

132. Suffering Works for Good

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. [[Rom. 8:28](#)]

To get the full impact of this verse, so rich in meaning, and to avoid misinterpreting it, we need to see it in its context. We need to notice three things about it.

First, we need to consider the meaning of “all things.” Out of context, we may think this means that all things in this world work together for our good. While this is certainly true, in context the phrase “all things” refers specifically to the things Paul has been discussing, which are the suffering and infirmities of the people of God.

Second, we note a restriction. God is not promising to bring good out of suffering for *all* people; the promise is only for those who love God. Suffering and agony are not good in themselves, and we need to work to alleviate pain and

evil wherever we can. But God promises to his children that he will bring good out of their suffering.

Notice that Paul does not say “those who believe in him” but “those who love him.” Paul focuses on the fact that, in the last analysis, the dividing line between the Christian and the unbeliever is not over the issue simply of believing in some God or other, but over the issue of loving God. The profession of faith can be very different from the possession of faith. Many there are who mistakenly identify the two ideas. The word “love” serves to distinguish those who both profess and possess a saving relationship with Christ.

The third aspect is also related to the fact that this promise is only for God’s children, those “who have been called according to his purpose.” Paul speaks not of an external call to the gospel, but of the inward call of the Holy Spirit. In theology we term this “effectual calling.” No one will love God unless God first changes the disposition of the heart through the work of the Holy Spirit. The capacity to love God is not natural to fallen humanity but must be supernaturally granted by the Father, who takes the initiative in restoring us to himself. The regenerative work of God must precede the act of repentance and faith. Only by

the divine initiative is anyone saved.

Coram Deo

There are many occasions when the “good” that suffering brings is the gift of salvation itself. God frequently uses pain and trauma to rivet a person’s attention, need, and hope upon Christ and the gospel message. Today, pray for hospital chaplains and pastors who have the opportunity to speak to hurting people about their need of a Savior.

For further study: [Genesis 45:1–11; 50:15–21; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Philippians 1:12–26.](#)