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Okay, we're back from our break, and we're picking up here in the study of the good, this agathos good that characterizes God. Jesus himself declared that God is the one good in the universe. This is one of those things that's recorded three different places in the Gospels, Matthew 19, 17, Mark 10, 18, and Luke 18, 19.

If you write any one of those down and have cross-references in your Bible, it'll point you to the others. But in Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18, when Jesus is talking to the one that comes up to him and says, good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And Jesus says, why do you call me good? Or why do you ask me about the good? There is none good but God. And once again, that's the word agathos, and it points us back to the fact that God is the source, and God is the accomplisher of that which is absolute, intrinsic good.

And this makes sense to us as we're thinking about this idea of things working together for good. You recall in a couple of different places in the New Testament where Paul gives the list of all of his trials. We are killed all the day long, shipwrecked, imprisoned, beaten, persecuted, stoned and left for dead, and all of the different things that befell the apostles.

And yet the outcome of their life was good. John the Baptist accomplished his mission as the forerunner of Jesus Christ, and he was imprisoned and beheaded. And you would say, well, doesn't look to me like all things work together for good for old John.

He looks like a complete failure. And yet that's the distinction. The good that God wanted to accomplish was done.

And John the Baptist was a happy man. And the apostle Paul, in all of his trials and tribulations, he himself told us here in chapter 8 that the sufferings of this present day are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in the sons of God. And that's the way he viewed it.

And because he loved God, and because he was focused on that good rather than what someone might perceive to be their personal good, he was very happy and very blessed even in the midst of all these persecutions. And that's the distinction that we're drawing out here and that Scripture is drawing out for us. So we've just seen that doing the good is going to be the basis of believers' judgment.

We saw that in Romans chapter 2, verses 7 and 10. You also find this in Ephesians chapter 6, verse 8. Ephesians 6, 8, Paul talks about servants being obedient to their masters, not with eye-servants but as bond-servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will, doing service as to the Lord and not to men, why? Verse 8. Knowing that whatever good anyone does, and this is agathos, whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

It doesn't matter that you're in servitude. It doesn't matter that you're in bondage. It doesn't matter that you're serving a harsh master.

If you're seeking and doing the good, you're going to receive the same from the Lord. And that's a reference to the judgment seat of Christ. You may not have a mansion and a roles in this life, but you will probably have a mansion and a roles in the life to come, figuratively speaking.

And that's the point. Now this was also true for the nation of Israel. We remind ourselves from time to time that Jesus Christ, when He came, lived in the age of Israel, and He was speaking and teaching to Old Testament saints for much of His teaching ministry.

And if you look in John chapter 5 verse 29, Jesus reiterated this same principle with regard to Old Testament saints. They are going to have the equivalent of the judgment seat of Christ themselves. They will also be judged based on whether or not their life reflected the good.

In John chapter 5 verse 27, Jesus says that the Father has given Him authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this. The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice.

Now this, at the time that Jesus is speaking, is talking about Old Testament saints. The only people in the graves are Old Testament believers at this point. And all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.

Those who have done good, it doesn't say those who have had faith in God. This is not a salvation judgment here. This is the call of believers out of the grave that will take place when Jesus Christ returns at the second advent and sets up the millennial kingdom.

All of the believers who are in the graves will hear His voice on that day when He stands on the Mount of Olives and it splits and the remnant is preserved in the battle of Armageddon. There's going to be a resurrection of the Old Testament saints. They will hear the voice of Jesus Christ and they will come forth.

Those who have done good, those who performed good, will come forth to the resurrection of life. Those who have done evil will come forth to a resurrection of condemnation. Now we look at this and we say, well, that's heaven and hell, that's salvation.

Salvation is not based on works, is it? And the dead who come forth for the great white throne judgment are a thousand years separated from the believers who come forth at the time when Jesus establishes His kingdom. This is a single call at which people come forth and we don't have a resurrection in which believers and unbelievers come forth at the same time. When you study Revelation 20, we find that those who believe not stay in the grave for the time they come forth at the great white throne.

This resurrection of life, and it's one of our misunderstandings, when we see life we think eternal life, that this is salvation from the lake of fire. This is eternal life. This is the fullness and the reward and partaking of that which is divine, the glory and honor and immortality that Paul talked about in chapter 2. This is the believer's resurrection in John 5. He's been talking to believers.

He's talking about the call that He will issue when He stands here on the earth and the believers will come out of the grave. Some of them will come out to the resurrection of life based on the fact that they did something, that they performed the good. And if you believe that this is some sort of salvation, believers and unbelievers, then you have to believe that salvation is based on works because those who come forth to life, it's based on what they did.

And those who have done evil and believers who pursue the evil, Paul says, I tell you even weeping that those who live a lifestyle of evil, fornicators, idolaters and so forth, have no inheritance. And loss of inheritance is loss of glory and honor and immortality and the eternal future as a believer. The same thing pertains to Old Testament saints as we see here in John 5. So this is the issue.

Why are we here after salvation? Why has any believer lived after the point of faith in God, faith in Christ? It's to pursue after the good, to pursue after the fulfillment of God's plan, to bear that fruit that Jesus talks about in John 15, that Paul talks about in Galatians 5, the fruit of the Spirit and its inner transformation. The transformation of Romans 12 too, by the renewing of our mind so that we can see it and pursue it, that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. And it's love and joy and peace and patience.

And with those things in our soul, we are thoroughly equipped for every good work. We can then do those visible things that Scripture speaks of and that we so often want to use and measure. We don't want to make the mistake that the Old Testament believers made when they looked at the law and they said this is the means of attaining righteousness.

The law was a means of expressing righteousness in the soul. And the good works, the ministry, the witnessing and the missions and so forth that we do in this life should be an expression of the righteousness, the good that's in our soul, not used as a means to try to attain it. So finally now, Scripture tells us that the good, that agathos good of God should characterize our thoughts, our deeds, and our words.

We find this in Ephesians chapter 4. Really the entire chapter communicates this, but especially in verses 23 through 29 of Ephesians chapter 4. Once again Paul talks about renewal. In Ephesians 4.23, be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new man which is created according to God in true righteousness and holiness. Putting away lying, let each of you speak truth with his neighbor, we are members of one another.

Be angry and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath, don't give place to the devil.

Let him who stole steal no longer, rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good. And this is agathos good, that he may have something to give to him who has need.

And if we are pursuing that, our deeds are going to reflect the good. Look at verse 29, let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth but what is good for needful edification that it may impart grace to the hearers. Our words are going to reflect the good.

So we have deeds in verse 28, we have words in verse 29. And look at verse 30 through 32, do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking be put away from you with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. So when we look at this last half of Ephesians 4, our thoughts, our words, and our deeds should all be a reflection of that which is good. That's what we are called to.

And we've talked about the fruit of the spirit, that this is what the good is, it's not the deeds that we do, it's what's going on in our soul. The fruit of the spirit is in that goodness, that agathos good. It's in righteousness and it's in truth.

We find this also here in Ephesians chapter 5 verse 9. Paul says in verse 8, you were once darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. And verse 9 says, for the fruit of the spirit, that love, joy, peace, patience, all those things in Galatians 5, the fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. When we look at our circumstances and we look at the all things that are working together around us, are we looking for what is acceptable to us? Are we looking for what is acceptable to people whose opinions we value or are we looking for what is acceptable to the Lord? And that's a very high requirement. Is what's going on in my soul as I pass through these afflictions and sufferings and also the prosperities and the good days and so forth, is what's going on in my soul acceptable to the Lord? That's the standard.

That's the measure of what is good. The fruit of the spirit is in goodness, righteousness, truth. Finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.

That's the good. That's the good that we see here in Romans 8 verse 28. So as we return to Romans 8 and we see that Paul says, we know that all things, and see this is how we know.

Now we can think about the Old Testament and we realize all things are working together for the good, for what God is accomplishing in human history. It's often been pointed out that God's will is going to be accomplished. We can either participate in it or be rolled over by it.

We can either be on the positive or the negative side, but things are going to work together for the accomplishment of God's purpose. We want to be on the positive side of that. We want to be people that God can use on the accomplishment side of that and not be those who are on the

discipline and judgment side of that.

We know that all things work together for that agathos good. Now there are two qualifications in this verse. How can we be on that positive side? How can we be participating in that? This takes place under two conditions.

What does it say? It says, two or four, those who love God, those who are the called according to his purpose. Now the Greek construction here is very interesting because it's what is called a dative locative. This is a way of spelling the word in Greek that tells you that it's not a genitive, it's not a nominative, it's not the subject of the sentence.

It makes it like a prepositional phrase. We know all things work together for good and then we have the word unto or into, it's the word ace, E-I-S. My favorite translation of that word in almost all cases is with a view toward, with respect to, in the case of.

It's a relationship word that says, here's the sphere, that's why they call it a locative. Locative means location, here's where you are. A dative means, sometimes it's called the dative of advantage, that this is to your benefit, that it's in the realm of your circumstances that this takes place.

The dative, the locative, the instrumental, you can be the means by which this takes place. All of those ideas are wrapped up here when it says, all things work together for the good in the case of, in the sphere of, located in the place where these people are. Those who love God, those who are the called according to his purpose.

Some of the English translations say God works these things together for the good of those and it makes it sound like it's for your personal benefit that God works all things together for good. That's not what this verse is saying. It's saying that the good is accomplished in this particular case, in the case of those believers who love God.

Now, do all believers love God? Pop quiz. We have a command in Scripture, don't we? There's a command that says, thou shalt love the Lord thy God. It doesn't say have him become your God and you will love him.

He says he is your God, love him. That was told to the Old Testament saints and to the new. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.

If it's a command, that means that we need to be told to do it and some of us are not going to follow that command. It's not automatic. We know what the nature of love is.

We've been over in John, chapter 15, and we're not going to dwell on love for God. I think it's self-evident, but just remember what it says in John 15, what Jesus said there. He says in 15.9 of John, as the Father loved me, I also have loved you.

Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. He says, no longer do I call you servants, for as a servant does not know what his master is doing, I have called you friends.

For all things I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. He talks about, in verse 17, these things I command you, that you love one another. Love for God and love for one another is a potential for us as believers, but it's not automatic.

One of the things that Jesus tells us, for example, back in John 14, is how do we know that we love God? What is the nature of love for God? He says, if you love me, in John 14.15, keep my commandments. He's talking to the 11 disciples in the upper room. They're all believers.

Judas has already left the room. If you love me, keep my commandments. I will pray and the Father will bring the Holy Spirit and so forth.

Verse 21 of John 14, he who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me. Love for God is reflected in knowing the commands of God and keeping them, in knowing the Word of God and fulfilling it in our lives. In verse 23 of John 14, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word.

My Father will love him. We will come to him and make our home with him. This is where the indwelling of Christ takes place in the life of believers.

The indwelling of Christ, in this sense, is not automatic for all believers. It's when we have the Word of God and keep it that the Father and the Son come and dwell in an active sense. I heard a lady call in to a Christian radio show this past week and she said, you know, I was a believer and I used to have enthusiasm and I used to have a real sense of God's presence and she said, I've lost that and I don't know how to get it back.

Well, Jesus tells us here, this is how to experience the personal presence of Jesus Christ, the personal presence of God the Father in our life. If anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him. We will come to him and make our home with him.

He who does not love me does not keep my words. The word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. And it reflects the good, it reflects the purpose of God.

And it's like that old bumper sticker, if God seems far away, who moved? It isn't God that has abandoned us. If we want the personal presence of Jesus Christ in our life, we have to know his word and keep it. That's a reflection of love.

And that's the condition for the fulfillment of Romans 8.28, if we want God's good purpose fulfilled in us and through us, we have to love him. We have to know his word and keep it. And that's why we emphasize so much the study and the learning of the word of God.

So that's a condition. All things work together for the accomplishment of God's good purpose in the case of those who love God, in the case of those who are pursuing the plan of God as their priority. Scripture says, love not the world or the things that are in the world, we're to love God.

And that means setting aside ambition for the accomplishment of earthly tasks. And this can even happen in Christian realms. There's a lot of talk now about Mission 2000 and we're going to evangelize certain countries and get everybody blanket marketing of the gospel in these countries by the year 2000.

We want a Bible in every home by the year 2000, we want this, that and the other. And even in the accomplishment of these things, we can miss the mark. We can set an external goal of righteousness, an external goal of what we think is the good rather than focusing on letting God do his work in us and through us.

So we have to be careful because we can have a lot of trappings just like the Jews did. Well, I'm keeping the law, I'm wearing sackcloth and ashes, I'm circumcised and I'm observing the feasts and I'm making offerings at the synagogue or the temple. And even in the name of God, many are going to come and say, Lord, in your name we did all these things and he's going to say, I never knew you.

Go out there in the periphery, go out there where you belong, that's what you chose in life and that's where you are now. It has to be a matter of love. Think about love that we have in this life.

If you love someone, it is a source of great pleasure to see them have the desire of their heart, to see some goal that they have fulfilled. If you love your children and your child has a desire for a good marriage or a good job or whatever, when you see that take place, it's very gratifying. You love them and you see that something that they desire has been accomplished and you receive great joy vicariously as you see their dreams and goals fulfilled.

If we love God, we're going to receive great joy by seeing his goals fulfilled and his purposes accomplished. And our joy is not going to be based on the accomplishment of our ambitions and our goals, but in seeing that God's purpose is accomplished. And so that's one of the conditions for Romans 8.28, all things work together for the accomplishment of good in the case of those who love God.

We're going to see that even if our circumstances are not great, even if we're afflicted, even if we suffer, we're going to see the good that God wants accomplished happening, and that's going to be a great source of blessing to us. Now what's the other condition in Romans 8.28? To those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. Now some people who have commented on this verse say, now see, here's your part and God's part.

Your part is to love God. His part is the calling. And we get into this idea of an effectual call and that when God calls, you must respond.

And as we pointed out before, this is a false and a limiting view of the call of God. There's a lot of theology out there that says that the calling of God is not resistible. If God, those who are saved have been called by God and it's an irresistible call, irresistible grace, Dr. Schaefer called it, Lewis Perry Schaefer, irresistible grace, that this is necessary to preserve the idea that salvation is by grace and that we don't participate in it.

And what this fails to recognize is that the exercise of choice is not meritorious. Paul points this out in Ephesians 2.8.9, he says, you were saved by grace through faith. And that system of salvation, by grace through faith, that neuter word in there, when it says that, not of yourselves, it refers to everything in that package.

Those words are all feminine and masculine, grace, salvation, faith. If he was saying that faith or that salvation or that grace is not of you, that word that would have been feminine or masculine. But he says this whole idea that you can be saved by grace through faith didn't come from man, didn't come from you, it's of God.

And it doesn't come from works, lest any man should boast. So the fact that we can exercise faith and make a choice and trust God for salvation, that's grace and not works. It's faith and not works.

Works are non-meritorious. Because that verse says the exercise of choice is not meritorious. If that's true, if choosing God, seeking God isn't meritorious, then it's okay for us to have that ability and to exercise it.

It doesn't mean that we're cooperating with God for salvation. This is where Reformed theology has gotten hung up because they say, well, but you're cooperating. It's you and God working together for your salvation.

Just read the verse. The verse says your choice doesn't have any merit and that it's not a work. It's not a work.

Exercise of choice is not a work. And so if it's not a work, that's fine. You can be a depraved person.

You can be totally depraved in the doctrine of depravity and still choose God. And they've taken the doctrine of depravity and said, someone who is in total depravity cannot choose God because to choose is to do a good work. Well, Scripture says choosing is not a good work.

So a totally depraved person can make that choice and he hasn't contributed anything to his salvation. So what's the point there? Choosing is not a meritorious thing. And so what depravity means is not that you can't choose God, but that you can't please God.

You can do a lot of good works. You can bring offerings and wear a hair shirt and do a lot of good

deeds and so forth, and God is not impressed. Total depravity is inability to please God, not inability to choose God.

However, from this false idea of depravity comes the idea that therefore if you're depraved and you can't choose God, God has to give you the ability to choose. And this is efficacious grace. This is irresistible grace.

When God gives you the ability, then you do choose Him. And this makes God responsible for the eternal destiny of every person because God only gives that to some and not to others. And they say this is calling.

This is election. God chooses certain ones and gives them the ability to trust Him. And you see where it goes astray, thinking that choosing has merit and therefore it has to come from God because salvation is all of grace.

All we have to do is understand that that ability to choose is given to everyone. And it reminds me of a military formation. We are required, we are called to be at a formation in the morning at 6 o'clock.

The trumpet blows, reveille, reveille, heave out, tricep, and so forth. Everybody gets dressed and comes out and shows up for formation. Now, they don't start handing out ribbons and badges and saying, we're so glad you showed up for formation.

It's, I'm putting an entry in your record book. You showed up for formation. It's expected.

Now, you'll get dinged. You'll take a hit. You might have some form of punishment if you fail to show up.

But the fact that you showed up has no merit. Everyone is able. Everyone is called.

Everyone is expected to be there. So, there's no credit for showing up for formation. It's an expectation.

It's required. If you fail to show up, there's a judgment. And that's what salvation is like.

Everyone is called. Jesus said, if I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself. But the fact that we respond to that drawing and we respond to that call for salvation doesn't assign any merit to us.

We're supposed to. What else should we have done? But failing to respond to that call brings condemnation. And so, we have to understand that when we look at Romans 8.28 because it says, all things work together for good in the case of those who love God, in the case of those who are the called according to His purpose.

And a lot of people want to say, well, that's all believers because everyone is called. It's an effectual call and all believers are the called. Well, let's see what Scripture has to say about the

called.

And we're going to go through this quickly. You may just want to note the verses and you can meditate on them more fully at a later time. But notice the qualifier there, who are the called according to His purpose.

And where we're going with this, you remember when Jesus was talking to the disciples and He said, if you do these things that I've taught you about, if you do your good in secret that your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly, if you don't parade your righteousness before men, He says, then you will be sons of your Father indeed. Now, were they already sons of God? Yes, they were by declaration of God. But there is a sense in which we can fulfill that designation, sons of God.

He says, you will be a son indeed. A son is supposed to be a reflection of the Father. All of the Father's best qualities, the Father's business, the Father's trade, whatever it is, the son would come up and reflect His Father, be a chip off the old block, as it were.

And to be a son of God indeed was to reflect the character and the purposes and the priorities of the Father. We can talk about eternal life in the same mode. All of us have eternal life in the sense of life of infinite duration with God in the eternal future.

But the fullness of that life, the qualitative aspect of life that partakes of God is a different thing. And we're going to partake of that in varying degrees, and that's what's called reward. To what extent will we experience the fullness of life that partakes of the divine? It depends on our priorities here.

Well, the same thing is true of calling. All men are called, but not everyone responds. Scripture says, many are called, few are chosen.

And why is that? Because to what extent did you respond to the calling? Everyone gets the call. But do you or do you not respond? Do you or do you not reflect that calling in your life? The President of the United States can come up and call all of us to be good citizens and to work together and be a thousand points of light or whatever. Well, all of us are called.

To what extent do we reflect that calling and go out and do those things that we are asked to do, to be good citizens, to be charitable, to be industrious, to be hard workers and productive citizens? Then we are truly called. We are called indeed. Watch for that as we look at these passages on calling.

Look at 1 Corinthians 1.26. This is where we have that oft-quoted statement of Paul. In 1 Corinthians 1.26, You see your calling, brethren, this is the calling of believers, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the

world to put to shame the things which are mighty.

The base things of the world and the things that are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that as it is written, He who glories let Him glory in the Lord. And once again it draws the distinction when we look at the good.

Is this the great testimony that we can give, the great numbers that participated in a ministry or that walked down the aisle or that came to Christ or that watched a TV broadcast? These are the mighty things from the world's standpoint. Paul says, Our calling partakes of things that aren't readily visible. They seem foolish.

They seem insignificant. They seem like they make no impact. And this is the inner life of the soul.

You can be a housewife doing dishes in the sink and producing the good in your soul and being a place where God has accomplished transformation because of the way you think and the way you do what you do heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. And it surpasses some guy with a stadium full of people and a large body count and a huge media splash because it's not the mighty things, according to the world, that God uses. That's not our calling.

Our calling is to the things that aren't readily apparent. It tells us in Ephesians 1.18 that one of the things that Paul prayed for is that we would come to know the hope of our calling. He says, I pray that you may come to understand the great potential of that calling.

It's a potential. There's an expectation associated with it. The greatness of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, looking ahead that if we persevere and pursue the good in this life, it's going to reflect the glory of God in a huge way in the age to come.

We want to see results now. We want people to appreciate us now. We want to demonstrate our righteousness and vindicate our decisions and our actions now.

And Paul says, if you come to understand the hope of your calling, if you come to understand that it's not the impact that is visible now, it's what God sees and what God is going to bring to light in that day that counts, that's a part of our calling. We are called to look ahead to the end result in the eternal future. Ephesians 4.1, Paul says, he beseeches us to walk worthy of our calling.

He says, I therefore the prisoner of the... Why does he say the prisoner of the Lord? He's in prison. Ephesians is one of the prison epistles, isn't it? Now, all things working together for good. Does this look like a good thing where he's in the dungeon, he can't travel around and do missions and preach and get huge crowds coming to Christ and so forth? He says, look, I'm the prisoner of the Lord.

I'm in chains here and I'm beseeching you to walk worthy of your calling. He himself is walking worthy of his calling. Whether he's free or in bonds, it's what goes on in his soul that counts.

Walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. And that implies that there's going to be divisive things happening. If you have to endeavor to maintain unity, it's going to be in the face of division, in the face of things that would split us apart.

And that doesn't make a big splash. People say, well, what ministry are you engaged in? People ask me this all the time. Oh, you went to Dallas Seminary.

Well, what ministry are you engaged in? I'm pursuing my calling. I'm engaged in love and joy and peace and patience. That's my ministry.

That's my calling. That's what all of us are called to. And it's so easy to say, well, you know, are you preaching? Are you ministering? Are you teaching a class here? Are you evangelizing? What is your ministry? Our calling is to holiness.

Our calling is to the fruit of the Spirit. Look at Philippians 3.14, just a few pages over. I press, Paul says, toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

This is the call to cling to and to pursue and to follow after the good. That's our calling. And it's not an effectual call.

None of the calls of God are effectual. This diminishes God so much, it reminds me of the story of King Midas. You know, the king back there, everything he touched turned to gold.

And sometimes people picture God as, well, if he makes a call, people have to respond because he's God. And if he issues a command, well, it must be obeyed. If he issues a call, it must be fulfilled.

And God is great enough to instill freedom of choice in his creatures and to let them make those choices. And God can issue a call that's rejected. Believers are called to holiness, but we're not all holy.

Believers are called to the heavenly things and not all of us pursue. Look over in 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 11 through 13. 1 Thessalonians 2, 11.

As you know, we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you as a father does his own children that you would walk worthy of God who calls you to his own kingdom and glory. Now, these are already believers, aren't they? This call to the kingdom and the glory is not a call to salvation. He says that we exhorted and comforted and charged you as a father does his children.

These people are all in the family of God. They're all believers. He says that you would walk worthy of God who calls you to his kingdom and glory.

That's the hope of our calling. That's the goal of the upward call. The prize is commendation and approval at the judgment seat of Christ, an opportunity to reflect the glory of God in the eternal future.

That's our calling. In 2 Thessalonians 2, 14 and 15, another just a couple of pages over, Paul says, We are bound to give thanks to God for you, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for deliverance, for salvation, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which he called you by our gospel for a purpose. What is the purpose? Obtaining the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And he says, Therefore, because you've been called to that glory, stand fast, hold the teaching with which you were taught, whether by word or by letter. This is how to obtain the goal of that calling. In 2 Timothy 1, 9, again, just a page over, he says, The law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this, the law is not made for a righteous person but the lawless and insubordinate, the ungodly and sinners, the unholy and profane, murderers and manslayers and so forth.

That's 1 Timothy. I need to be in 2 Timothy. That's the legalism passage there.

2 Timothy 1, 9, that God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. It's been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. That's the nature of our calling.

We're called according to his purpose. Look down in verse 14. That good thing which was committed to you, that agathos thing that was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Hebrews 3, 1 tells us that we are, he says, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling. Consider Jesus, our apostle and high priest, our calling ought to motivate us and point us toward Jesus Christ. But turn with me as we close to 1 Peter 2. Peter has the greatest and clearest things to say about our calling as believers.

1 Peter 2, 21, right after the passage we reviewed earlier about doing good and suffering, taking it patiently and this being commendable before God, to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow in his steps. Pursuing the good in the face of adversity is our calling. That's what we've been called to.

We haven't been called to a life of ease and a bed of rose petals. We've been called to pursue the good in the face of adversity. That's what Jesus did, and he is our example.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return, in verse 23. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but he committed himself to him who judges righteously. He bore our sins in his own body on the tree so that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.

That's our calling. That's our goal. Not all of us pursue that.

Not all of us think that that's important. We focus on our suffering. We focus on our affliction and we try to get out from under it.

We try to get rid of it, to change it, to be removed from it instead of seeing it as the opportunity to fulfill our calling, to have love and joy and peace and patience in our soul in the midst of that suffering. We've been called to suffer and to pursue the good in the midst of it. Look at chapter 3, verse 9 of this same book.

Not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, blessing. Knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. Inheritance in the kingdom of Christ is based on fulfilling this calling to suffer and pursue the good in the midst of it.

Suffering is an opportunity. That's why we can count it all joy when we fall into tests and adversity. That's the arena where the game is won or lost.

That's where inheritance is earned or lost, is in the midst of that suffering. If you're not suffering, you're out of the game. You're out of the calling.

You're out of the purpose. It's in those times of adversity that we fulfill that. Our inheritance is based on that circumstance.

So now, when Romans 8, 28 says, all things work together for the good in the case of those who love God, in the case of those who are called according to His purpose, that's our opportunity. That's our choice. Are we going to live and act as one who is called? Are we going to view our life and our circumstances, our afflictions and our sufferings as an opportunity to fulfill that call? If we do, all things in our life are going to work together for that good, the good of God.

And it doesn't matter if we're imprisoned. It doesn't matter if we suffer all the afflictions that Paul lists. It doesn't matter whatever our current afflictions may be.

It's the bearing of that eternal fruit in the soul of love and joy and peace and patience that fulfills our calling and that fulfills the good that God has as His purpose. And we're going to see that by understanding what Paul is talking about in Romans 8, 28, it's going to help us understand 29, 30, and 31, foreknowledge, calling, election, and so forth, all of these theological concepts that are often discussed in this context. We start by recognizing that it's God's purpose.

It's God's good and God's glory that is at stake. So we'll continue our study in Romans 8 next time. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You that You have seen fit to include us in Your plan, that You have seen fit to make us instruments of righteousness and a means by which the good purpose of Your plan is fulfilled. We pray that we will be conscious of that, that we will take advantage of the enablement that You have given us through the Holy Spirit and through Your Word to fulfill our calling to seize and lay hold of the inheritance of eternal life that You have set before us as the hope of that calling. We pray that in all these things our Savior, Jesus Christ, will be glorified.

For we ask it in His name, Amen.