

SERIES ON THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE
Sermon #16
Romans 8:24-39
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GOD'S GRACE AND GOD'S PROVIDENCE

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For several weeks now we have been considering together the doctrines of the grace of God. Those of you who have been here through this series will remember how we started. I want to review that briefly this morning because it has some bearing on the things that I want to say.

We spent six Sundays on the attributes of God--the characteristics of God. We could have spent many more Sundays than that, but we did spend six Sundays talking about God's grace, God's sovereignty, God's righteousness, God's love, God's wisdom, and God's unchangeable character. Of course there is great blessing to be found in examining what the Word of God has to say about any one of these subjects. The blessing is multiplied if we take all of them together. So we learned from this that an understanding of God, some kind of acquaintance with God, is basic to an understanding of the truths of Scripture, and that certainly applies to the doctrines of grace.

We went on from this to talk about the doctrines of grace themselves. Someone, we do not know who, someone back in history, linked these with the word TULIP and formed an acrostic to help us remember what these doctrines of grace are. I hope you remember what they are: "T" stands for TOTAL DEPRAVITY; "U" for UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION; "L" for LIMITED ATONEMENT (sometimes called PARTICULAR REDEMPTION, or DEFINITE ATONEMENT); "I" for IRRESISTIBLE GRACE; and "P" for the PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS.

After I spoke on these great doctrines of our salvation, then I have been taking up some of the practical aspects which result from the doctrines of grace. Last Sunday I spoke on the grace of God, and how it is to bring about the glory of God. Today I want to speak on the grace of God and the providence of God which is related, of course, to the great theme of the sovereignty of God.

The Scripture which was read for us in the book of Romans, the latter part of the eighth chapter, gives us one verse which seems to me to be the key to this whole passage of Scripture. This is the twenty-eighth

verse: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." If you were to examine this context, you would learn, that the "good" that Paul was talking about has to do with God's purpose, the accomplishment of His purpose in salvation. Instead of reading, "And we know that

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all things work together for good," some versions say, "And we know that God works all things together for good to them that love him, to them who are the called according to his purpose." It is not that things just automatically turn out this way. It is not by chance. It is God Who is at work, seeing that all things work together for good.

If I were to distinguish between the sovereignty of God and the providence of God, this is the way I would do it. The sovereignty of God means that there is no one greater than God. It means that whatever the circumstances may be, He is always the Supreme One. No one can possibly overrule what God wants to do. What He does and intends to do overrules every other force or power in the universe whether it is human or angelic or demonic. This is a great encouragement, a great comfort, to the Lord's people. God is sovereign and the Word of God makes this very, very clear.

But the providence of God means that there is a purpose in what God does--a good purpose, a purpose that is designed for blessing for the people of God in all that He does in His sovereignty. You see, sovereignty alone could be a terrible thing. We read in our newspapers continually of men who rise to power in certain nations and they exercise sovereign power in that nation. In many, many instances they are not concerned about the welfare of the people over whom they exercise sovereignty. They are concerned about their own welfare. But you see, with the sovereignty of God we have the companion truth of the providence of God where He not only is sovereign, overruling every other power in all the universe, but He does it for the accomplishment of His purposes and the accomplishment of good and blessing as they relate to His people. This is what Romans 8:28 teaches us. "And we know that God works all things together for good to them that love him, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Now it is quite amazing the way many Christians believe in the sovereignty of God and in the providence of God. You will see why I have linked together these three divisions of these messages I have been bringing, dealing first with the attributes, then with the doctrines of grace, and now with the practical side of it. There are not many Christians, in fact, I do not know that I have ever run into any Christian, who does not believe in the sovereignty of God as an

attribute. That is our comfort when trouble comes. We know that God is over all of our circumstances. There seems to be general agreement among the Lord's people that this is the case. So, consequently, when it comes to the practical side of our lives this is a truth that we cling to. We love to believe, and we rightly believe, that God is sovereign in all of the events and all of the circumstances of our daily lives. Whatever may be your circumstances, your problems, your needs this morning, it ought to be a source of great comfort to know that God is sovereignly working for a good purpose. Yet at the same time it is difficult to find Christians who believe that God is sovereign in determining who is going to be saved. They eliminate the sovereignty of God from the doctrine of salvation. In other words, they believe in the doctrine of sovereignty, but they eliminate it from salvation, as though the sovereignty of God has limitations. I want you to see today from Romans chapter 8 that our real assurance that God cares for us in all of the circumstances of our lives and that God providentially is carrying out a good purpose in all that takes place in our lives is inseparably linked to His sovereignty in salvation, not something that is separated from it.

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Now let me show you what I mean. I hope that you have your Bible open to Romans chapter 8 so that you can follow. Verse 28 again: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For. . ." You will see that verse 29 is an explanation of verse 28. It is a good example of one of these passages in Scripture where, if you lift a verse out, like the twenty-eighth verse, as wonderful as it is, you are going to miss the real meat of it if you do not include the verse that follows. In this case, the reason for the truth of verse 28 is explained in verse 29: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, (now you see, he is talking about the doctrines of grace here in verse 29) that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover (it is like saying, "If you think that is good, wait until you hear the rest that I have to say.") whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (Rom. 8:28-30).

Now if you want to know what God's purpose is, His purpose is that all of those who were predestined to salvation are to be conformed to the image of God's Son, meaning that they would eventually become like God's Son. This is described by that last word "glorified." So the purpose of God which comes at the end of verse 28 is linked with the glorification of the believer there at the end of verse 30. And our real assurance that all things work together for good is linked to the predestination, the calling, the justification, and, I could insert, the

sanctification, and the glorification of the Lord's people. God is not just working all things out so that they will turn out the way I would like for them to be. This is what people decide when they take Romans 8:28 by itself. But, when you leave it in its context, you will see that the "good" that Paul was talking about is the accomplishment of His purpose. The ultimate conformity of the people of God into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ, is what our glorification is going to be. This is a process that is going on in our lives through all of our circumstances as God works them together, the things that we like and the things that we do not like. Day by day through the experiences that He brings into our lives we are being made more and more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. So you see how intimately God in His providence links together the practical aspects of our daily lives with the doctrines of grace. If it were not for the doctrines of grace, if it were not for what God is doing in our salvation, then we could not have any guarantee at all that Romans 8:28 is true.

Having seen this, I want you to see another thing in this passage of Scripture. It has to do with the assurances that the Apostle Paul gives us in this latter part of Romans chapter 8 that we can be at peace in our hearts when we believe in the providence of God. Actually, if we just had verses 28, 29, and 30, that would be enough. But the Apostle Paul gives us some other truths in this passage of Scripture to make us even more convinced that "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." I want to mention five that you find in this passage of Scripture.

I. THE NATURE OF GOD (Rom. 8:29-31)

The first one is to be seen in the very nature of God Himself. I am not going to spend a lot of time on this because I have already linked the doctrines of grace with the attributes of God. I just want to read verses 28-31 and emphasize the fact that the Apostle Paul was talking here about God.

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If you have the New American Standard Bible you will find that Romans 8:28 begins like this, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good . . ." This is the way some of the early manuscripts read. I want to emphasize that.

We know that God causes all things to work together for good to them

that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to

the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us..." (Rom. 8:28-31).

That word "if" introduces what the Greek grammarians call a first-class condition. Consequently the word "if" could be translated since. He had given all this evidence that God is for us--He has predestined us, He has called us, He has justified us, He is glorifying us. And that work is going to be completed. Paul was so absolutely overwhelmed in his own heart as he reviewed these great truths again that he said, "If (since) God be for us, who can be against us?"

I think it was Gurnall, one of the Puritans, who said, "If God is your friend, it does not make any difference who your enemies are." If God is on your side, it does not make any difference who is opposed to you. Here is a sovereign, loving, almighty God Who has exercised His power in redeeming us. How wonderful it is to know that God is "for us."

So, when you think of all of these attributes that we have been talking about--the grace of God, the sovereignty of God, the righteousness of God, the love of God, the wisdom of God, God's unchanging character--this is the God who is on our side. He is working all things together for good and He cannot possibly fail. He is carrying out His plans and His purposes. If I lose sight of God and I begin to look at my frailties and my sin and my weakness, of course I am going to have doubts as to whether or not all things can work together for good. But when I keep my eyes on Him, then I will have peace.

II. THE INTERCESSORY WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Rom. 8:26, 27)

The second reason that we can believe that all things work together for good is because of the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit.

You know, I am always greatly encouraged when I go to our men's prayer meeting on Saturday morning, and hear the men praying for me. One of the men said yesterday morning in His prayer that he knew that I was the special target of Satan as anyone is who teaches the Word or teaches the doctrines of the grace of God. Aren't you glad when somebody writes you, or comes up to you and says, "I want you to know that I am praying for you." That is a tremendous encouragement, isn't it? When you hear someone praying for you, why that is even a greater encouragement. But how do you feel about this? Can you and I fully comprehend what it means that the Holy Spirit is praying for us? Now where do you see that? Look at verse 26: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our

infirmities." If anything can stand in the way of my glorification, it is my infirmities. The Holy Spirit helps my infirmities: "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself (or Himself) maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

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Our pentecostal friends have really misunderstood this word, groaning. They believe that, if the Holy Spirit is praying in them, they are going to be groaning. And so they do a lot of groaning, a lot of agonizing. But it is the Holy Spirit Who does the groaning. What does the Holy Spirit groan about? What does this mean? It means that the Holy Spirit earnestly yearns for the completion of God's purpose, the accomplishment of God's purposes, and He yearns for this "with groanings which cannot be uttered." That is, you could not possibly put into words the way the Holy Spirit feels about our perfection. Furthermore, He "maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (verse 29). What is the will of God that he is talking about here? It is the accomplishment of God's purpose. It is the glorification of the people of God. The Holy Spirit of God is interceding for you. He knows your infirmities. He knows your need. He knows all of your circumstances. He is pleading with God that God's purposes in you might be accomplished, that the result of all of those circumstances that are hitting you at any particular time would result in your being more conformed to the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus.

Now if that was all we had that would be enough. You can take any one of these and it would be sufficient. But when you take all of them, and see everything that the Apostle Paul has mentioned here, our assurance mounts in a most amazing way.

III. THE DEATH OF CHRIST (Rom. 8:31-33)

The third thing that I want to mention is the death of Jesus Christ. How do we know that God is for us. Paul said, "Since God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). Well, we have seen that He has chosen us, He has called us, He has justified us. His work of glorification is so certain that he spoke of it as something that was already accomplished. But there is another way, and perhaps this is the greatest way, that we know that God is "for us." In verse 32 we read, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" God has predestined us to be like His Son. God has called us to Himself for salvation. But He spared not His own Son. He "delivered Him up for us all." This is particular redemption, isn't it? The Lord Jesus Christ had a special purpose in going to the Cross, and He accomplished that

work on the Cross. God did not even spare His Son. This was the price of our redemption. He delivered His Son up. It was not that men took Him against His will. God delivered Him into their hands.

But now Paul here was arguing from the greater to the less. If He did that, will He not freely give us all things? Do you know what it means that He is giving us all things? Does this mean that God is just giving me everything that I want? Well, any child of God knows that that is not the case. Sometimes God gives us things that we would rather that He not give us. Other times He does not give us things that we would like to have. What the Apostle Paul had in mind here was not that God is pouring out blessings upon us and satisfying every desire that we have. But to freely give us all things means to turn everything in our favor. It means exactly what he said in Romans 8:28, that He is working all things together for good. It means that there is not a single thing that touches your life or my life that can possibly hurt us because these are designed by God for our blessing and for our good. So if He would die for me, if the Lord Jesus Christ would go to the Cross, bear our sins, and put them away, then do you think that He is going to let the normal circumstances of our lives be something like chance, or just get out of Page 6

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control altogether? Do you think that He wants us to talk in terms of my "good luck" or my "bad luck?" There is no such thing for the child of God because, as God orders our circumstances, and overrules in all of these things, working them together for good, remember that His object is to bring good, His object is to bring us to glory, His object is to fashion us more and more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. So if He spared not His own Son, then how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? The death of Christ brought the Apostle Paul to the realization that, if God gave him the greater, then He was surely going to take care of all of the circumstances of my life.

IV. THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST (Rom. 8:34)

But now this is not all. I have given you three reasons to be at peace when we believe in the providence of God: first of all, the nature of God; secondly, the intercessory work of the Spirit of God; third, the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now let me add a fourth: the intercession of Christ. You see this in verse 34, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Now look at this. God is at work, according to verse 28 working "all things together for good." The Spirit of God is interceding for us, according to verse 26 "with groanings which cannot be uttered." In addition to this, Paul indicated here in this passage of Scripture that the main business of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven for the past two

thousand years has been to intercede with the Father on behalf of His people. He is "at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us."

You know, you and I need to come back to the twenty-sixth verse, and to the thirty-fourth verse, and read them over and over, praying that God would impress upon our hearts the reality of these wonderful truths. Are you the kind of a person who feels, "Well, nobody knows about my needs, and nobody really cares; nobody is praying for me." That may or may not be true. I can assure you, though, that, if you are part of the Trinity family, somebody is praying for you. In fact, there are probably many people who are praying for you. Maybe nobody has ever told you that they are praying for you, but they are. But say that there is a child of God and there really is not any other person on the face of the earth who is praying for him, yet every child of God knows from Scripture that the Holy Spirit is praying for him, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is praying for him, praying continuously, pleading with the Father on behalf of His wonderful purposes. You say, why is that necessary? Don't ask me. But the very fact that the Spirit of God is doing it, and that the Lord Jesus Christ is doing it, is an indication that it is absolutely necessary. They are engaged in this ministry continuously.

Over in the book of Hebrews, chapter 7, verse 25, is a verse that most of you are familiar with. It ties in with this thirty-fourth verse of Romans chapter 8. I want to read it to you, and if you would like to look at it with me, please do. The writer of Hebrews said this: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost . . ." I heard a man who was in rescue mission work and he liked to read this verse--"He is able also to save them to the guttermost." That is true. That is true. Regardless of how low you get the Lord is able to save. But that is not what this word "uttermost" means. The word "uttermost" here means to the end. It means, completely. He is able to save them completely "that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." You see, this is exactly

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what we are learning in Romans 8:34. The reason the Lord is going to be able to save us to the end, completely, is not only because He died for us, but because He ever lives to make intercession for us. Therefore, we can be sure that when we think of those trials in our lives that all of us have, we can be sure that both the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are praying for us. The reason that those things cannot be a hindrance, but instead, will be a blessing and will help you on the way to perfection in the Lord Jesus Christ, is because Jesus Christ is interceding for you. That is a wonderful comfort, isn't it? The Lord

Jesus Christ is interceding for us. This is His main work at the Father's right hand at this very moment, praying for you and for me. How could anything possibly harm us, or anything go wrong, when the Lord Jesus Christ is praying for us?

V. THE LOVE OF CHRIST AND OF GOD (Rom. 8:35-39)

Finally, let me say just a word about the love of Christ and the love of God.

You will remember that when we were considering the attributes of God we considered both the love of God and the unchangeableness of God. When you put these two together, then you realize that if God and Christ love us now, they have always loved us, and they always will love us. We may dishonor them. We may disobey them. We may displease them. But as I have said many times, and I cling to this myself, you and I can never do anything that will cause God, or the Lord Jesus Christ, to stop loving us. NEVER! He set His love upon us. It has been there from eternity. It will be there unto all eternity. And it endures the same throughout time. The love of God is never interrupted when we sin, nor when we are in trouble, nor in any of the circumstances of our lives. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing can stand in the way of what He has lovingly planned regarding our salvation. Every experience, under the hand of God, is going to leave us better than it found us. How wonderfully it is stated here. Paul said, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" It is the love of Christ that he was speaking about in verse 35, but he spoke of the love of God later on in the last verse of the chapter (verse 39). The love of God and the love of Christ here have to do with the accomplishment of God's purpose in our salvation. It means: Can any of these things stand in the way of God working them together for good? No! Instead, God uses them to conform us more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness?" Here are some of the things that the people of God were experiencing. He also mentioned "famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Let people do their worst, even if it comes to the sword. If a child of God lays down his life for his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, does that mean that the one who held the sword was the victor, and that God's purposes were set aside by the sword? Paul said, "As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Then he said--and look at this verse: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

You know, the Bible is really the only book I have ever found that talks about being more than a conqueror. What does that mean? It means that God not only gives you the victory, but God uses these things that are

directed against you to serve His purpose so that the tribulation and the distress and the persecution and the famine and the nakedness and the peril and the sword, are among those things that God works together by His sovereign power in answer to the prayers of the

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Spirit of God and in answer to the prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ to make you and to make me more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul concluded by saying, "I am persuaded, that neither death (let the enemies of the Gospel do their worst), or life (with all of its temptations and its difficulties), nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers (he is talking about heavenly beings), nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38, 39). You can see the marvelous providence of God.

Let me put these two words together: Understanding the sovereign providence of God means peace for the child of God. This could have been the only explanation for Joseph's remarkable attitude during his life. Don't you love the story of Joseph? When his father finally died, his brothers got worried all over again as to what he was going to do to retaliate for the evil that they had done to him years before. Joseph found out about it, and this is what he said to them: "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, ye thought evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:19, 20).

Would you write those words over your own life, over your own experiences? Regardless of what the immediate cause for their coming, remember that it can always be said concerning our trials, our distresses, our anxieties, our sicknesses, even concerning death--concerning whatever may come into our lives, God means it for good. "And we know that God works all things together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). By the grace of God, let us believe it. Let us rejoice in it. And let us praise God that this is always true in the lives of His people.