

# Christianity Clarified Volume 24

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[ 0 : 00 ] What is Christianity really all about? Here, in an ongoing effort to try and dispel some of the confusion, is Marv Wiseman with another session of Christianity Clarified.

How God Uses Our Sin, Part 1. The statement was made on the previous volume 23 of Christianity Clarified that God is committed to using even our sin to make all things work together for our good. That just doesn't sound right, does it? No, it doesn't. But it is right, nevertheless. Let me explain. First of all, the Romans 8.28 text says, God works all things together for our good.

It doesn't say most things, and it doesn't say he works all things except our sins for our own good. And no, it doesn't mean, and we are not saying, that it makes no difference whether we live a godly life or not, or that it makes no difference if we as Christians live a life that is displeasing to the Lord. It does make a difference. A big difference. It makes a difference for several reasons, three of which are major. Difference number one is the law of cause and effect.

[ 1 : 25 ] Galatians 6.7 reminds us, Be not deceived, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. That is an irreversible law of the universe, called cause and effect.

God put it in place, along with other physical and moral laws, when he created the heavens and the earth and man upon it. And he does not suspend that law for Christians.

When we as Christians sin with a bad attitude or bad behavior, we automatically set in motion a chain of events called consequences that are always the predictable results of those sinful actions. Our sin was the cause, and the consequences are the effect. It's that inexorable law of cause and effect, and it works every time.

Every cause produces an effect or result, and every effect is linked to a cause. Nothing just happens on its own, but is always caused by some previous action, good or bad, right or wrong.

[ 2 : 38 ] This means we may choose whether or not to do a certain thing, and be the agent or cause of a thing. But once we do it, we cannot choose the effect that will come from that.

While the cause is under our control, the effect often is not. Often we think we can avoid the consequence, but we cannot. Even if we seem to have avoided it, we haven't.

Because even a cover-up contains its own consequences. This is why the verse says, Do not be deceived, or Don't kid yourself into thinking you can get away with something.

You can't. You can't because the person who matters most already knows all about it. And, of course, God will forgive you if you repent, confess your sin, and receive his forgiveness.

That is guaranteed. But God does not cancel or remove the consequences, even though he has forgiven you. It's the law of the universe. Remember? How God Uses Our Sin, Part 2 Since God is committed to working all things together for the Christian believer's good, it of necessity requires that he do that even in regard to our sin.

[ 4 : 07 ] One way God can use our sin to work for our own good is through the moral law of cause and effect. If our sin and disobedience is the cause, be assured there is always inevitably the consequence, and the consequence of sinful behavior is always painful.

Pain, caused by the circumstances, the fallout of bad behavior, can be a valuable teacher. Often it screams out, Don't do this again!

It's that old, Don't touch the hot stove again principle. And very often the painful consequences of sinful behavior are not limited to the one who produced the cause, but may extend to others as well, who likely had nothing to do with the cause.

They are the innocent bystanders who suffer the negative fallout of the one who was the cause, and very often these are mere children whom we might call collateral damage.

You can see that sin is such a serious business, and it carries potentially devastating consequences, almost never being confined to the one who was the cause.

[ 5 : 23 ] So what does God do to allow our sin to work together for our good? Well, He long ago placed that law of cause and effect into effect, and it alone, by the consequences it produces, can serve as a deterrent from repeated offenses.

Experiencing the pain and negative fallout of our wrong choices is a valuable teaching tool and a deterrent in itself. It's often played out with a, Man, I'll never do that again.

Well, the consequences have produced the desired effect, and we won't go down that road again.

Well, say you, that's all well and good for the truly teachable among us, but what about those among us who are, shall we say, slow learners?

You know, the hardheads who just don't get it? What about them? Well, again, if they are a Christian, more negative circumstances are on the way, and they are in root, and the proverbial chickens will come home to roost, the consequences may intensify.

God, through a principle called divine discipline, may take the one who persists in his sinful behavior through successive steps of what I call spiritual spankings, all of which are designed to illustrate the blessings and benefits of correcting one's behavior.

[ 6 : 56 ] It's all part of a very gracious and loving act of God, whereby he demonstrates his concern and care for one of his own children who persists in the way of stubborn misbehavior that dishonors him.

The principle of divine discipline is spelled out in the book of Hebrews, chapter 12. It's powerful. Rightly understood, it will be comforting and reassuring.

And it's coming up. How God Uses Our Sin, part 3 It's a very sobering, yet also a comforting verse and principle found in Hebrews 12.

It's sobering in that we are assured and warned that God will chasten or correct us when we get out of line. And it's comforting to know he will do it for our own good, because he truly loves us and cares for us like an earthly father does for his son, only more so.

Here's the passage from Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12.

[ 8 : 33 ] We had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of Spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful. Yet, to those who have been trained by it, afterwards, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

What an incredible and comforting concept. It is affirming that God's love is such for us, that he administers spiritual spankings when we need them.

He is motivated by the same loving care that an earthly father has, when out of concern for the future and welfare of his son, he disciplines him.

He doesn't do it to punish him, though it may seem so. He does it to correct him and train him, all for his own good. And if a father does not do this, it is evidence that that one is not a true son, and the father has no interest or obligation in correcting him.

[ 9 : 54 ] Are you a true son or daughter of God, via your faith in the substitutionary death of his son? Well, if so, Take comfort that God's love for you extends to your being disciplined by him.

This God-initiated discipline may take many forms and degrees, because God tailor-makes his corrections according to the individual's need, and God alone knows how and when to do that, how much and how little.

We have a God of infinite wisdom and incredible love, who looks out for the best interests of each of his children, and his timing is impeccable, although we would often disagree with it.

So just as an earthly parent knows far better the needs of his own child, so it is with our Heavenly Father, only better than that of any earthly parent. Remember our earlier conclusion about perspective changing everything?

Well, it does, and this is a major reason for God's accuracy. How God Uses Our Sin, Part 4 It is understandable that even Christians find it difficult to believe that God is committed to using even our sin, as an ingredient for his working all things together for our good?

[ 11 : 23 ] Yet he does, and he does so because it's all part of the grace package God has provided for all who are his children. And, of course, it is all linked to and derived from the gracious work of redemption that Christ accomplished while on that cross.

Our Romans 8.28 text reminds us that God works all things together for our good. Not most things, not lots of things, but all things. And, yes, that must include even the dumb things we do, the

disobedient things we do, and even the blatantly sinful things we do.

But we are quick to add that sinful behavior is destructive and clearly against all that God wants for us as believers. So no one is saying that sinful acts don't matter.

They do, and they matter a lot. They are destructive and dishonoring to the Lord and not to be minimized. Please keep these facts in mind when we say God can and will use even our sin to work together for our good.

They are four in number. Here they are. One, the 8.28 reminds us that it is the all things he works together for our good, and the all must include our sin.

[ 12 : 39 ] Two, our sin always invokes automatically the law of cause and effect. Our sin is a cause, and negative consequences issuing from our sin produce a remedial effect.

Some call it learning from the school of hard knocks. God's universal moral law of cause and effect is often our greatest teacher of what to avoid in the future.

And three, while God is committed to working all things for our good, it often is not for our immediate good, but our ultimate or eventual good. And that good may not be realized this side of heaven.

One, we may not see how it plays out until we meet the Lord himself. And four, persistence in bad behavior and refusing to learn from the negative consequences caused by our bad behavior may result in a premature home going.

First John 5 speaks of a believer committing a sin unto death. One can only take this in its context to mean that a believer who persists in sinful behavior not being repentant and not learning from the painful consequences of his action may simply be summoned by God to come on home.

[ 13 : 58 ] One wonders if Paul was also referring to this in 1 Corinthians 5. He was speaking of the unrepentant Christian whom Paul says to Satan, of course, is a destroyer, a merchant of death.

Physical death may well await a Christian who persists in sinful behavior and stubbornly refuses to learn from his negative consequences. God may well yank on his chain and remove him from the earth.

A tremendously important concept is given by the Apostle Paul in the 15th of Romans in verse 4. It is stunning in its implications when you stop to think about it. Especially is this true when we are considering how to deal with any pain we are experiencing, whether physical or emotional, and how that pain can possibly contribute to our ultimate good, as our previous segments on Romans 8.28 insist that it will.

And it will because God promises that he will see to it. Old and New Testament saints we will be referring to as examples no doubt wondered the same thing as we do when experiencing really painful trials.

[ 15 : 29 ] How can this thing possibly have any redeeming features to it? What good could possibly come from this? And here is the verse the Spirit of God inspired the Apostle Paul to write.

Himself having experienced more pain than most of us can ever imagine, this is what he was led to write. Whatsoever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

When Paul says written before, he was clearly referring to the Old Testament which had been completed centuries earlier, and was the only Bible available to those in early New Testament times in which Paul and his contemporaries were living.

What do you suppose he was referring to when he spoke of the things written before? Things that, if we took note of, would give us patience and hope.

He must have necessity been referring to those Old Testament believers who underwent enormous pain and adversity, but who nonetheless were able to experience the good hand of God upon them in turning their pain and sorrows into a cause for jubilation.

[ 16 : 41 ] Those people like Job, Joseph, Hannah, Naomi, Esther, David, to name only a few, who suffered great pain, disappointment, and adversity, yet were stunning beneficiaries of God working all things together for their ultimate good.

The Spirit of God included their stories in the Bible so that all who come after them, including us, could benefit from their examples.

Bottom line? God can be trusted. He has always been trustworthy and always will be, no matter how hopeless and dire your circumstances may be.

We are to keep these historic examples in mind and refer to them in the midst of our own pain and suffering. They assure us that God has a track record for fidelity and trustworthiness for those who love Him.

He surely will not let that stellar, always faithful track record be ruined by either your negative circumstances or mine.

[ 17 : 53 ] He will prove Himself faithful time and again. We will briefly pursue a few of these historic examples upcoming.

They will increase our confidence and our gratitude. You will see. Learning from the Pain of Job On a previous segment of Christianity Clarified, we referred to Job as being God's poster boy for trusting in God while experiencing great adversity.

And so he was. Surely, Job was one of those whom Paul the Apostle had in mind when he said what he did in Romans 15 about the things being written previously were recorded for our learning that through those preserved scriptures, we in our lives might be encouraged and buoyed up in our confidence and trust in the Lord, just like Job.

He was a man upon whom one calamity after another had fallen. And with none of them did Job have any clue as to why all that adversity had befallen him.

His losses were stunning. He lost his children. How incomparably painful that had to be. Then he lost his wealth and all livestock.

[ 19 : 25 ] And then his own health departed from him and left him sitting in a heap covered head to toe with excruciating boils over his body. The only input he got from his so-called friends was to charge him with living a secret double life with which Job obviously had fooled everyone else.

But God wasn't fooled. And Job was experiencing all of this calamity because God was punishing him for his hypocrisy. And while Job knew that wasn't true, still he had no idea why God had allowed all this to befall him.

And that not knowing more than anything else was positively maddening. It could only get worse. And it did. Mrs. Job had finally had enough of all the losses and her husband's adversity because she too had suffered all those same losses right along with him, especially of those dear children she had birthed and nourished.

No doubt under nervous exhaustion, pressure, and depression, Job's wife told him, Why don't you just curse God and die and get it over with?

Not flinching in the wisdom and sovereignty of God, Job rebuked his wife saying, You sound just like one of those foolish women out in the village.

[ 20 : 50 ] Shall not we who have received good from the Lord also receive adversity? It is God who has given and God who has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord, said Job. In all this, Job sinned not nor charged God foolishly. Wow! Well, God had his reasons, but Job didn't know what they were, and it was the not knowing that drove him to distraction.

Yet, Job declares in the final analysis, even though I do not know what possible purpose God has in mind for allowing all these things, I do know that God knows, and that's all I need to know.

I know God does all things well, and that even includes the negatives that God allows into my life. Do you get it? This is a true test of faith. Job, God's poster boy.

Well, I guess... Learning from the pain of Joseph Any listing of truly extraordinary men of the Bible would have to include the patriarch Joseph.

[ 22 : 08 ] Joseph and his younger brother Benjamin were full brothers, having been born to Jacob, and the only woman Jacob truly loved, Rachel. All of his other brothers were half-brothers, born of Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah.

No doubt because they were Rachel's sons, Rachel being the true love of Jacob, he favored her children above all the other ten sons, and it showed.

In fact, it showed so much that Jacob's favoritism for Joseph soon became a source of more than the usual sibling rivalry among brothers.

This was a rivalry morphed into downright hatred, and almost led to a conspiracy to actually murder Joseph. We don't know if it was through the soft-heartedness of the oldest of all the brothers, Reuben, or if he wanted to cash in on Joseph by selling him as a slave to a caravan passing by.

But for whatever the motive, Joseph's life was spared by being eventually sold to the Egyptians as a slave. The scheming brothers then told their father Jacob that Joseph had no doubt been killed by

some wild beast while he was tending the sheep, and Joseph's bloody coat that the father had given him was all they were able to find.

[ 23 : 37 ] And as you read from Genesis 37 onward, Joseph, having suffered this betrayal spawned by the hatred of his half-brothers, went on to undergo one trial and adversity after another.

Painful and unjust as they all were, Joseph's response to them all was a trust that God knew what he was doing and had a purpose for allowing all the reversals to befall him.

Through a series of circumstances orchestrated by the God in whom Joseph trusted, he eventually arose to a position of trust and power exceeded only by the Pharaoh of Egypt himself.

Not only did Joseph become responsible for the preservation of the Egyptians by interpreting Pharaoh's dreams about the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine, he would also become the instrument for the preservation of his long-lost family.

They were still dwelling in Canaan when his brothers came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain.

Eventually, Joseph revealed himself to his shocked brothers, treated them kindly, extended his forgiveness to them, and then uttered those immortal words.

[ 25 : 01 ] And they are words we all need to recall when adversities or even adversaries deal us a traitorous or painful blow. Here is what Joseph said, I know you meant it to me for evil, but God meant it for good.

Another story preserved for our learning that we, like Joseph, may be patient and comfort from the scriptures and have confidence. Learning from the pain of Naomi Naomi was a student of personal pain and losses, big losses, the kind that eat at your heart till you think there's nothing left of you.

Naomi and her family had been forced to leave their homeland in search of food. The famine in Israel was severe, and they heard there was food in Moab, a neighboring country.

These people were pagans, idolaters of the worst kind. In fact, they were even into human sacrifice to a fictitious god they called Molech. But empty stomachs can tolerate a lot in order to stave off starvation, so off to Moab they went.

Naomi, her husband Elimelech, and their two sons Malan and Killian. Loss number one would soon be realized when her husband Elimelech died.

[ 26 : 27 ] Very painful loss. But two bright spots remain. Her boys Malan and Killian. And each of them took a wife. Maybe there would be grandchildren.

But losses number two and three arrived with the deaths of both sons who left young widows and a grieving mother Naomi behind. By now, though, the word was out that things had improved back in the homeland of Israel, and Naomi decided to return to her roots and the few kinfolk that remained. She encouraged her widowed daughters-in-law to remain in Moab, where they had ties, and she would travel on alone to Israel. Orpah decided to do that, but the other daughter-in-law named Ruth would have none of it, because she had bonded to her mother-in-law and refused to leave her.

She uttered those tender and profound words, Whither thou goest I will go, and whither thou lodgest I will lodge. Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.

Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. As much an expression of commitment to Naomi, these were also words of commitment to Judaism, the faith of her mother-in-law Naomi, in her uttering this phrase, Thy God shall be my God.

[ 27 : 49 ] And when Naomi arrived back in Israel, her daughter-in-law, a former idolater, was all she had to show for her sojourn into that strange land of Moab.

When her kinsman welcomed her back to Israel, and calling her name Naomi, she curtly replied, Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara.

Mara in Hebrew means bitter. Call me Mara, she said, because God has dealt bitterly with me. Look at my losses! A husband and both sons!

Yea, bitterly indeed has the Lord dealt with me. Little did she know, God was working through her pain to her own good in His good time.

Because her daughter-in-law would marry Boaz, and their son would be Obed, and Obed would marry and have a son who would be Jesse, and Jesse would marry and have eight sons, the last of whom would be David the king, direct ancestor of David's greater son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God.

[ 28 : 55 ] Did God deal bitterly with Naomi? It only appeared so, but actually for her good, and that of the entire world. Learning from Hannah's Pain Her name was Hannah.

She's found in 1 Samuel 1. Not a terribly well-known individual, but a very important one nonetheless. And Hannah had a husband, Elkanah.

Perhaps even less well-known. And who ever heard of Peninnah? Virtually nobody. But these were all key players in an important unfolding drama with a full-blown soap opera motif.

Here's the lineup. Hannah and Peninnah were both wives married to Elkanah. Yes, Elkanah was a bigamist. Two wives. Peninnah was pregnant.

Peninnah was always pregnant, to the delight of her husband, Elkanah. But Hannah? She was barren. Year after year, no baby.

[ 30 : 06 ] Always barren. And did Peninnah ever rub it in? She? She, Peninnah, was the one who gave Elkanah children, while Hannah couldn't produce even one.

It all, no doubt, made for a very stressful household, shall we say. Out of sheer desperation, and probably compounded by deep depression, Hannah prayed and told God if He would just give her a son, she, Hannah, would give that son back to God forever.

She wouldn't redeem him by making the prescribed offering for the firstborn son as required by the law of Moses. She would offer him to the Lord to be reared by the priest in the temple rather than by her side in her own home.

God answered, and her baby, Samuel, was born to Hannah and Elkanah. And after weaning little Samuel, Hannah made good on her promise and delivered him to the temple to be reared and instructed by the priest.

Upon each yearly visit to see her son Samuel, Hannah would weave him a new coat larger than one she brought him the previous year. Her son was growing as a young man.

[ 31 : 22 ] Eventually, it became clear that Samuel's wisdom and abilities were extraordinary. He rose to the position of a very prominent prophet in Israel. It would be Samuel who would become the most effective and revered among all the judges of Israel.

To Samuel, the people would complain that they wanted a king like all the surrounding nations had. God told Samuel to anoint Saul from the tribe of Benjamin.

More importantly, it was Samuel who would inquire of Jesse for one of his sons who would succeed the disapproved King Saul. And it was then this Samuel who would identify and anoint the eighth son of Jesse, a seeming nobody, and the baby of all Jesse's sons.

His name was David. He who would be King David, he who would be a direct ancestor of David's greater son to be born in Bethlehem one thousand years later, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and the Son of David.

It all began with the prayer of a barren woman whose trust was in the God of Israel. Learning from David's pain in many ways, the life of David the shepherd lad, David the giant killer, and later to be king of Israel, was a microcosm of all humanity.

[ 33 : 01 ] And by that we mean David exemplified some of the most noble traits of which a human is capable, while at the same time displayed a variety of mankind's darkest and most sordid traits.

David spanned the spectrum of behavior from being the only person God ever called a man after his own heart to the sinful depths of being an adulterer, a liar, and a murderer.

What a study in behavioral contrasts. But despite David's flaws, they were many, and they were serious. He had one thing going for him.

He did love God, and God loved him. And yes, God loved David in spite of his serious moral failings. In fact, this is the only kind of person God does love because these are the only kind of people there are.

All of us to a person is beset with serious moral failings, and those not seeing themselves as a moral failure are beleaguered with the deadly spiritual virus called self-righteousness, a truly damning malady.

[ 34 : 08 ] But if there was anything David was not, he was not self-righteous. He declared his sin and repented of it in that monumental 51st Psalm, saying, Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions and my sin is ever before thee. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in thy sight. David came clean, and God loved it.

And while God hates man's sin, he loves man. In fact, God hates sin because he loves man, and he sees what sin does to people he loves.

God also loves man coming clean about his sin as David did. And yes, God will work with and through and around David's sin so that he will make all things work together for David's good, even including the negativity of David's sin.

Yes, David did pay a price for his sin by way of divine discipline because God's love compels him to chastise those whom he loves.

[ 35 : 20 ] And David most certainly underwent discipline from his heavenly father. Notwithstanding all that, David began the house of David, the dynasty that, a thousand years later, culminated in David's greater son being born of a virgin in the town of Bethlehem.

What a legacy! This is the legacy and a perfect example of God working all things together for David's good and for the good of the entire planet.

To expand upon all God promised David, please read 2 Samuel 7 and Psalm 89. Because a place of prominence is promised David upon his own resurrection from the dead after the arrival of David's greater son who will appear in his second coming to establish his millennial reign upon the earth.

All things, indeed, working together for David's good. Learning from the pain of the blind With the limited perspective we humans all have, it's quite natural to question how anything good can come out of some very painful circumstances.

Yet we have many examples of something very good being realized in accounts given us from the scriptures. In fact, these accounts, we are reminded in Romans 15, are given for the very purpose of making those disclosures.

[ 36 : 57 ] And they are to instill confidence in us that God can be trusted and he knows full well what he's doing, even when it doesn't look like it, and yes, even when life hurts and hurts a lot.

For believers who are all too prone to think God has forgotten us here in our little corner of the world, we need these examples to strengthen and encourage our trust in him.

As noted, this was the very purpose of their being recorded and preserved for all us believers who come after these historical examples.

That includes us. Another powerful illustration of pain and adversity serving an ultimate good purpose, even when no good purpose was in sight for several passing years, is the man born blind recorded in John 9.

How can being born blind possibly serve any good purpose? Well, from our perspective, it doesn't. But from God's perspective, which is the only one that matters, his being born blind served a very good purpose because it set the stage for the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth who would reveal the purpose of this man's being born blind by giving him sight.

[ 38 : 24 ] After all, Christ could perform no miracle of giving him sight if he already had vision. He was born a blind man for this specific moment of time that Christ might give him sight.

Now, this account is not given to make anyone today think that being born blind he will be miraculously given sight, although some so-called faith healers may make that claim.

The account given was merely to reveal that God has a plan and purpose that cannot be improved upon and he wants us to trust him to that end regardless of the negative and presently painful circumstances we may be experiencing.

If one were to ask that man born blind if he resented or felt that he was used by God, may be confident that his answer would be, I consider it a rare privilege to have been so used by God as to provide the occasion of being healed by the Son of God.

Christ himself made it clear in verse 3 of John 9 that the very purpose of this man's blindness was in order that the works of God should be seen in him, declaring again that God does have his purposes and they are flawless.

[ 39 : 48 ] Whether we are able to realize them or not, our task is to trust him that he really does know what he's doing. Learning from the pain of martyrdom No one questions the reality of evil and wickedness spewing out all over the earth.

It's all due to the spiritual and moral fallenness of the entire human race. God has given mankind a will, a volition that allows him to do admirable things and also cruel and evil things.

The alternative would have been for God to merely pre-program man so he could only do good things. But this would make man a puppet or a robot devoid of the capacity to make free choices.

Yet, given this capacity, many have through the years made evil choices with that will. And today is no exception for the proliferation of evil worldwide.

Instances of evil men putting innocence to death merely for their belief is becoming commonplace. It's nothing new. The Bible is replete with the innocent suffering at the hands of evil people.

[ 41 : 13 ] Christ himself is the supreme example, as well as Stephen in Acts 7, who is widely regarded as the first martyr on behalf of his Lord Jesus Christ.

We are accustomed to people suffering dire consequences for having done wrong, and we don't recoil at that because it's called justice.

One receives his just deserts. But when men suffer ill for having done the right, that's injustice, and we rightly regard it as a travesty.

Martyrdom on behalf of Christ is becoming more frequent around the globe. Stephen was so committed to Christ and even contented to suffer martyrdom, he went to the extent of asking God not to hold his murderers responsible for his death.

His plea of, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge, reminds us of Stephen's Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, when he cried out from the cross, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

[ 42 : 27 ] There was no miraculous deliverance for either Christ or Stephen. Was God unable to deliver? Of course not.

There would have been and could have been those twelve legions of angels at the ready had he called upon them. But God had a higher purpose for both his son and Stephen.

It was that through their unjust deaths to provide for all succeeding generations the flawless plan and program of God, and only from God's perspective life.

Did their deaths make any sense? There is that perspective thing again. It's so easy for us to forget God's big picture and focus only upon our tiny perspective.

Can we trust God like Christ and Stephen that his perspective is the only one that really matters and takes everything into consideration? Is he not worthy of this trust?

[ 43 : 33 ] learning from the pain of Paul. Just exactly who is this Jesus Christ person that he is deemed worthy of men serving him even to the extent of laying down their own life on his behalf?

Who indeed? He is the eternal Son of God, God of very God who enfleshed himself as a human in order to be born of a woman and die on the cross for a sinful humanity.

He then rose from the dead on the third day precisely as he promised, lived among innumerable witnesses for forty days after his resurrection, and then ascended to his Father in heaven, there to be seated at his right hand until the time summoned to return to the earth for his second coming.

That's who he was and is. This is the one and the only one on whose behalf the apostle Paul was willing to spend and be spent.

Listen to the litany of negative things Paul experienced in order to serve Christ. The list is recorded in 2 Corinthians 11 and is probably not complete.

[ 44 : 58 ] Note, if you will, Paul does not recount these things as a complaint. He makes it crystal clear that Christ was more than worth it. Says the apostle to the Gentiles, he labored abundantly, he had received stripes above measure, was frequently imprisoned, faced death repeatedly, received 39 lashes from the Jewish religious authorities on five different occasions, three times beaten with rods, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked and spent a night and a day in the sea, at peril repeatedly on land and sea, and at risk of life and limb from robbers, from his own Jewish countrymen, from the heathen, from the wilderness, and from false brethren, to say nothing of hunger and thirst and cold and being ill-clad.

And Paul was the servant of the Most High God? Was this any way for God to allow a choice called servant to be treated?

Why did not God intervene on Paul's behalf and run interference for him? Why did God allow evil men to so abuse his servant and eventually execute him?

Are we asking God to take from these men the volition he gave them so they could not do evil things to Paul? But did he not do so in the Philippian jailer incident?

Indeed he did. And why did he? It's that perspective thing again. God knows precisely how and when to intervene in the affairs of men, even to overrule the operation of their volition, or whether to do so.

[ 46 : 46 ] It all comports with the totality of God's pre-planned goals and objectives, most of which we are not privy to. The gap between what we are privy to and what we are not is the area requiring our trust and confidence in him.

This is what the Apostle Paul preached and practiced, and we are called upon to do the same. God is worth it. Learning from the pain of Wycliffe John Wycliffe, often referred to as the morning star of the Reformation, lived and died in England during the 1300s.

England was officially and thoroughly immersed in the Roman Catholic Church, it being the official and only recognized religious body in England. Wycliffe was a Catholic clergyman, having been trained at Oxford University, where he also taught theology for several years.

Leaning more and more toward the position of religious authority being vested in the Bible alone, Wycliffe soon fell into disfavor with the Church, eventually leading to his excommunication from the Church of Rome.

On numerous occasions he was summoned before investigative panels to give an account of his teachings, and chiefest among the charges leveled against him was his denial and attack on the cherished doctrine of the Church regarding transubstantiation, the belief that upon the priestly consecration of the bread and wine at communion, the elements were miraculously changed into the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ.

[ 48 : 35 ] This doctrine remains a key ingredient of the Roman Catholic Church today, and is believed to be repeated each time a priest conducts a service of a Mass.

besides his repudiation of the doctrine of transubstantiation, Wycliffe attacked the institution of the papacy itself, along with the selling of indulgences.

Perhaps more than any other issue, his insistence upon sola scriptura, that is, scripture alone, being the only authority for faith and practice, brought more opposition to Wycliffe than anything else.

the issue was all about authority and where the power really was. Was the power in the Bible as the inspired word of God?

Was it in the papacy and the various decrees and bowls issued by the Pope? Was it in established tradition or in some combination of the three?

[ 49 : 39 ] The church opted for the former, and still does to this day, while John Wycliffe recognized scripture alone as authoritative. This conviction of his naturally led to the importance of people having the Bible in a language they could read and understand, a concept clearly unthinkable up to this time.

Bible translation work to this day remains the top priority of organizations like the Wycliffe Bible Translators, committed to translating the scriptures in languages not yet available.

Following his death in 1384, John Wycliffe was so hated by the Roman Catholic Church that after 44 years, in 1428, his body was exhumed from its grave, and by cremation, his ashes thrown into the Swift River.

mankind to this day owes an inestimable debt to the courage and martyrdom of John Wycliffe, rightly dubbed the Morning Star of the Reformation.

Learning from the Pain of Tyndale Following in the train of John Wycliffe's death in 1384, Wycliffe's persistent influence would impact another reformer over a hundred years later in the person of William Tyndale, born in 1494.

[ 51 : 13 ] He too, like Wycliffe before him, was an ordained priest of the Roman Catholic Church, educated at both Oxford and Cambridge universities. Tyndale was dismayed and disturbed at the woeful ignorance of clergy and laity in the church.

Eventually, he became persuaded that their ignorance lay solely in their not knowing the scriptures. Tyndale thus wrote, It was impossible to establish the lay people in any truth, except the scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue.

Such conviction led Tyndale to undertake the lifetime project of Bible translation, an exceedingly dangerous undertaking. It was dangerous because it threatened the authority of the church of Rome.

Rome considered the laity incompetent to understand scripture, which efforts they believed would only confuse them and tend to draw authority away from the church.

This was during a time around the 1520s, when such an undertaking of Bible translation in England was strictly unlawful. Tyndale had to contend with numerous threats from the authorities, religious and civil, because then they were as one, along with the activity of spies who infiltrated his workshop to gather information and evidence against him.

[ 52 : 43 ] Tyndale was tireless in his task and capably produced countless manuscripts of high-quality translation works of numerous portions of scripture.

Hard as it is to believe, translating, copying, or distributing the Bible or scripture portions thereof was a serious offense punishable by law.

Tyndale resorted to smuggling copies of his translated works in the English language into England, hidden in barrels of flour. Rather than finding Tyndale's translations confusing, the limited laity who were able to read them found them positively exhilarating.

This response only further angered the established church and made them all the more determined to prevent Tyndale from continuing his work of translation into English.

In 1535, Tyndale was arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. He was to be executed by strangulation in public, and then his body was to be burned.

[ 53 : 50 ] All at the tender age of 42. Records indicate that as sentence was being carried out, Tyndale was heard to cry out, O God, open the eyes of the King of England.

Tyndale's prayer was answered 76 years later. The King of England, whose eyes were open, was King James I, who authorized at the expense of the public treasury the revered King James Bible of 1611.

A translation heavily dependent upon none other than William Tyndale. Learning from the pain of Miles Coverdale.

In the same year of William Tyndale's death, 1535, Miles Coverdale, an apprentice of Tyndale's, was responsible for producing the first complete printed English Bible.

He, too, like Wycliffe and Tyndale before him, was a cleric in the Roman Catholic Church, having been ordained as an Augustinian friar. Along with his completed English translation of the entire Bible, Coverdale penned the principles for interpreting and understanding Scripture that to this very day remain unequalled in their simplicity and value, and they read thusly, It shall greatly help ye to understand Scripture, if thou mark not only what is written, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what went before, and what follows.

[ 55 : 34 ] One can only wonder what the results would be in every church whose pastor in the pulpit adhered to this simple but exceedingly important guideline. Much confusion and division would fade into oblivion in short order, and the church could realize an impact never before in its entire history.

Coverdale went on to receive a commission for the revision of Matthew's Bible, which he completed in 1539 and published under the title of The Great Bible, given that name, no doubt, due to its great physical size.

Copies of the Great Bible were literally chained to pulpits in the churches throughout England, and it became the official Bible of the Church of England. All of these translators, usually referred to as reformers, were originally official priests and clergy in the Roman Catholic Church.

And apart from some small, little-known independent groups of believers with varying theologies and doctrines, the Roman Catholic Church was the undisputed religious entity for all of Europe and parts beyond.

Without exception, none of these so-called reformers had any original desire to abandon the Catholic Church, but only desired for the Church to confront its excesses and corruption and take steps to reform it.

[ 56 : 58 ] This is why and how Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, John Calvin, and another former Augustinian monk named Martin Luther came to be labeled as the reformers.

All the while their heart and future was seen to be attached to the Catholic Church, the Church was in no mood and completely unreceptive to the notion of reformation.

It responded with vilification and eventual excommunication, thus assuring the origin and perpetuation of what would come to be known and called the Protestant Reformation.

Each of these martyrs and scores of others paid a price that was exacted in so many ways, oftentimes in their death. Even in this, God, working all things after the counsel of his own goodwill, surely superintends working all things for the good of those who loved him, even in their death by martyrdom.

learning from the pain of Christ. As in every case of biblical theology, the supreme example of whatever subject or activity being pursued always focuses upon the person of Jesus Christ.

[ 58 : 23 ] It is only right that it should be so. He is, after all, the one who fulfills the offices of creator, redeemer, and sustainer of everything. So, does this Romans 8:28 principle, instituted by God, apply to his son, the Lord Jesus?

The quote, if you will recall, is, And we know that God works all things together for our good, to them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose.

So, can the applicability of this principle possibly be denied to God's only son? Unthinkable. He is, in fact, the ultimate recipient of God's working all things together for the good of his son.

So, how did all these unspeakable negatives Christ experienced lead to God working these things for the good of his son? Philippians 2 explains it.

Here we read that Christ, the Son of God, while existing in the form of God, did not regard that supreme status as something to be retained, but he actually impoverished himself by laying it all aside.

[ 59 : 40 ] In doing so, he took upon himself the status of a servant. Being made in the likeness of men and being recognized as a man, he humbled himself yet more, becoming obedient even to the point of death, an ignominious death on the cross.

All this involved pain on the part of the Son of God never to be equaled by any other human being of all time. So, how was it then that God fulfilled Romans 8.28 and worked all these terribly negative things to and for the good of his son?

He did so by exalting his son and giving him a name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, including things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

This unparalleled exaltation plus the entirety of the church, that includes you and me, and all who love God, which he bought with his own blood, is the payoff for the Son of God having obediently completed the work of redemption.

Because no one has ever stooped so low, no one has ever been exalted so highly, and rightly so. And this exaltation of Christ is not complete.

[ 61 : 10 ] More is to come related to his second coming and his defeat of Satan's armies at Armageddon and his subsequent enthronement on his father David's throne in Jerusalem, all of which will be a strategic part of God having worked all things together for the good of his Son, who so loved his father and was so loved by his father.

Yes, indeed, Romans 8.28 will work as well for Jesus as it does for every other believer. Revisiting That Powerful Promise, Part 1 Halfway through the previous CD numbered Christianity Clarified, Volume 23, the Romans 8.28 promise and concept was presented.

We cannot emphasize too strongly that this verse constitutes God's panacea for any and all human pain, no matter whether physical or emotional.

The verse states, and we know, that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are the called according to his purpose. The sole criterion for this truth being realized, actually guaranteed in someone's life, is that they must be one who loves God.

And if that is true, if that's who and where you are as one who loves God, he will take it from there and personally see to it that everything entering your life, negative or positive, will ultimately work together for your good.

[ 62 : 50 ] Not your ill, but your good. But God reserves the right to do that in accord with his own wisdom and timetable. He is never wrong with his wisdom, nor late with his timetable.

Your only condition is that you are one who loves God. And if you are trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, then you are a lover of God.

For you cannot love God without embracing the Son of his love, the Lord Jesus Christ. To love the Father is to love the Son, and vice versa. Being in this position sin automatically makes you a recipient of the truth God has given us in Romans 8.28.

And yes, this definitely does mean God causes everything to work together for our good, including even our sin.

No, of course we are not saying sin however you want, and it doesn't matter because God will turn even that into its working turning out for your good. But while he does do that, he may also use the painful consequences caused by your sin to be the key ingredient toward their ultimately turning out for your good.

[ 64 : 08 ] After all, the pain of divine discipline and the consequences derived from the law of cause and effect can become a powerful corrective as well as a convincing deterrent from repeating sinful choices.

If God is limited to using only the right things we do to turn out for our good, we are in big trouble. But thankfully, this is not the case.

God loves us still, even while we are pursuing stupid and sinful choices, just as you continue to love your children when they commit theirs.

But while we are often not able to make our children's wrong choices work out for their good, God is not limited in his doing so. Rather, he is committed to doing so and has thus obligated himself in the promise.

You don't even have to believe this, and you will still gain the benefit of its truth. The downside is you will experience a total lack of peace in the meanwhile as you fret and stew and agonize, doubting God and his promises.

[ 65 : 20 ] Revisiting that Powerful Promise, Part 2 There is no doubt and no surprise that our explanation of Romans 8.28 may well be hard for many to believe.

The very idea of God's unconditional commitment to so orchestrate all things to actually turn out for our ultimate good. That is, for those who love God and are thus in Christ enjoying his forgiveness and eternal life, solely based upon his dying for our sins.

Of course, that's a stretch for man to comprehend and embrace. It ranks right up there with the whole concept of God's grace, which is also a stretch for man to embrace.

We all know how logical a works-based performance mode of behavior appears, which is what most embrace, as a kind of self-help salvation, garnered on the basis of your efforts, and so on.

But this is as wrong as it is deadly, since the Scriptures make it abundantly clear we are saved by grace, through faith, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

[ 66 : 34 ] On first hearing these words, they tend to fall on deaf ears. And so it is with Romans 8.28, even for many believers. And to say that God has charged himself with the responsibility of orchestrating events in our life to turn out for our ultimate good, even including our sin, come on, that can't be.

Oh, but it is. And as we already noted, if God can use only the good things we do to turn out for our good, we are in a heap of trouble.

But God using our sin? How can that be? Well, please keep in mind the fact that he already died for them.

Do you think anything else he does on behalf of our sin could be greater than that? But how can God do this? How can he actually orchestrate and coordinate everything in our life, good and bad, to turn into our ultimate good?

Well, not being God, we have no idea how he could do that. But we don't have to. It's part of his job description, not ours. Ours is to believe that he does do that precisely as he has done it in the lives of so many examples of saints in previous segments on this 24th volume.

[ 68 : 04 ] And the fact that it may not appear he is doing that in your life right now doesn't suggest he won't. Your life isn't over yet.

Plus, your ultimate good may not even be realized in this life. For lots of folks who love God, their ultimate good won't even show up until after this life is over.

It's ultimate good, remember? Not immediate good. So then, how are we to conduct ourselves presently? And what about loved ones we all have in our lives who seem to be so far from God and his love for them?

Will Romans 8.28 work for them? You may already know that answer, but we will pursue it once more, upcoming. Love Disciplines as Needed All of us need to be reminded that the 8.28 promise of Romans is strictly limited to those described as lovers of God.

All others are excluded, with nowhere to go but to whatever the justice of God requires for them.

But we may assure you, it will not be that which is for their good, as is the case for those who love God, but rather to their detriment.

[ 69 : 30 ] For those not responding to the grace of God, as made available through the substitutionary death of Christ, there is nothing that remains for them but the rightly deserved justice of God, whatever that entails.

For believers, agonizing over the waywardness of prodigal sons or daughters or grandchildren, perhaps strung out on drugs or alcohol or living a life of dissipation, it is indeed indescribably agonizing.

Prodigals have no idea how much pain and agony they are causing, and most are too self-absorbed to even care. Parental and grandparental agony is the price often paid for loving.

It goes with the territory. You are called upon to pray for them and exercise tough love toward them. And tough love is, well, a lot tougher than the weak kind of sentimental stuff often passed off as love, which does little more than make one an enabler.

You cannot make people leave a path of self-destruction. You can be there to pick up the pieces if there are any left.

[ 70 : 50 ] And if the prodigal is a true believer and does indeed love God, then God is unlimited in his creativity for imposing divine discipline. This may be via a serious injury, a jail or prison sentence, or even what we would call a premature death.

All of these, excepting that of death, can contribute mightily toward one coming to a genuinely repentant attitude that results in losing their attitude of arrogance and insolence.

Untold numbers of believers have recounted how bitter adversity, whether a prison sentence or a serious illness, was graciously used of God to be their wake-up call.

Divine discipline can be the most painful, yet beneficial thing one can experience, and untold legions have traveled that route, and many are on it at the present.

If they love God and belong to him, he is right now working circumstances, no matter how painful, to turn out for their ultimate good.

[ 72 : 00 ] And Romans 12 reminds us not to be resentful toward God for his chastening of either ourselves or our loved ones through the adversity he allows to come. Rather, we should be thankful that God loves those who love him, and he loves them enough to administer his spiritual spankings when needed, or in extreme cases even call them to himself in what appears to us to be a premature death.

In any case, it is God working all things together for the good of those who love him. Romans 8.28 and You The tendency for most believers when it comes to the truth of God working all things together for their good is to see themselves as some kind of an exception to that promise, especially when some very painful adversity visits us or a loved one.

Well, say they, Romans 8.28 may be just fine for other Christians, for those who can believe that, but it isn't true in my case, which is different.

But what, pray tell me, gives anyone the right to read themselves into this verse as an exception?

There is no reason whatever to add qualifications to God's promise in addition to the one qualification he has already given, and that is the requirement of being one who loves God.

And if you do love him, you are under that divine umbrella of Romans 8.28, whether you believe it or not and whether you feel it or not.

[ 73 : 40 ] The only reason you as a believer would doubt it anyway or consider it as not being true in your case is due strictly to your feelings. But do you not understand how misleading and fickle your feelings can be?

Feelings are based on a limited perspective. And if you rely upon your feelings more confidently than you do the integrity of a God who cannot lie, you may well expect to find yourself an emotional basket case.

You've earned it. Few, if any, can avoid it if feelings constitute the base of your confidence. God wants you to trust him as the object of your confidence, not your fleeting feelings.

Consider adding Philippians 4.6 to Romans 8.28. Let's paraphrase it. Don't be uptight about anything, but in all things, by prayer and sincere pleading with God, bring your request to him with an attitude of thanksgiving, and then relax in the peace of God that passes all understanding.

It doesn't say that you pray and God will automatically answer and give you your requests, but it does say he will automatically make his peace available to you because you have bared your heart to him with your request, and you know he will answer with his will and in his time.

[ 75 : 06 ] Relax. God is in charge, and he does all things well. Even to the extent of ordering and orchestrating all things together for the good of those who love him, no matter how long it takes or how painful in root, God does a thorough work.

Do what you can. Do what responsible love requires, and then leave what you cannot do with the one who can, and relax. Bask in that peace of God that passes understanding.

And failure to do so will still result in God's working all things together for your good. The difference is living in agony and self-torture in the meanwhile. Instead of enjoying the sweet release of basking

in that peace, God has provided for any and all cases people who are dealing with things just like yours.

For sure. Life is too short, and God is too worthy of our confidence to go any other way. Don't you think? You've just heard another session of Christianity Clarified with Marv Wiseman.

Preview of Volume 25 Our plans for the next Volume 25 of Christianity Clarified will be decidedly different from all the previous 24 CDs.

[ 76 : 36 ] Volume 25 will concentrate on comparative religions. This is believed to be a necessity due primarily to the idea so many have regarding religious pluralism.

Simply stated, religious pluralism assigns a like or equal validity to all religious entities. Religious pluralism insists upon according and across-the-board legitimacy to all belief systems, large or small.

This is, of course, only possible if one embraces the concept of moral relativism, coupled with a denial of the existence of absolute truth.

And in the view of the religious pluralist, truth, and what one accepts as such, need not have objective reality behind it because a mere personal preference will do nicely.

So, of necessity, we will introduce the subject of comparative religions by beginning with a discussion of truth itself and the demands that accompany it.

[ 77 : 43 ] It will involve some basic consideration of logic and philosophy, coupled with and undergirded with what the Bible says about truth and its claims.

A treatment explaining each of the world's most dominant religions will then follow. These will not be treated in detail, but will explore the basic tenets of each from an admittedly superficial examination.

It is our conviction that an in-depth consideration is simply not necessary in the discovery of how and where the various belief systems depart from biblical authority.

The content will be covered in such a way as to enable the listener to see the strengths, weaknesses, and differences that separate the billions of people on earth into the various faith systems they adhere to.

It almost goes without saying that there is but one commonality all these beliefs actually share, and that is the belief that they and their religion is the only right one and all the others are false.

[ 78 : 57 ] And, honestly, in this, Christianity Clarified is no different from the many others. We, too, believe we are right and all the others are wrong.

So, whether this is true or to what extent it is true will have to be decided by you, the listener. This is Marv Wiseman thanking you for listening and being a part of Christianity Clarified.

And we sincerely invite and encourage you to continue with us into the next volume of Christianity Clarified. then you can judge for yourself what we set forth as the truth claims of biblical Christianity.

Thank you again for joining with us. May God richly bless you. Thank you.