

A Complex Verse – Romans 8:28

Introduction

There are a number of *specific* verses in Scripture, which have enormous theological significance. In other words, those particular verses exert an outsized influence, on our understanding about spiritual matters.

Some examples of these “theologically profound” verses are: Genesis 2:7, Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 26:19, Ezekiel 18:4, Matthew 5:5, Matthew 7:21, Mark 10:18, Luke 1:35, John 14:6, and – of course – the famous John 1:1.

Another verse which certainly qualifies as being “theologically profound” is Romans 8:28. In fact, not only does that verse have great *theological* implications, but it also has the potential to affect people’s entire “worldview”.

In other words, from my experience, that specific verse has *greatly* influenced some people’s understanding, about *events* that are happening to them.

As a result, it certainly appears worthwhile to explore Romans 8:28 in detail.

The translation issue

Before discussing Romans 8:28 itself, it is necessary to discuss the overall “translation issue”. As we all know, the Bible was *not* originally written in English – it was written in other languages, and then *translated* into English.

Of course, accurately translating complex ideas from one language to another is a difficult task – in many cases, the author’s original meaning can get “lost in translation”. In addition, in some cases translators have allowed their own, pre-determined biases to affect their work – and that can cause an even *further* deviation from the author’s original intent.

As a result, it is very helpful to compare *different* translations of the Bible – *especially* when studying “theologically profound” verses. Doing so will hopefully allow one to obtain a more complete understanding of the verses in question.

For example, consider Genesis 2:7. Most English translations of that verse have something similar to the following:

⁷ Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

Basically, most English translations state that Adam became a living “being”, or a living “creature”, after God gave him the breath of life. With *that* translation, everything appears “normal” and “expected”.

However, take a look at the King James Version and American Standard Version translations of that same verse:

⁷And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

⁷ And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

Those two translations state that Adam became a living soul. In other words, Adam did not *have* a soul – he **WAS** a soul. This has *enormous* implications for mainstream Christianity’s “immortality of the soul” doctrine...

Different translations of Romans 8:28

Now, let’s take a look at Romans 8:28. As demonstrated above, different translations of the Bible can render the *same* verse in *different* ways – and in some cases, those differences can have an enormous impact on the meaning of the verse in question.

As it turns out, Romans 8:28 is rendered in *many* different ways, among the various translations of the Bible. However, from what I can see, there are two main “categories” of translations of that verse. In other words, the various translations of that verse appear to fall into two basic “groups”.

The following section contains six separate translations of Romans 8:28. The first three translations fall into one basic “category” of translations for that verse; while the other three translations fall into the second “category”. See if you can determine the primary *difference* between those two categories of translations.

Translations of Romans 8:28:

Category 1:

KJV:

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

HCSB:

²⁸ We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God: those who are called according to His purpose.

NASB:

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

Category 2:

RSV:

²⁸ We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

GNT:

²⁸ We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him, those whom he has called according to his purpose.

NIV:

²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Implications of those translations

A “summary” of the translations listed above is as follows:

Translation 1: God causes **all things** to work together for good to those who love God.

Translation 2: **In** all things, **God** works for the good of those who love him.

“Translation 1” appears to state the following about Romans 8:28:

“If a person loves God, and is called by God, then every single thing that happens to that person is for his own good.”

In other words, no matter *what* events happen to that person, *all* of those events are actually **good** things for him. This is because God, Himself, is explicitly controlling every single event that happens to that person.

“Translation 2”, on the other hand, has this to say about Romans 8:28:

“If a person loves God, and is called by God, then everything that God does to that person is for his own good.”

In other words, all of the events that God causes to happen to that person are for his own good. However, this does **not** mean that *every single event* that happens to that person is necessarily good – because many of those events are not caused by God at all.

So, the overall question that is brought up by Romans 8:28 is as follows: Is God completely “micromanaging” all of the events that happen in His followers’ lives?

Which translation has more Scriptural support?

There are certainly *some* cases in Scripture, in which God (or His agent) explicitly causes events to happen to His followers, for their own good. Sometimes those events are *obviously* for a follower's good – such as when God saved Daniel from the lions' den, in Daniel chapter 6. In other cases, the events cause temporary *problems* for a follower – but those events end up working for his own good. An example of this is contained in Acts chapter 9: Jesus temporarily caused Saul (Paul) to become blind – in order to convince Paul that Jesus is actually the Son of God.

However, the question raised from Romans 8:28 is: Is God controlling every event that happens to His followers – so that *every single thing* that happens to them is for their own good? In other words, are there any cases in Scripture, in which God did not control events that happened to His followers?

Consider the following three passages – in which events happen to followers of God:

2 Chronicles 24:20-21 (ESV):

²⁰ Then the Spirit of God clothed Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'Why do you break the commandments of the LORD, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.'" ²¹ But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.

Mark 6:27-28 (ESV):

²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison ²⁸ and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.

Acts 7:59-60 (ESV):

⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

All three of those passages discuss people who loved God, and were called by God – the prophet Zechariah, John the Baptist, and the apostle Stephen. So, according to "translation 1" of Romans 8:28, God will cause *every single thing* that happens to them to be for their own good.

Of course, in all three of the passages above, the followers of God were murdered. It is difficult to see how *that* event was for their own good.

Not only that, but in all three of those passages, the people who murdered God's followers committed **sins**. So, if God explicitly *controlled* those events, then that means that God forced those people to sin! If that is the case, then how could God ever hold those people accountable for their actions? In other words, how could God ever blame those people for committing murder – if He, himself, *forced* them to do it?

As it turns out, at least in the first passage, God *did* hold the people accountable for murdering Zechariah. 2 Chronicles 24 continues on as follows:

2 Chronicles 24:22-26 (ESV):

²²Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, "May the LORD see and avenge!" ²³At the end of the year the army of the Syrians came up against Joash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. ²⁴Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the LORD delivered into their hand a very great army, because Judah had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Joash.

So, it definitely appears that God did not want the people to murder Zechariah. In fact, in multiple places Jesus refers to the murder of the prophets as a terrible sin against God – which deserves *punishment*. For example, see Luke 11:47-52, as well as the parable of the "wicked tenants" (Matthew 21:33-45, Mark 12:1-12, and Luke 20:9-19).

As a result, it certainly appears that God is **not** explicitly controlling every event that happens to His followers – because if He were, then that would mean that *everything* that *everyone* does to God's followers would actually be obeying God. Since some people **disobeyed** God when they did things to God's followers, that indicates that God was *not* controlling those events.

Conclusion

There are all sorts of extremely heinous crimes that occur in the world – murder, rape, kidnapping, etc – and in many cases, the *victims* of those crimes are people who are *sincerely* trying to follow God.

As noted above, "translation 1" of Romans 8:28 appears to say that God is controlling *every single event* that happens to His followers. If that is actually the case, then that means that God is *forcing* people to murder, rape and kidnap His followers. That translation does *not* appear valid to me – particularly in light of the Scriptural evidence against it.

Instead, it appears to me that "translation 2" is closer to the truth. Certainly, everything that *God* does to His followers *is* for their own good. However, God is not controlling *every* event that occurs on the earth today. After all, 1 John 5:19 tells us that "the whole world is lying in the power of the evil one". Also, Jesus tells us to pray that "God's will be done on the earth, as it is in heaven". If God's will were *already* being done on the earth, then why would we have to pray for it?

In any case, we certainly can be assured that God's plans *will* be accomplished in the *future* – no matter what sins are committed against God's followers during this age.