

# HE MAKES ALL THINGS NEW

Volume 25

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Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Here we are beginning a brand-new year. Happy 2024 to each of you, our readers. Mary and I are so grateful to have been given this opportunity to send out these newsletters. We were encouraged in 2023 by many of you through cards, letters, texts, and phone calls, about how the messages in the newsletters had spoken to you, encouraged you, strengthened you and challenged you. We are also encouraged by God, Himself, as He promises that His word will not return void. It will accomplish what He sends it out to do. So, we are excited about beginning our third year sending out the newsletter. I am going to share a message with you I came across that really blessed me. I do not know who the author is, but this is a great thought and verse to start the new year off with. No matter what 2024 may look like, we can rest in God's promise and in His Grip!

In His Grip: Resting In The Promise Of Romans 8:28

Think for a moment about the challenges you've faced, the trials that have tested your faith, and the moments when you felt overwhelmed by life's circumstances. During these struggles, have you ever wondered if there is any purpose or meaning behind them? Are they just random events, or is there something greater at work?

In these moments of questioning and doubt, Romans 8:28 shines like a beacon of hope. It reminds us that God is not distant or indifferent to our suffering. Instead, He is intimately involved in every aspect of our lives, working everything together for our ultimate good. Today, we will explore three key aspects of Romans 8:28 that will provide encouragement and hope to each one of us. First, we'll discover that God is in control, even when life seems chaotic. Second, we'll delve into the promise that all things work together for good, even during our trials. And third, we'll understand the significance of loving God and how it positions us to experience the fulfillment of this promise.

Let's turn our attention to the first aspect of Romans 8:28, **God is in Control**, which assures us of God's unwavering sovereignty over our lives. As we read these powerful words penned by the Apostle Paul, we are reminded that "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Life is filled with challenges and uncertainties. We encounter unexpected setbacks, disappointments, and trials that can shake our faith and leave us questioning God's plan. In such moments, it's crucial to remember that we are not alone in our struggles. We serve a God who is aware of every circumstance we face, and He remains in control, even when our circumstances seem overwhelming.

It's comforting to know that regardless of what we face—financial difficulties, health issues, broken relationships, or any other trial—God is still in control. He sees the bigger picture, and His purposes extend far beyond our immediate circumstances. When we surrender our lives to Him, we can trust that He is actively working all things together for our good, even when we cannot see it now.

Knowing that God is in control, let's explore the second aspect of Romans 8:28—the promise that **all things work together for good**. Reflecting on the phrase "all things" in Romans 8:28 reveals the breadth and depth of God's promise. It encompasses every aspect of our lives—both the pleasant and the painful, the joyous and the sorrowful. Nothing is outside the scope of God's ability to work for our ultimate good. Even during the most challenging circumstances, we can hold onto the assurance that God is at work, orchestrating events according to His divine plan. It is important to understand that God's definition of "good" may differ from our understanding. While we often associate good with comfort, success, and immediate gratification, God's perspective extends beyond our temporal desires. His definition of good encompasses our spiritual growth, character development, and eternal purposes. Sometimes, we perceive difficulties or setbacks as opportunities for God to mold us, refine our faith, and shape us into vessels for His glory.

Now that we have gained a deeper understanding of God's ability to work all things for our good let us explore the third and final aspect of Romans 8:28—**the significance of loving God**. Romans 8:28 finds a condition attached to the promise—a condition of loving God. What does it mean to truly love God? Loving God goes beyond mere sentiment or affection. It involves a deep, intimate relationship with Him, characterized by obedience, trust, and surrender. When we genuinely love God, our perspective on life changes. We begin to see our circumstances through His love and purpose.

To truly love God means surrendering our will to His will. It means aligning our desires, plans, and ambitions with His divine purposes. It requires letting go of our understanding and trusting in His wisdom and guidance. When we surrender to God, we position ourselves to experience the fullness of His promises, including the assurance that all things will work together for our good.

Consider how you can begin to deepen your love for God today. Cultivate a prayer life, seeking His presence and wisdom in every situation. Engage in heartfelt worship, expressing your love and adoration for Him. And most importantly, strive to obey His Word, for Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands" (John 14:15). In this journey of loving God, we will discover the joy and fulfillment of aligning our hearts with His.

With a deeper understanding of what it means to love God, we have explored the three key aspects of Romans 8:28. These aspects—God's control, His ability to work all things for good, and the significance of loving Him—hold power to transform our lives and bring us rest in His unfailing grip.

Howard Isom

## THE OLD MAN IS DEAD

*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20 KJV)

Recently, I was invited to speak and share my testimony and my book at the Wilkes County Public Library. As I began to prepare what I would share, I was compelled in my spirit to share an excerpt from my book. The excerpt was taken from a letter I had written to my mom while I was still in the county jail. I had written that I had made such a mess of my life that it was irreparable. I wrote, "my life is OVER!!!!... I don't want to live like this."

While at work, the day I was scheduled to speak, the thought began to rush through my mind that I had spoken or written a prophetic word that day when I said, "My life was over." Life as I had known it was over. Life as the old man was over. Life as an alcoholic was over. Life as a drug user and abuser was over. A death was going to take place.

The cross was an instrument of death, a very slow and painful death. The old man, the self-life, was going to experience a crucifixion. Over the twenty-year period of my incarceration, as the old self-life was

dying, the life of Christ living in me became my focus. He became my all and all. I got so excited that day at work thinking about what had taken place in my life. I decided to share it that evening at the county library.

Stephen Olford, in his sermon *Jesus Christ: Not I But Christ*, says Galatians 2:20 is so important because it gets to the heart of the most essential matters of the Christian life. He says that this statement Paul makes encapsulates the gospel of the grace of God. F.B. Meyer, in his book *The Christ-Life for the Self-Life*, puts it this way; "This verse is Paul's confession of the power of the cross in his own life. The cross stood between him and the past. His self-life was nailed there, and this new life was no longer derived from vain efforts to keep the law, but from the indwelling and overflowing of the life of Jesus." Dr. Steven Lawson, in his sermon *A Life-Changing Encounter with the Living God* says of this verse: "Some individual verses in the Bible are such a profound statement of truth that they seem to rise above other verses and beg for our attention. It's not that they're more inspired, for every verse in the Bible is equally inspired, but there are those verses in the Bible that stand out like stars in the night, there are those verses that contain such a succinct statement of truth that they are so profound and so pungent that they seem to reach higher and say more than other verses. They are like an acorn that contains an entire forest within it just waiting to be unleashed, like a seed that contains an entire harvest within it. So, one verse can contain seemingly an entire systematic theology of truth." Look at the verse again in the NKJV; "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me*" I love that phrase "the life which I now live."

Olford, in his sermon, uses the following three headings: the Gospel of the Extinguished Life, the Gospel of the Relinquished Life, and the Gospel of the Distinguished Life. I love these headings!!

Let's look at the Gospel of the Extinguished Life. The verse states: "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live.*" (Galatians 2:20) Jesus Christ came into the world to live and to die. In His life, His obedience to the law was perfect. In His death, He suffered for our disobedience. On earth, He lived the only life of sinless obedience to the law which had ever been lived. On the cross, He dies for our law-breaking since the penalty for disobedience to the law was death. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He died under the penalty of the law.

In Paul's teachings, he presents this truth, this theme of believer's union with Christ, our identification with Christ. Not only is Christ with us or in us, but we are in Christ. Look at what Paul writes in Romans 6: 3-11. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Likewise, you also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (emphasis mine) O, this word is stirring my heart this morning even as I type these words. May the Holy Spirit make this truth of our union in Christ be so real in our hearts and reality in our everyday life experience.

In our dying with Christ, who died under the law's penalty with all the laws demands being satisfied in Him, we've also died to the law, and it has no hold on us. Our dying with Christ also means that we have died to self. The dominating control of the fallen nature has been broken. The extinguished life means death to self and sin. In his book, F.B. Myers writes, "The curse of the Christian and of the world is that self is our pivot; it is because Satan made self his pivot that he became a devil. Take heaven from its center in God and try to center it in self and you transform heaven into hell...The philosophy of the Bible is to do away with self and make Christ all in all. We must cast out the spirit of self and substitute the Lord Jesus Christ."

In Matthew 16:13-26 we find Jesus in a conversation with Peter. Jesus had just told them that he was going to undergo great suffering, be killed, and would be raised on the third day. Peter began to rebuke Jesus saying that's never going to happen to you. No way. Jesus called Peter satan and told him to get behind him because his mind was not on the things of God. Peter wasn't too fond of the message of the crucified life. Nor are most of us. We love the cradle of Christ and await the coming of Christ, but the cross,

the crucified life is not the message many of us really want to hear or understand. Jesus went on to say, "If any want to become my follower, let them deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeit their life?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

Many years ago, while incarcerated, I read a piece on this verse in Matthew and the verse in Galatians 2:20 entitled, *The I Must Die*. I wrote in my journal in 2011, "That for most of my life it was always about me. What I want. What I like. What I think. How I feel. What I wanted to pursue. Too much of I was in the way. The kingdom of I dominated. The I needed to die!!"

When Paul stated that he was crucified with Christ, of course he did not mean that he was physically on the cross like the two thieves on either side of Jesus. No. Paul was speaking of something far more profound. As I stated earlier, he was speaking of his union with Christ and what Christ had experienced became Paul's experience spiritually. In Colossians 3:3 Paul tells the folks there that they were dead, they had died, and their life was now hidden with Christ in God.

Lawson says this, "So what does it mean when Paul says, 'I have been crucified with Christ.' It means that when Christ died, Paul died to his old self and his old ways of life, that old person that he once was, that was dead in sins, corrupt in heart, depraved in nature. When Christ died, Paul died to his old sinful pursuits. All this came to a decisive final end. Paul died to self-righteousness. He died to self-centeredness. He died to self-exaltation. He died to self-ego, self-flattery, self-pride, and self-will. Paul died to the entirety of his old self-life, all that he was, all that he pursued, all that he valued, all that he trusted, and all that he prized. Paul died to Paul. Paul no longer lived for Paul. Paul came to an end of Paul. When Christ died, that old Paul died. That old Paul was crucified with Christ." I say hallelujah!! Doesn't that just make you want to praise God? I pray that each one who reads this, that this will be your experience, my experience, our experience, and our testimony. This is so good.

Look at the Gospel of the Relinquished Life. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). No longer is life self-centered but Christ centered. By the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus lives out his life in us day by day. Olford says, "We do not relinquish ourselves to an enemy, but it's more of a presenting ourselves as a bride to a bridegroom who has wooed and won us in love. The

bride is asked, will you have this man to be your lawful wedded husband and she answers I will, and they are joined for life. That is the kind of presentation we are thinking about when we speak of the relinquished life. We are saying, Lord, I am married to you, and from now on my language and life are two words: I will. Every day, we must repeat that once-for-all interaction: I am wholly yours, Lord. Use me for your glory.”

Paul is saying that he is no longer living for himself, and he is no longer running his own spiritual life, there is a new driving force at work within him that was not there previously. Then, he goes on to tell us what that driving force is that is now so dominant in his life that he would say, “*it is no longer I who live.*” He says, “*Christ lives in me.*” There is now a new resident within Paul and seated upon the throne of his life is no longer self, no longer sin, no longer Satan, it is now Jesus Christ. Paul says that it is now Jesus driving him, empowering him, guiding him, and living His life in him and through him.

Paul writes in Colossians 1:27, “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*”. Christ in you, not merely close to you, not merely near you, not next to you, not nudging you from the outside, but Christ on the inside at the deepest level of our being. Christ is living in the very depths of his soul in such a way that Christ’s thoughts are his thoughts; Christ’s passions are now the driving passions of his life. Christ’s priorities are his priorities. What Christ loves, he loves and what Christ hates, he hates. Jesus is Lord of Paul’s life. Jesus Christ empowers Paul, enables him, energizes him, and provides what Paul needs. The same is true for each of us, who by His Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ has taken up residence in our lives, and wherever we go, He is with us: whatever we say He hears us: whatever we think, He reads, and whatever we need, He is ready to provide. What a privilege it is to know Christ.

Let’s briefly look at the Gospel of the Distinguished Life, “*the life which I now live, in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” (Galatians 2:20) Paul is now talking about his new life in Christ. He’s talking about his new pursuit of Christ. He’s talking about all that transpires now in the Christian life – his worshipping Christ, his serving Christ, his witnessing for Christ, his living for Christ. He looks to Christ, he depends upon Christ, as a branch would abide in a vine and rely upon the vine to supply everything the branch needs to bear fruit. Lawson says, “To have faith in Christ is to access the source of everything that anyone could ever want joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness, self-

control, spiritual power, wisdom, understanding, guidance, direction, stamina, endurance, perseverance. Everything that one needs in living the Christian life is found in Christ, therefore one could be placed in a prison cell as Paul was and be by himself alone, cut off from all the accompaniments of life, and have **all** that his soul requires because he has Christ in him.” What a glorious truth!

Look at how personal Paul is in the phrase, “*who loved me and gave Himself for me.*” (Galatians 2:20) (emphasis mine) Paul really got a hold of the truth that Jesus loved him and demonstrated it by going to the cross for him. There, nailed to that old rugged cross, having Paul’s sins, my sins, and your sins transferred to Him who knew no sin, He shed His precious blood to reconcile us to God, to redeem us, to buy us out of the slave- market of sin and out of the ownership and slavery of Satan to be His very own possession. He **loves you** dear reader, with an unconditional, sacrificial, intentional, and eternal love and He gave Himself for **you**.

Howard Isom

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