip us or even convict us but surely to strengthen us. It ties into the “hope” mentioned in v.24. The first word in verse 28 must be observed. “And” is the connective particle and is often translated, “But” because it is an adversative connective. It is saying, “even with the groaning of the earth and the earthlings we are confident of this truth that “all things work together for good.” It may read. “But in spite of the hurts, pain, groaning, *we know*, we are convinced that God will use this event in conforming us to the image of His Son.

[Transition]

In our remaining time together, let’s look at one word...”all” in verse 28.

1. ALL MEANS ALL. I’m sure we’re unanimous in saying all good things work. But *all means all*. All includes bad, failures, hurts, pain, and disappointments. We see this truth in Isaiah 45:7 God says “*I form the light and create darkness. I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.*”

The story of Joseph, Genesis 45:19-20 gives this truth as a testimony. Beyond that there is an aspect of training or discipline. Pride, presumption, humility and rebellion are found. We know of saints who have fallen, backslidden, sinned and who have found mercy forgiveness and second chances.

See Psalm 119:67, 71 “**Before I was afflicted I went astray.**” And, “**It was good for me to be afflicted.**”

2. ALL IS NOT FOR ALL.

A limitation is set. Two groups or people are implied. Only one can claim the promise. Only those who truly **love God**. It is not referring to to a lot of folks who are polite about God, approve of him, tolerate him, even offer God talk, and maybe say they believe in God? But **love God**, well that's another thing. Love is a desire to please, to obey, to glorify, to serve God's will. These then are the ones who are called to His purpose. What does that look in the Bible? How about Job? In spite of his loss, pain, and struggle, he claimed "Though he slay me yet I will trust Him." See Job 1:21-22 and 19:25-26. "Now, that's a God lover. Marked-Out by God. Where as his wife, when the roof fell in, said. "I'm sick of you standing up for God; your integrity is stupid, "curse God and die." (My paraphrase) NOW THERE IS ONLY ONE GROUP THAT CAN SAY "...in all things God works for the good." THEY ARE THOSE WHO LOVE BECAUSE THAY HAVE BEEN LOVED AND THOSE WHO SENSE THEY HAVE BEEN CLAIMED BY GOD.

Those without a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ cannot expect all things are to work out for their good. They can be temporarily comfortable and even prosperous, but eternal separation from a loving God awaits them.

[Transition] So to review: All means all and All is not for all and thirdly:

3. ALL HAS LONGEVITY. ALL IS FOREVER. ALL IS ETERNAL.

We do not know about every incident that happens, not even how to pray, but my gray days are not in vain.

The glory will someday be revealed. We know that the future will be fantastic. Our troubles on earth are not to be compared to the glory that shall come. So much of our success, prosperity, pleasure, and influence is fading and passing away, but our rich inheritance in God's grace is being held secure in the heavenly places.

[Transition]

The last thing that comes from the text is:

4. **ALL IS CONTROLLED BY A SOVEREIGN GOD, V.29**

He has a purpose for a bunch of folk who are in the image of His dear Son. Jesus is the first fruit of a family of believers who love the Father. This verse is a four point outline for some preachers about doctrine. They see it solely as steps such as foreknowledge, predestination, justification and glorification. Those are valid and glorious doctrines, but I believe in its setting it is pointing the believer to submit to the rule of God for His plan for their lives. It is telling the Roman believers and us that we need to allow God to work in our Christian life. Notice the emphasis is He, He, He, and He, It's what He has done for us. He is in our Christian experience from the beginning until the completion.

THE CALL IS TO ALLOW GOD TO BE GOD. TRUST HIM IMPLICITLY.

The famous preacher of Westminster Chapel in London gave this illustration of an old preacher that applied to this text: "Take your watch and open it. What do you see? You see the one wheel is running in a counter-clock-wise direction, but it is attached to another wheel that is working in a clockwise direction. You say, "This is mad, This is quite ridiculous. Here are wheels working in opposite directions. This item must have been made by a madman. But in fact it was a stroke of genius to keep a watch going. By winding the main spring the watch keeps running with wheels turning different ways. So the Master Watch maker God has designed our lives to have an intermingling of good and bad that will produce in us a meaningful purpose for His kingdom.

Have Thine own way lord. Have own way. Thou art the potter; I am the clay, Mode me and make me after thy will While I am waiting, yielded and still