

All things will work together for good

'And 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)

'But one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.' (Phil 3:13-14)



How do we become free from our past, so that we can reach forward towards the future?

- a. We cannot forget what we have done in the past.
- b. We are living in the present largely shaped by our past choices, mistakes and sins.
- c. So how can I truly be at peace with myself knowing these two things?

There are TWO major enemies to forgiving ourselves and dealing with the weight of the past.

1. Grief

Grief is a deep sorrow that comes from a 'sense of severe loss' - loved ones, job, income, home, health, etc. E.g. A healthy high school teacher suddenly fell ill. She suffers 'deep grief', mixed with some guilt as well.

- a. When you are going through grief, the profound sense of loss, **it doesn't mean God is displeased with you** (unless sin is involved). God is for you - even more so when you are suffering grief. 'Everyone can master grief, but he that has it.' (Shakespeare)

We need to walk through our grief in honesty and vulnerability before God because God comforts us in our grief and pain. Holy Spirit is the 'Comforter'. At times we are called to endure grief instead of being relieved of it quickly (2 Tim 2:3). We sometimes assume our pain or disappointment is a punishment from God, like Job's 'comforters'. 'If God is pleased with you, you will not go through any pain!'

- b. Whatever grief we go through, for Christians *there is **always a purpose behind it.***
 - I. When we respond rightly to suffering, it builds character (Rom 5:5).
 - II. If we suffer for Christ it produces God's glory (1 Pet 3:17).
 - III. God will not allow what we cannot handle (1 Cor 10:13). The 'thorn in the flesh' (2 Cor 12:7) will not kill you, but it will hurt you like a 'fishhook'.

Ultimately all of this is God's discipline. 'Accelerated learning' (whether due to sin or not) is meant to make you better not bitter, to **partake in His holiness** (fruit of righteousness). (c.f. Heb 12:10-11).

2. Regret

Regret is mental pain. You wish you could go back to the past and change it, but you cannot. Regret involves your 'action' or 'inaction' in the past that is regrettable, and you feel now it is too late. This may or may not involve true guilt. '*What if I'd studied harder...I'd not meet this person... I was nicer to my mother when she was alive....*' The list goes on.

If it is not too late, change. If it is too late, trust God and leave it in His hands. This may be the reason why you cannot forgive yourself totally. If there was no sin involved on your part, know that you didn't fail God. God is not angry with you. However, if sin is involved, repent before God. Then totally forgive yourself, and move on trusting in God.

The answer to both 'grief' and 'regret' is Rom 8:28.

3. Repent and Turn to God

If true guilt or sin is involved, repent before the Lord. There is no other way. THEN commit to God your past sins. God wants nothing more from you than two things concerning your past: (1) 'true repentance' and (2) 'faith/trust'.

Do not be defensive about your past or present sins before God. If David had defended himself when Nathan the prophet confronted him, his ending would have been very different! 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 counterproductive, and is opposite to faith and trust in God. Rather pride and self-righteousness are behind it.

When you have repented and turned to God, we must give our past into God's hand. How?

4. Outrageous Family Secret

This family secret is only for those who are in Christ. It is not for everyone. And it is the Greatest Personal Prophecy. Paul made some extreme statements (c.f. Rom 4:5), but this tops it all. Rom 8:28 makes it possible for me to forgive myself.

'And 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)

- a. It deals with our past. **Entire past – pre-conversion past + post-conversion past.** We are tempted to read it as 'some things' or 'many things', etc. But 'all things' as Christ is before all things!

Call to mind your most difficult moment. Your most shameful times. When you were at your worst. When the greatest injustice was inflicted upon you, or the most tragic accident. 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 in their lives will eventually turn out for good. Why does God say this? because it is true.

- b. God doesn't want you to feel guilty about your past. He wants you to know all will turn out for good. God is saying, 'As for the past, leave it with Me. It is not your problem. It is My problem. It is my job to make all that has happened to you work together for good.'

Whatever your past, God takes the responsibility away from you and will make it turn out for good. The overall message of Romans 8 is overwhelming! 'Adoption to God's own family'; 'We have become co-heirs with Christ'; 'Nothing can separate us from the love of God.' Everything that has happened, bad, evil, accidental, negative, sinful, unjust will work together for good. It is not I who decides which part of my life will work for good. God ensures it for His family, who are co-heirs with Christ. Only we can inherit this promise.

This is the family secret. Paul uses 'know' - 'oidamen' (factual truth), not 'ginosko' (personal, speculative). It was true of the cross of Christ – the greatest triumph of God from the greatest injustice and tragedy. It was also true of Paul's life – who was a murderer of Christians – because he loved God and was called according to His purpose!

- c. '*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 very woman with whom David committed adultery. Why? To demonstrate that God is able to turn evil into good. How God 'covered' David's sin and made it work together for good! It doesn't mean it was the right thing to do. You cannot apply this verse to the future to justify your present sin. You don't want to go through the discipline that David went through! Rom 8:28 refers to our past. Rom 8:28 is a promise you can enjoy by faith now – even when things don't look good. Who makes it work for good? Not you. God! Don't try to make it happen. Let God do it. Don't worry. He will do it. It is what He does best.

5. Condition

The promise is for:

- a. Those who love God (present tense). To love God means to shun sin. Loving God is the first and greatest commandment. It is the key to a great spiritual life.

Those called according to His purpose. The promise is for those who have been adopted into God's family. God's purpose for our lives started before we were born. It started in eternity with God's foreknowledge born out of His love, and it ends with glorification – becoming like His Son.

This is the family secret. (i) Foreknowledge; (ii) Predestination; (iii) Salvation [Calling]; (iv) Justification; (v) Glorification. How glorious! Beyond our wildest imagination! *'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.'* (1 Cor 2:9)

- b. How good is good? Good – better – best? When God created the world, he called it 'good' (Gen 1:25). If God calls His pre-fallen creation 'good.' In the redemptive story of Joseph: *'...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.'* (Gen 50:20). What God calls good is good enough for me.

6. Forgiving Yourself

Did you totally forgive and accept yourself? (C.f. Ps. 139:13-18, 23-24)

- a. Do you accept your parents? They were God's choice and God did not make a mistake in choosing your parents. They were *God's chosen instrument* to bring you into this world because *God wanted you*. How we accept our birth and all that has happened to us as part of God's plan of shaping us into what we are to be. *We must forgive our parents, and accept God's choice for us. Do not look back.* Thank God for them.
- b. Do you accept your past including painful upbringing? You cannot accept yourself and at the same time deny things that happened to you, which shaped who you are today. God did not make a mistake, and you are not a product of God's mistake.
- c. 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.
- d. Do you accept the level of your intelligence? Who doesn't wish they were 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).
- e. Do you accept your gifts and calling? Visible or invisible; spectacular or unspectacular; high profile or low profile. *'Your abilities (talents) are God's hint about what you should do in life.'* You may be called to the mission field and not like it. E.g. *David Brainerd was a most successful missionary, who didn't enjoy his vocation (1718-1747).*
- f. Do you accept your present faults & limitations? (including illness, disability, singleness) It is not a refusal to improve yourself or to seek God's blessing for a breakthrough. It is knowing God has accepted you as you are. *'Greatest freedom comes to us when don't have to prove anything.'*
- g. Do you accept yourself in the light of the 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 yet.

The same God who commands you to forgive yourself now says: 'Accept yourself.'

Apostle 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)