

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

ROMANS 8

²⁸We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose, ²⁹because those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified.



Is your life a puzzle? There once was a family that would put puzzles together every evening. Does your family do this? The mom or dad would bring home a different puzzle, they would set up the front of the box so they knew what it was supposed to look like, and they would work together.

For a streak of evenings, the puzzles got harder and harder, until ... one night, the dad brought home a 1,000-piece puzzle that became the hardest one they'd ever tried. But it wasn't just a difficult puzzle. The puzzle was hard because somehow Dad switched box covers, and the family was working off a completely different picture than the puzzle was supposed to be. This puzzle was shaping up to be absolutely different than they thought, and it looked like a real mess.

Maybe the puzzle family isn't so different than the rest of ours. Is that your family? Is your life a puzzle? Are you puzzling things together every evening, except ... that puzzle is your life? Is life a puzzle? Getting through the week, facing the unexpected, challenges overwhelming, battling sickness? Are sinful natures on the attack? Is guilt weighing you down? Are you weeping over the family puzzle pieces? Are you simply confused and ready to stop trying? Is your puzzle riddled with problems?

These words of St. Paul are for you just as they were for the Roman Christians so many years ago. God does not want you to puzzle over the pieces. As it turns out, God knows how to put these pieces into place. Believers in Christ can and should rest assured that everything involving their salvation has been taken care of by a gracious God. From eternity he has been active in their salvation.

GOD'S PUZZLE OF ALL MY PROBLEMS

As it turns out, Romans 8:28 is a little bit of a translation puzzle on its own. In Greek word order it reads: *"We know that, for those who love God, all things work together for good, who are called according to His purpose."* It is especially tricky to know that the word "all" can be the subject or the object of the sentence – the doer or the thing that is done. *"We know that, for those who love God, He works all things together for good, for the ones called according to His purpose."* In either case, we understand that God is the underlying reason all things can possibly add up to the good.

After all, this is the main point; i.e., that **all things add up to good**. All things add up to good in the life of one called to love God. This is a very difficult concept to grapple with, especially because ALL THINGS certainly includes BAD THINGS, and yet the end result is GOOD.

Consider the immeasurable grace of that statement! Compare it to what you know of God! He is holy, righteous, just, innocent, loving, good, and kind toward all He has made. We are imperfect, blemished, self-centered sinners. All things being equal, all things should add up to our eternal destruction and death. But God promises those who love Him, that all things add up to our good. Put aside the difficulty of that statement for a moment, and remember who is the clay and Who is the Potter. He formed us with a purpose we did not fulfill, and yet He chooses to remake us as His very own anyway.

To understand this better, it is in the context of verses 29-30. God was in this for the long haul from the very beginning – since before the beginning, in fact. He foreknew these believers. He elected them by grace to be in the image of His Son. He called them, justified them, and glorified them to eternity. This is what God does for those who love Him. He does everything on earth to draw them to Himself in heaven, and every groove of His jigsaw adds up to salvation. He knows this salvation backwards and forwards, from prehistory to glory. He is their past, present, and future. So it must be said that God knows how the puzzle fits together.

Do you know how puzzles are made? Long strips of rubber are fashioned and fitted with a metal bit. They are hammered into a mold to carefully apply the same cut to each cardboard puzzle. It is an art, a craft, a skill, and there are

factory secrets that puzzlemakers do not share. In the same way, God goes about our lives with a great deal of skill. He does not share His factory secrets. He has been weaving generations of lives interacting with one another since He created humanity. His work on us, “all things” considered, is complicated.

You and I are accustomed to critiquing God’s puzzles. Do you ever spend so much time looking for that one piece, that you blame the puzzle company for not including it? Then you realize it blended into your carpet or was left underneath the finished part of the puzzle. We do that in life, spending our days looking for that piece, and we end up blaming God for not including it. Or we attempt to jam pieces together that were never meant to be. But all we are doing is sinfully hammering at that part of the puzzle we do not understand.

Now imagine picking up the piece of a puzzle, staring at it, with that odd shape, and beginning to weep. Imagine running your finger along its rounded or pointed edges, and grumbling against the puzzle company. **Imagine losing your head because you are ignoring all the other pieces of the puzzle.**

But that’s just what we do when we challenge the Creator of heaven and earth for that thing we do not get. We ignore the rest of the puzzle! Whoever has not denied himself and learned to subject questions to the will of God ...

- will always keep asking WHY God wills this and does that.
- will judge God’s will as inferior, when God’s will should be judge over ours.
- will never find the reason.

Romans 9:20, “*Who are you, O man, that you should answer back to God?*”

If we read the Bible carefully, we find out that it’s not a bad sign if things seem to turn out contrary to our expectations. That’s a good sign. When God begins to give us what we pray, He gives in such a way that subverts our expectations. He destroys us and tears us down before He gives us what is really good.

- ✓ 1 Samuel 2:6-7, “*The Lord makes poor and the Lord makes rich. He kills and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and raises up.*”
- ✓ Psalm 94:11, “*The Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are vain.*”
- ✓ Psalm 33:10, “*He thwarts the plans of the peoples.*”

By doing this, by reversing our expectations, God renders us capable of receiving His gifts and His works. We are capable only when our own advice ceases and our works stop. We are then made purely passive before God.

- ✓ Isaiah 28:21, "*The Lord does a strange work in order to do His own work.*"
- ✓ Psalm 103:11, "*As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love toward those who fear Him.*"

People trust their own intentions. They presume they are seeking, willing, and praying rightly and worthily. Then they go to pieces and despair, thinking God doesn't hear them or doesn't want to help them INSTEAD of hoping all the more confidently. That's when people prove they don't know God or themselves.

- ✓ Psalm 106:13,24, "*They quickly forgot His works; they did not bear up under His counsel. Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe His Word.*"

So think about Mary, the mother of Jesus, for 9 months. How out of place this piece of the puzzle must have seemed for a chaste virgin in her time! Think about St. Monica, the mother of Augustine, who prayed that her son wouldn't go to Rome because it was such a filthy, sinful place. Instead, God denied her prayer. Augustine went to Rome, but there he was converted to Christ. Think about Lazarus, who was sick in bed for four days, and Jesus refused to come and heal him. Jesus let him die, and how misplaced that jagged puzzle piece seemed. But now all of us long for what Jesus gave to Lazarus.

Notice the Scripture doesn't say, "*We suppose,*" or "*We guess,*" or even "*We feel.*" Scripture says, "*We KNOW that, for those who love God, all things work out for good for those who love Him.*" The only way to know this is to rest your confidence on the Son of God, who is the ultimate example. Troubles are different to those who believe in Jesus, who are elect, called, justified, glorified. Our God shows us we are saved by His unchanging love. How could we break through all these things and not lose hope 1,000 times, unless God's eternal and fixed love led us through them?

It is always the case we understand our own work before it's done, but we do not understand the work of God until it is done. John 14:29, "*Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it does happen, you may believe.*" We understand our own work before it's done, but we do not understand the work of God until it is done. In a way it has been done our whole lives long. When our Savior Jesus called out from the cross, "*It is finished,*" then it was done. He puts your puzzle together on the cross. Amid all the puzzle pieces, in the middle of all things, KNOW THIS NOW: it was for our GOOD; in Jesus' name, Amen.