

WHAT DOES ROMANS 8:28 TEACH IN REGARD TO THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD?

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It is doubtful that there are fifteen other words in the Bible that say more about the providence of God than these found in Romans 8:28.

Being a missionary, I have found a strong belief in the providence of God. Those in the mission field areas are often far from home, with few friends, brethren, or help of any kind save that which God supplies. Therefore, they come to rely on God for more than when home, surrounded by those we often can lean upon. I well remember our last tour making a tape to our elders back here at home and saying, "I am almost afraid to pray and ask, for God answers with such rapidity it is frightening." I meant that. I thought I saw God work providentially and quickly in our lives opening doors so the work of the Kingdom could go forward.

Many, many times now I put matters in God's hands to handle providentially when I am unsure as to what to do, or how to do it. This is a far cry from believing that God works supernaturally (i.e. miraculously) in my life or yours. This I categorically and emphatically deny. For the Bible shows conclusively miracles have ceased but knowing this and admitting this in no way denies the providential working of God in our lives today. In fact, it enhances this knowledge and makes it all the more meaningful.

In this article, I wish to present the four laws of providence that are found in Romans 8:28, "**And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.**"

THE LAW OF OPERATION

First, there is the law of operation. "**All things work...**" If there is anything taught in the word of God, it is "**All things work...**"

God has been busy in physical creation, notice: "**By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made out of things which appear**" (Heb. 11:3). The worlds have been framed by the word of God. God spoke the worlds into being by *instantaneous creation!* God spoke and it was so! Some eight times it is recorded "**God said,**" and it was so! When God speaks the law of operation, operates! It works!

Once again when Jehovah delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh the law of operation worked, notice:

And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Jehovah caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all the night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it came to pass in the morning watch, that Jehovah looked forth upon the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of

fire and of cloud, and discomfited the host of the Egyptians. And he took off their chariot wheels, and they drove them heavily; so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for Jehovah fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And Jehovah saith unto Moses, Stretch out thy hand over the sea, that the waters may come against upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and Jehovah overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, even all the host of Pharaoh that went in after them into the sea; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus Jehovah saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great work which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared Jehovah: and they believed in Jehovah, and in his servant Moses.

The passage says, **“And Israel saw the great work which Jehovah did upon the Egyptians, and the people feared Jehovah: and they believed in Jehovah, and in his servant Moses.”** When the laws of God operate men would do well to **“fear”** and **“believe”** today! But what do we find? Skepticism, unbelief and even ridicule and denouncement! For shame!

But secondly, the law of operation works in the spiritual realm as well. Paul argues this in Ephesians 1:11-12:

In whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will; to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ.

And again, in verse 19: **“And what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might.”** Then again in Ephesians 3:20: **“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.”**

It is abundantly clear the spiritual blessings found in Jesus Christ for us are according to God’s counsel and in working through His glory. God works mightily in us. Notice also Philippians 4:13, **“I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.”** God works in us. God strengthens us. What a glorious concept! The law of operation works!

THE LAW OF COOPERATION

Secondly, there is the *law of cooperation* found in Romans 8:28: **“All things work together...”** There is no contradiction or conflict in what God does—**“All things work together.”**

Paul makes the statement in Philippians 2:13, **“but it is God who worketh in you, both to will and work for His good pleasure.”** God is the Supreme Architect of the Universe both physically and spiritually, so everything God does has a divine harmony about it. When all is of God there is no schism or division in anything that God does. God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). There are no

contradictions in the laws of God and no confusion in His plans. He does all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40).

When God created the universe, He did so through Christ and there was complete cooperation on the part of Deity. Notice Genesis 1:1 and John 1:1: **“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”** and **“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”** That same Deity upholds or sustains all things in their respective place.

God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers In the prophets by divers portions and In divers manners, hath spoken unto us In his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very Image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1: 1-3).

God worked in Christ creating the worlds and now sustaining the world. God spoke through the prophets to the ancient world and now God speaks to our world through the Christ, the Savior of the same world.

God works through man to care for and save the present world. There is a harmony and cooperation? That is beautiful to behold. Notice the Great Commission:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned (Mark 16: 15-16).

Now it is evident God is its author, man is its deliverer. God authorizes and man carries it out. Paul further enhances this idea in Philippians 2:13-16a:

For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and questionings: that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are the light of the world, holding forth the word of life.

God is the author of the light but you and I, together with Him, hold it forth to a world that sits in darkness, cooperation is the keyword.

The same is true of our benevolence and care for others. We minister through the strength which God supplies. That which God's benevolence supplies becomes that with which we can supply to others. Our care for the poor, the widow and the orphan is God working through us to meet their needs. The only hands God has are ours, the only money He can command is ours and the only hope they have is us and we do it because we are His! Cooperation! That's the name of the game.

THE LAW OF COMPENSATION

Thirdly, there is the *law of compensation*. **“All things work together for good....”** This is perhaps the most interesting, yet hardest to accept and believe. **“Do all things really work for our good?”** How could every situation in life really be overruled for our good? Even suffering? Pain? Persecution? Failure? Economic reverses? Even the cruelties of life? How can this be?

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16:9, **“for a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.”** This is usually the way of life, “doors open” and they “effectually open,” but there are many adversaries. God opens the doors of opportunity.

And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all things that God had done with them, and that he had opened a door of faith unto the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

Yet, always, wherever Paul went the adversaries followed! In fact, it seems they sometimes beat them there! God opens these doors providentially, so all may hear. It has long been a firm conviction of mine based upon a study of the entire Bible that wherever there is an honest person seeking the truth God will providentially provide for someone to get there to give him the chance to obey the gospel. God opens the doors, and none can shut, God shuts the doors, and none can open (Rev. 3:7). So, we must take every advantage for Christ, and pray continually for God to open more doors! I am confident we are not waiting on Him, but rather He is waiting on us. When our faith and vision are sufficiently strong the doors will open!

Paul again states,

There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it (1 Cor. 10:13).

Temptation can be an awesome thing in our lives. Often it sways our entire destiny, it troubles our days and affords us sleepless nights. Often it is like a living thing in our lives goading us, leading us to go and do things our conscience forbids. Yet, God has fully assured us that “no temptation has taken us, but such as man can bear!” God will provide the way of escape. Now, neighbor, the question comes, “do you want to take it?” or had you rather say, “Get thee behind me Satan and push!” In every situation of temptation, we can profit spiritually if only we let God have control and we take the way of escape. So, we can say all temptation can work for our good! In fact, **“All things”** can work for that same good.

But what about all the other situations of life, tragedy, horror, physical impairment and even death itself. Neighbor, Satan can’t conceive of a situation that the power and Spirit of God cannot conquer. No situation can exist that God cannot providentially overrule for our good. Consider:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Even as it is written For thy sake we are killed all the day long: We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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. 8:35-39).

So, it **is** true, God overrules everything providentially. He overrules the Kings of the earth (Rev. 1:5), their Kingdoms, and the opportunities in them. He providentially guides, guards, and keeps us in every situation of life.

THE LAW OF LIMITATION

The **law of limitation** works, for **“All things work together for good to them that love the Lord...”** God never promised to overrule providentially those who do not love God! God is not at the beckon call of those who ask without loving God. God is not a “lakey boy” to be abused.

The idea of loving God is one misused and abused concept. Many feel to “love God” is little more than having a sentimental feeling toward a Supreme Being. The Bible idea of loving God is a conscious decision to accept God's truth and obey Him in all things possible, for Jesus said, **“if you love me you will keep my commandments”** (John 14:15).

At least three things are always involved in obeying God. First, there is the sacrifice. Jesus said,

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it (Luke 9:23-24).

So many today want to live for God, but they want a life free of sacrifice and commitment. It is not possible. Jesus' example is one of sacrifice and dedication and He demands it of every disciple. If you are not willing to pay the price, then you can't expect to collect the reward!

Secondly, there is the striving. Jesus taught, **“Strive ye to enter in by the narrow door”** (Luke 13:24). To strive means to “agonize,” to “strive with strenuous zeal,” to accomplish your goal. The reason so many continue to live in sin is because they are unwilling to repent, for repentance often demands “agonizing.” To agonize is to face reality, judgment, and heaven and hell and it is awesome. To bring one's mind, will, and desire into subjection to God can often be a terrifying experience. When our Lord wrestled with His humanity in the garden, the record says, **“He being in an agony still...and His sweat became as great drops of blood...”** (Luke 22:44). This is a sobering, revealing insight into the agony we often must suffer to accomplish the will of God in our lives. Neighbor, how long has it been since you agonized over anything—well then, that just might be too long!

Thirdly, obedience demands we serve. Jesus said, **“He that would be greatest among you shall be your servant”** (Mat. 23:11). Jesus was in our midst as one who served. We are taught of God to serve one another. It is performed out of love and appreciation for Him who served us so grandly, graciously, and gloriously. Whether it be the menial tasks of everyday life or the greater service of teaching the Word of God to those who sit in darkness—it is service. Service to God and to man, this is a mark of discipleship. It cannot be ignored or neglected for God commands, **“Love not in word neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth”** (1 John 3:18).

IN CONCLUSION

We have looked at another facet of the great gem of providence. We have noticed the four laws of Romans 8:28: The law of **Operation**; The law of **Cooperation**; The law of **Compensation**; and the Law of **Limitation**. We believe strongly in God's divine providence while rejecting the miraculous or the direct intervention theory. God does **all** things well and God cares for His own. Unto Him be the glory forever and forever. Amen!~

Deceased