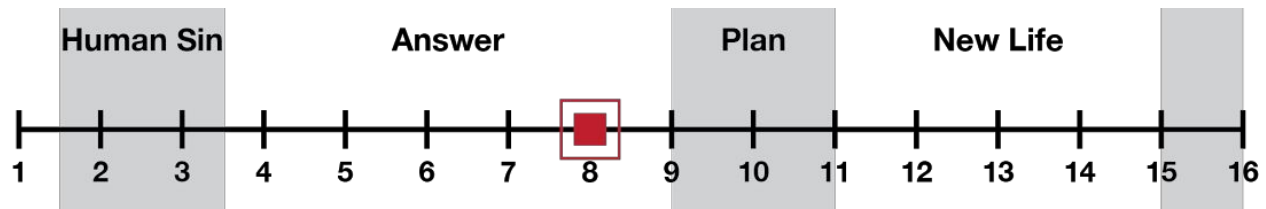


# Romans 8:18-39 | ALL THINGS FOR GOOD

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## Synopsis

Romans 8 might be considered the crescendo—and climax—of Paul’s salvation argument. He certainly has more to say in Romans 9-11, but his discussion of how one is saved finds its beautiful completion in this passage. We see with astonishing clarity God’s salvation plan not only for humans, but for the whole world. This whispers, or perhaps shouts, of the cosmic significance of Jesus Christ. It points to something beyond ourselves. We are not the center of the universe. Jesus is.

The end of Romans 8 is a reminder that this is a remarkable story, but the story has an author and a story-teller. God is the one in control. Not in a puppeteering sort of way, but far more significant than that. He uses the mess of humans to tell an incredible story beyond what we can imagine. This is the story of redemption and restoration. God’s Spirit takes what was once dirty and makes it clean. And when we are on the side of God, we have nothing to fear.

The **reading** is Romans 8:18-39. No **focus passage** for the week. Feel free to discuss in a broad way or focus where you think is best.

**The win this week:** Don’t get sidetracked by possible rabbit trails. Soak in one of the most important texts in Scripture, discussing God’s sovereignty and redemption.

**\*\*NOTE:** We understand that this week could bring up questions about Calvinism. But that’s not the main point of this week’s study. You can address concerns without getting engulfed in the argument. Next week, you will have the option to talk about the issue (or you can choose to avoid it). Remember, don’t just do what you think is “fun,” but what’s best for your group.

## God is Sovereign

**Read Romans 8:18-39**

## Commentary

v. 18 - In Romans 5:3-5, we learned a little bit about suffering and evil. While many people reject God because so much evil still exists in this world, the New Testament doesn't specifically respond to the philosophical "problem of evil." In Scripture, evil and suffering are definitely a problem, but only insofar as God will wipe it out and it has no place in God's Kingdom. If we truly wanted God to eradicate all evil, we would have to request he wipe us out as well. In Romans 5, the discussion was more about how suffering can shape and make our souls look more like Jesus. In Romans 8, Paul reminds us that the sufferings we face now are nothing in the light of heaven. Even our sufferings here must be seen with the understanding that they too will be redeemed. To see suffering as having power over good is a mistake. In the words of Samwise Gamgee: "this darkness is just a small and passing thing." This doesn't belittle our suffering, but it does place it in a perspective that we will one day have.

v. 19-22 - The fate of creation is intimately tied to the fate of man. Human beings don't just have free choice, but free and responsible choice. The choices we make affect not just ourselves but the people around us and, as Paul points out here, creation. But the redemption of Christ extends to creation as well. We are told that "all of creation is groaning" in eager expectation. There is a certain amount of pain in waiting for this final redemption. All of creation includes earth and even us, the church. We are eagerly awaiting Jesus to return and take over as King and make all things right.

v. 23-35 - The Spirit is called the "firstfruits." The firstfruits was the initial installment of the Palestinian harvest. It signifies the beginning. Believers have experienced the firstfruits of redemption and adoption (and the Spirit is evidence of that) but we await the fullness of that. We live in the tension of "already...not yet." The decisive defeat has taken place in the death and resurrection of Jesus, but a remnant of evil remains that needs to be eradicated for the war to be over. For you WWII buffs, Christians live between D-Day, the decisive battle of the war that rendered victory certain, and V-E ("Victory in Europe") Day, when the war (in Europe) was actually over. We wait for our final redemption with "hope" and "patience."

v. 26-27 - We are powerless even to pray, but the Spirit helps us in our weakness. The Spirit is also "groaning." We saw only a few verses ago that all of creation is groaning in pain and expectation for the final fulfillment. God is not exempt. God does not stand apart from the pain of the church and creation, but comes to stand in the middle of it. This is another answer Paul has for evil: God comes to dwell in the middle of it and stands with us in our pain.

v. 28-30 - God does work good for those who love him, but note that this doesn't necessarily mean financial or physical prosperity. We can't think of this in a worldly way and interpret it as meaning God will give us the perfect person to marry, the perfect job, house, and kid. This is a mistake. God is concerned primarily with our salvation: our justification, sanctification, and glorification. He wants to make us look more like Jesus, not more like a successful CEO.

So no, ladies, God doesn't promise to give you that guy just because Psalm 37:4 says God will give you the desires of your heart. And no, guys, he won't give you a bigger truck either.

A word needs to be said also about Calvinism. This passage has often been used in support of predestination of a Calvinist bent. It must be understood that sovereignty and predestination are Biblical doctrines, *not* Calvinist doctrines. They only need be properly understood. Modern readers have a tendency to look at things in Scripture through the lens of *the individual* when that is not implied. Here is an example of this. When he talks about predestination, Paul is referring to the church, the people of God, who have been called and predestined for a purpose. Those people he will justify and glorify. Paul never implies that human beings have no role whatsoever in this. We have been given an enormous gift, we need only to open it. But open it we must. If we sit it on the shelf still in the wrapping, declaring we don't need God's gift, we will not reap the benefits. God is certainly the primary actor and initiator of salvation, and salvation is a gift of God by grace. We cannot *earn* it. But we must receive this gift.

v. 31-36 - If God is for us who can be against us? Romans 8:18-39 reminds us to look at the world from a different perspective than most. We live in an enchanted world. God has made a good world and intervenes in it regularly. It's easy to despair in the face of ISIS, natural disasters, and finals. But we are able to see beyond that and have *hope*. The creator of the universe is for us and he has a remarkable end in mind.

v. 37-39 - The final word of reassurance. Nothing can separate us from the love of God. As we've seen in the first 8 chapters of Romans, God has gone through great lengths to win back the hearts of his people. His plan has cost him dearly and he doesn't intend to stop. He will continue to redeem and make new until evil is finally gone forever. These final two verses do not call for interpretation, they call for reflection.

## ② Questions

How is "creation in bondage" as Paul says in v. 21? How does "creation groan?"

Paul asks the question in v. 31: "what shall we say to these things?" That's kind of an odd question to be in the middle of this hugely important section. What are "these things?" What does he "say?"

What does Paul mean in Romans 8:33?

Paul says that "nothing" can separate us from the love of God. Do you think this includes "ourselves?" Can you separate you from the love of God? Carefully reflect on this question.

## ② Application Questions

In regards to the Calvinism debate, where do we draw the line between unity and right doctrine?

Calvinism is a popular debate that often happens around college campuses. Do you think it's an important discussion/debate to have? Why or why not?

How do you think God works "all things together for those who love him"? Does this mean he doesn't work good for those who don't love him?

What ways does God "work all things?" Does this mean that God makes bad things happen to people for a greater good?

In this section we are told that we are not only "justified" but also "glorified." What does it mean to be glorified? What does that look like?

Interceding and intercession is a word that pops up a few times in this section. What is our role in intercession and interceding?

If "nothing" can separate us from God, why are there some people separated from God?

Does the end of Romans 8 mean that after we accept Jesus that we can live and do whatever we want because our salvation is sure? What is an appropriate understanding of assurance and perseverance?

What does it mean that "God is sovereign"? How is he in control?

What does it mean to hope and how do we exercise that?

## Accountability

Paul has this little sentence that it's easy to miss in this section. Romans 8:26: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness." This is a key part of the Christian life. We realize that even after we are Christians, we still have weaknesses. But it doesn't stop there. The Spirit wants to *help* you in that weakness. You are not just left to fight the weakness yourself, but God wants to end the evil in your heart like he wants to end the evil in the world.

- When it comes to living the Christian life, what are weaknesses that you have? Note that it's not just things you do that you shouldn't do, it might also be things you should do but don't.
- How can the Spirit help you in your weakness?
- For this upcoming week, pray for the weaknesses of your entire accountability group, specifically praying for the Spirit to help them.

## Resource Toolbox



[Jon Weece on Assurance and the Future](#)



[John Frame - The Bible on Evil](#)



[Craig Keener Article on Romans 8:28](#)