

All things will work together for good (Rom 8:28)



Reference: 'Totally forgiving ourselves' by R.T. Kendall

'And we know that **all things** work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.' (Rom 8:28)

A. Three Keys in Forgiving Ourselves God's Way

1. 'Dignify true guilt' by repentance when Holy Spirit convicts you.
2. 'Refuse to entertain false guilt' which is Satan's bait. Once you have truly repented, treat false guilt like temptation you must resist.
3. Do not give an inch to the devil the 'accuser of brethren.' (Rev 12:10-11) (a) recognise; (b) refuse; (c) resist (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8-9).

B. Distinguish Grief and Regret from Guilt

1. **Grief** is a deep sorrow that comes from a 'sense of severe loss' – of loved ones, job, income, home, health, familiar environment, etc.
 - I. When you are going through grief, ***it doesn't mean God is displeased with you*** unless unrepented sin is involved. In fact, God is closer to us when we are suffering deeply. People turn to alcohol, drugs, binge TV watching, food, etc to escape the pain, but there is no magic pill to make the inner pain go away. Only God can truly comfort us through our pain. The Holy Spirit's name is 'Comforter'. Sometimes we are called to endure grief instead of escaping it quickly (2 Tim 2:3). Jesus wept with Mary and Martha. Some people assume their pain or disappointment is a punishment from God, and associate their pain with guilt. Job's friends were in grave error when they theologised, 'If God is pleased with you, you will not go through any pain!' This is not true.
 - II. Are you struggling with **persistent guilty feelings**? If so, have you forgiven others or yourself totally? (1 John 4:18) Obsessing with the idea of 'punishment' is one of the symptoms of unforgiven sin.
 - III. Whatever the grief we go through, for Christians there is **always God's great purpose behind it**.
 - a) When we respond rightly to suffering, it builds our character (Rom 5:5).
 - b) If we suffer for Christ it produces God's glory (1 Pet 3:17).
 - c) God will not allow what we cannot handle (1 Cor 10:13). 'Thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7) will not kill us, but it can hurt like a 'fishhook'.

Ultimately all God's discipline, whether it is due to sin or not, is meant to produce in us 'accelerated learning'. God's purpose is to make you better, not bitter so we **partake of His holiness** and produce in us fruit of righteousness. (c.f. Heb 12:10-11)

2. **Regret** is mental pain. We wish we can go back to the past and change it, but we cannot. We cannot undo our 'action' or 'inaction' in the past, and we feel it is too late. E.g. 'What if I'd studied harder?' 'What if I did not meet this person?' 'I wish I were nicer to my mother when she was alive.' The list goes on.

This may be the reason why you don't forgive yourself totally. If it is not too late to make changes, then change it. If it is too late, trust God and leave it in His hands. If there was no true guilt involved, know that you didn't fail God and God is not angry with you.

C. The Answer to both 'Grief' and 'Regret' is Romans 8:28

1. If true guilt is involved, honestly repent before God. There is no other way. THEN commit to Him your past. God wants nothing more from you concerning your past apart from these two things: (i) 'true repentance' (ii) 'faith and trust'.

Do not be defensive about your past or present sins. Behind the refusal to repent is pride, and self-righteousness. If David had been defensive when Nathan the prophet confronted him, he would have

had a very different ending. Repent and turn to God with all your heart because God has already done everything to deal with your past sins. The blood of Jesus is greater than all our sins! Wallowing in remorse and self-pity is the opposite of faith and trust in God.

Then how do we place our past in God's hands after we have repented and turned to God?

2. There is an outrageous family secret. It is only for those who are in Christ, not for anyone else. Isaiah cried out, *'Who has believed our report? (C.f. Is 53:1)*. Paul said some extreme statements (c.f. Rom 4:5), but Romans 8:28 just about tops it all. Rom 8:28 makes it possible for me to forgive myself! (i) We cannot forget what we have done in the past; (ii) We are living in the present largely shaped by our past mistakes and sins.
3. So how can I truly be at peace with myself knowing these two things? Because *'we know that **all things** work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.'* (Rom 8:28)

- Rom 8:28 deals with our **entire past**, both pre-conversion past and post-conversion past.

Call to mind your most difficult days, your most shameful season, when you were at your worst, when the greatest injustice or most tragic accident was thrown upon you. Rom 8:28 'guarantees' everyone who loves God and is among the called according to His purpose, that anything and everything negative, wrong or unfair which has happened will eventually turn out for good.

Why does God say this? Because it is true!

And because God doesn't want you to feel guilty about your past. He is saying, 'Leave your past with Me. It is no longer your problem. I will make it My full responsibility to make all that has happened to you work together for good.'

- Romans 8 tell us we are *'adopted into God's own family'*; *'We have become co-heirs with Christ'*; *'Nothing can separate us from the love of God'* AND everything that has happened - the bad, evil, accidental, negative, sinful, and unjust - will all work together for good. I don't decide which parts of my life will work together for good. It is God who guarantees it and ensures it for His family members who are co-heirs with Christ. This is the family secret. Paul says, *'we know'* - *'oidamen' (factual truth), not 'ginosko' (personal, speculative)*. This is true of the cross of Christ – the greatest triumph of God came from the greatest tragedy. It is also true of Apostle Paul's life.
- *'David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife' (Matt 1:6)*. David had other wives through whom Jesus could have come, but God chose Bathsheba, the woman David committed adultery with and whose husband he murdered! This demonstrates God's redemptive power to turn evil into good. God forgave David and made 'all things' work together for good! Rom 8:28 is a promise you can have by faith even when things look bad. Who will make it work for good? Not me, but God. Don't try to make it happen. Let God do it. It is what He does best.

It doesn't mean David's sin was ok. Never! We cannot apply Rom 8:28 as an excuse for our present sin to claim future blessing. Remember God's discipline for David for his terrible sin was painful.

- There is a condition we must meet for Rom 8:28. It is for (i) those who love God (present tense), not those who resent Him or loved Him in the past. (ii) and those called according to His purpose - those who have been adopted into God's family.

How good is 'good'? When God created the world, He called it 'good' (Gen 1:25). If God calls His original creation 'good' and promises His redeemed people that He will redeem our past.

D. Do You Totally Forgive and Accept Yourself? (C.f. Ps. 139:13-18, 23-24)

1. Do you accept your parents? Our parents are God's choice for us. God did not make a mistake. They were God's chosen instrument to bring you into this world because God wanted you. This is how we accept our birth and all that has happened to us as a part of God's plan in shaping us into whom He wanted us to be. *We must forgive them and accept them as God's choice for us. Do not look back.* Thank God for them.

2. Do you accept your past including a painful upbringing? You cannot accept yourself and at the same time deny things that happened to you which shaped a part of who you are today. God did not make a mistake, and you are not a product of God's mistake, but of His perfect plan.
3. Do you accept your gender? God did not make a mistake with you. You are a male or female by the will of God. This is how God wanted you. Do not buy into the enemy's lies.
4. Do you accept the level of your intelligence? Who doesn't want to be smarter? God has given you certain abilities. He will always give you enough to achieve what you are called to do. Yet God will give wisdom to whoever asks of Him (James 1:5ff).
5. Do you accept your gifts and calling? Visible or invisible; spectacular or unspectacular; high or low profile; *'Your abilities (talents) are God's hint of what you are called to do.'* You may be called to the mission field and not like it. David Brainerd was a very successful missionary, didn't enjoy his vocation (1718-1747).
6. Do you accept your present faults and limitation? (including illness, disability, singleness) This is not a refusal to improve or to seek God's blessing for a breakthrough, but it is knowing that God accepts you as you of the present. We experience the greatest freedom when we don't have to prove anything.
7. Do you accept yourself in the light of mistakes you have made? *'I am not what I ought to be, I am not what I want to be, I am not what I hope to be, but thank God I am not what I used to be.'* (John Newton) Thank God we are all work in progress, and God is not finished with you yet.

The same God who commanded to forgive yourself says: 'Accept yourself.' Paul: 'By the grace of God, I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.' (1 Cor 15:10)