

Promises
For
Now And Evermore

Promise for Understanding

Steve Flatt

Promise for Understanding

The promise "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) is the one of the best known, best loved.

That passage is a security for us in a time of storm. It's a passage that we turn to when we're in turmoil, or in tragedy. It's a passage we look at when we're wondering why we just don't understand. It takes our "why" and it turns it into "who." It takes our question and it turns us to the one who will always provide an answer. It's a promise for understanding.

"For we know." Underline those words. "We know." There's the promise for understanding. Even when things happen that hurt us, level us, or leave us absolutely clueless as to why they ever came about. "And we know that in all things God." Right after that little prepositional phrase, "works" That's the key to the whole verse. We're going to look at it in some detail but that's the key. It's not what you know, it is who you know.

The key to understanding in life is knowing God and trusting Him. That's the key. It's not how much you know, it's not how much you understand, it's not what your IQ is. The brightest among us don't have the ability to understand the depths, the mysteries and the difficulties of life. We just don't have that within us.

I'm a little amused that in two verses prior to Romans 8:28, Paul says, "In the same way...we do not know what we ought to pray for." That's the truth isn't it? I know some things for which I need to pray, but there are so many needs in my life, there is so many circumstances going around me, that I don't even begin to understand, I need God to help me pray. I don't even know what to pray for, that's how ignorant I am. That's how ignorant you are.

Thomas Edison said back in 1926, "We don't know one 1/millionth of one percent of all that's happening around us." Every day is bearing that statement out to be even truer. With each new discovery that we're making in science, we're finding how little we know.

Have you read about the "Black Hole" they found in the universe? Billions of light years from now, we can't even comprehend one light year, but we're talking about billions of light years. I don't understand that hole, but you know what they say about it? They say it is a hole that is sucking in, not just matter, but energy. That the pull of gravity is so strong, that even light cannot escape. Can you imagine that? They say that the pull of gravity is so strong in that black hole, that if you take the entire earth and everything that's on it, and have that same pull of gravity it would shrink the earth down to the size of a marble. I can't even begin to relate to that. I don't understand. But, the point is the power of understanding doesn't have to be within us, the good news is the power of understanding is within the God who made that black hole and made everything else around us.

The promise we had from Jesus in John 8:32 is, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Who's going to show us that truth? God is going to show us that truth.

So many things the Bible says Christians know with confidence. We know that we have passed from death into life. How do you know that? I know it because God's made sure that I was told that, and I trust him. We know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him. How do I know that? I know that because of what I know about God.

Paul said, "For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that I've committed unto him against that day." (2 Timothy 1:12) You see by faith in God, He will give us understanding.

Romans 8:28-29 tells us that our understanding will come from confidence and certain things about God. I want to share three of them with you from the text.

1. I can better understand what is going on around me because of my confidence in his providence. "For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..." The providence of God is his ability to sustain and to guide destiny. He can do that because everything that happens in this world is either permitted or planned by God. Have you ever thought about that? Did you notice the word, "all?" "All things work together for good." Why? Because everything that happens in this world is either permitted or planned by God. Now that doesn't mean that everything that happens is a direct cause from God. He's not some great puppeteer pulling strings. A lot of things happen on this earth that are evil, that are orchestrated by Satan, but for the time being those things are being permitted by God.

He is the Creator of the heavens of the earth. The world exists by the word of his power. Isaiah 40:28 says, "...The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom." He's God. Everything is watched by his eye, everything is considered by his mind, and everything is ultimately under his control. He sees, he knows, he cares, and he works, that's the providence of God.

Remember the old story about the lady who came to the door in response to the Gallup Poll petitioner, and after knocking on her door, she came just ragged looking and all unkempt. He said, "Ma'am, we're conducting a poll on what you think the greatest problem in America is, ignorance or apathy?" And she said, "I don't know, and I don't care," and slammed the door in his face. I've got great news for you. We've got a God who knows, we've got a God who cares, and we've got a God who works.

Everything, everything in this world is either permitted or planned by the great, good, gracious, giving, and glorious God Almighty. That by the way is why Paul could say in other places in his writings, "In everything give thanks." Everything? EVERYTHING? Yes, in everything give thanks. Why? Because it's all right here. That's why he could say, "Rejoice in the Lord always." You mean even when I'm down, even when bad things happen...Yes, always. Why? Because it's not outside the scope of his providence.

That's why he could say in Romans 8:28, "God works all things together for good." If you were to keep reading down in Romans 8 near the very end about verse 35, 36 and 37, he said, there's some horrible things out there. There's death, famine, tribulation, and persecution; yes, God will even work those things together for good. The first thing we're confident in is God's providence.

2. Be confident in God's perspective. To me, the key word in the whole text is the word, "together." The Bible doesn't say that all things are good. It says that "God works all things good and bad things together," for a good outcome.

Hey, there are a lot of things that aren't good. Temptations aren't good. I don't enjoy temptations or succumbing to temptations. James 1 tells us that temptations come from the devil, they don't come from God. But God can use temptations to actually draw us closer to him. Pain is not pleasant, is it? But God can use pain to reestablish humility and dependence upon him. Failure hurts. I'm not really fond of failure, but God can use it in such a way to help us relook at our priorities. While we may not see it, we've got to understand that God has a better and fuller perspective on our lives.

Let me give you two illustrations of how God acts in that role. The first thing I think of is air traffic controllers, the guys in the control tower. All of these pilots are out there in their plane wanting to come in and land. Some are wanting to take off. The air traffic controller has to tell them which runway is cleared for landing and what the coordinates are for entry. He gives them the timing, he gives them the route, he alerts them about field conditions. If every pilot wanted to come in on their own you would have thousands of people dying. They would say, "Well, this looks like the best way to me." Wham! Whoosh! Crash! What I want you to see is that God is in the control tower of the airfield of your life. You may think this is the best way, and he says, "No, I want you to circle again." You say, "Why?" He says, "Don't ask why, just circle, I'll tell you when to come in."

I'll give you an even better illustration. He's the baker of your life. I'm not a baker. I'm not a cook. I love some of the products of good bakers. For example, I love German chocolate cake. I don't know anything about the ingredients, proportions or the baking temperature. The only thing I have to know is how to use a fork. But, see God is the baker of my life. He knows exactly the right ingredients.

By the way, I do know just a little bit about baking a German chocolate cake. If you were to taste any of those ingredients individually, they're not really good are they? Did you ever taste a big tablespoon full of flour? Do you want that? Is that good? Yuck! How about some of the salt? Just put salt in it. No! The sugar, it's pretty good, but it's not all that good, especially compared to the final product. What about that raw egg? How would you like to choke that down? You see the ingredients by themselves are not good at all, but the baker of our life, stirs them up in exactly the right proportion. But that's not all he does. Then he puts them under heat. He puts them under heat for just the right amount of time. The great news today is, that God knows the ingredients, He knows how much heat we need and for how long. That's his magnificent perspective.

I'm confident in his providence, and I'm confident in his perspective, but there's one other thing that's really even more important than those two.

3. Be confident in his purpose. Look at verse 28 again, we quote it all the time, "For we know that in all things God works for good for those who love him..." but look at the rest of it, "...who have been called according to his purpose." Wait a minute. What is his purpose for us? What's God's purpose for you? What's God's purpose for me? This is where too many of us stop reading but keep reading, verse 29, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son..." There, right there, do you see that? That is God's purpose for us.

His purpose for you is to **be conformed in the image of his Son**, Jesus. That is God's supreme purpose for me. God's supreme purpose for me is not to believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. That is the means, a vital means, but it's not my purpose. God's purpose for me is not to assemble together. That's the sustenance, but that's not my purpose. God's purpose for me is not to win another lost soul, that's my mission, but that's not my purpose. God's purpose for me is not to go to heaven, that is my reward, but that is not my purpose. What's my purpose? He tells me. **His supreme purpose for me is to be like Jesus.** That by the way is the best quick answer I know when somebody asks you this question, "Why do bad things happen to God's children?" Do you know the answer? Because we need to be like Jesus.

Do you know what that reminds me of? 1 Peter 2:21 "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps." How many of you want to suffer? I don't either. How many of you want to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ? I've got bad news for you, it goes with the territory. We cannot be conformed into the image of Jesus unless we also suffer.

Christians really should have a sign across their chests that says, "Construction Underway." God is working on us and he's working around us to make us more like Jesus. Do you see his promise? I'm not going to understand everything that happens to me. Sometimes I'm not going to understand it at all. I'll be so confused that I'll fall on my knees and beg for understanding. But I can understand that the God who loves me enough to die for me and has a providence, a perspective and a purpose for all of it. Now that leaves me with one last thing. What do I need to do?

4. Love Him. This text has one key responsibility. Look at it again. "...We know that in all things God works for the good of..." What does it say? "...those who love him..." This is a promise for people who love God. It's not a promise for every human being. It's not a promise for the unbeliever. Sadly, it's not a promise for those who only believe. It's a promise for those who love the Lord.

If I want understanding, what do I need to do? I don't have to worry so much about working things out. I don't have to worry a lot about figuring things out, that's God's responsibility. Here's my responsibility. My responsibility is to love God more. The more I love God, the better I'll understand. I don't know how, but that's the promise, and it works. Adapted from Amazing Grace #1163 - Steve Flatt, June 12, 1994