

# Part 1, Tues (Toronto Spiritual Life Convention 1993)

by Eric J. Alexander

---

*The sermon emphasizes the importance of Christian assurance and certainty, highlighting God's universal, benevolent, and sovereign work in the lives of His children.*

**Duration:** 39:43

**Scripture:** Psalm 73:1, Romans 8:28-38, Philippians 1:6

**Topics:** "Gods Providence", "Trusting God"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the insecurity and uncertainty that exists in the world today. He gives an example of a planned evangelistic visitation in Glasgow, where teams were going to reach out to new residents in the city center. The speaker emphasizes that despite the challenges and mysteries of life, God is good and works for the eternal good of his people. He encourages believers to have confidence in God's providence and to trust that he can turn even the actions of evil men into something glorious. The sermon also includes a personal anecdote about reading fairy stories to a child.

---

## Transcript

I'm sure you will allow me a moment to say what a great joy it is to be back again in Toronto. I counted a privilege more than I could tell you to be here during this week. So many of my dearest friends are in this city and I'm deeply thankful to God for the opportunity of renewing fellowship with them and of being here in this place again.

And I want to say to you that I am grateful for your presence here this evening and for the opportunity of ministering to you in these evenings. During these three evenings, I want us to approach the same subject, but really from three different directions and in three different aspects. The subject is the subject of Christian assurance or Christian certainty, what the Reformers would have called the perseverance of the saints, or some of our forefathers would have described as the security of the believer.

It is the theme that the Apostle Paul is expressing in his letter to the Philippians in chapter 1, verse 6 of that letter, for example, when he says that he is persuaded or certain that the God who has begun a good work in them will carry it on to perfection until the day of Christ Jesus. It is the theme that we were reading about this evening in Romans chapter 8, where more broadly the Apostle speaks to us about the final triumph of God's purposes for his people when he says that nothing in heaven or earth or under the earth,

nothing in the present or the past or the future shall separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. It is that great ringing certainty which has been part of apostolic and biblical Christianity down through the generations, which I think our present world and perhaps the church in the contemporary world greatly needs today.

It needs no deep insight into the world in which we live to see that it is a world riddled with many kinds of insecurity and uncertainty. Let me give you one or two examples. Just a little while before Christmas we were planning in our congregation in the center of Glasgow to have an evangelistic visitation of homes in the city center.

Now like many cities throughout the world we are repopulating the center of Glasgow and there are something like eighteen hundred homes within our parish area which is the commercial heart of the city of Glasgow. And we were planning to send teams of people out to seek to contact these new people who have arrived on our doorstep. Many of them, most of them, the young upwardly mobile people, the yuppies of the modern generation.

Some of them very able, some of them very wealthy people. And we were going out to meet them, take the gospel to them. Now a great problem was not that we couldn't get people to go.

Our great problem was not that we were not aware of the need for helping and training people to do this. Our great problem was that every single home in our parish has such a security entry system that you cannot even get in touch with the people. Now when I was a student in Glasgow and we were doing similar kinds of visitation in the tenement blocks of the city, you could go up the stairs and knock on the door and they would answer the door and welcome you in and you could tell them about Christ.

But there is a sense of insecurity abroad today and people prefer to lift the telephone and say, I'm sorry it's not suitable. And we have scarcely been able to contact one of them. Let me give you another illustration.

Just in the autumn as we call it, or the fall as you would call it, I was in Spain in Barcelona at a conference of Christian doctors from all over Europe. Many of them came from Eastern Europe. And one day I sat down at lunch across the table from a very eminent European psychiatrist.

And as we talked together about his work and about what was happening in the Eastern European situation, he said, we are overwhelmed, I think deluged was the word he used, by people whose lives are riven with insecurity in almost every form. People who have shaken off the yoke of Marxism and Communism and are desperately insecure. Just the other day, before I came away, I read in the London Times a quotation from the President of Russia, Boris Yeltsin, who said, the only thing of which I am certain is that nothing is certain.

Now in the light of all of that and of what you inevitably are aware of in the insecurity in people's lives today, let me read you the text that you'll find, and it would be a good idea if you find it yourself in Romans chapter 8 verse 28. Let me read you that text and then ask you a question. We know, Romans 8 verse 28, we know, says the Apostle, not we think or it is our opinion or we would like to make this suggestion, but we know beyond all shadow of peradventure.

We know that in all things, not just in the pleasant things or the things we can understand or in the acceptable circumstances that touch our lives, but in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. That's the text and here is the question. Do you

share the Apostle's conviction this evening? I mean by that, is that the ground and foundation of your life as we gather together in this church building in the early weeks of 1993, is that the basic conviction of your life, the foundation on which everything else is built, we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Because if you do share it, you will see that it makes an enormous difference to your life. If you are able to look back upon the weave of the circumstances of your past and to have this absolute assurance that the hand of the eternal God has been weaving his purposes throughout all manner of circumstances and doing so for your good, it gives you an altogether different kind of peace about the past. If you can look around you in your contemporary life, however strange and mysterious, however painful much of it may be, however it may seem as if there is no pattern or purpose that's visible to the human eye, if you can look at that and say, I know this evening beyond a shadow of doubt that in everything God is working for my eternal good and there is nothing outside of that truth, then I tell you it gives a different poise to the present and to the way you live your life in the present time.

And if you can look into the future, all unknown, and say, come what may and happen what will, whatever God has for me, I know that to the very end of my days he will be working together for good in every single moment and every single circumstance of my life. Then I say you can face the future with an entirely different perspective than otherwise would be true. So you can see how important this conviction is and how relevant it is to the modern world in which we live.

And I want to explore it just a little and simply with you this evening. I was saying to the people here on Sunday evening because I was preaching at the evening service here that this is one of the best church buildings I know. It has no clock that I can see and that's a great advantage in a church building, a great blessing.

Clocks should be banished from all church buildings. That's a matter of theological orthodoxy but I want to have mine here beside me. I'm sure I've told you before, my family used to say when I took my watch off and laid it down, that's dad's most meaningless gesture.

But I shall keep to my time whatever it's supposed to be this evening. Let me explore this text with you then. Do you notice that as the apostle tells us, God is working in all things for the good of those who love him, he is saying to us first of all that God is universally at work in the lives of his children and on their behalf in all their circumstances.

By that I mean that there is no area of life that is excluded from this statement nor any moment of time. In all things without exception God works. Now of course there are circumstances in our daily lives where we could readily recognize that God was at work and many Christian people have the habit of looking at certain areas of life and certain experiences they have had and they would readily acknowledge the hand of God was upon me there and the Spirit of God was moving there in my life and in my circumstances and I can recognize that.

But what the apostle is saying is not that. What he is saying is there is no circumstance, there is no moment of time in which God is not engaged on behalf of his people to fulfill his purposes within them and that includes circumstances that are profoundly painful, experiences that hurt us beyond words to describe, situations where we may feel that we are crushed beyond possible bearing. God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

He plants his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. In other words he is able to take some of the profoundest storms of life and use them as the chariot on which he rides to fulfill his purposes in the lives of his people. Now that means that God is at work in circumstances that I might think horrendously unlikely that he would ever be engaged.

It means that he is at work even when I do not desire him to be at work in my life. It means that he is at work when I have no conception that he is at work in my life. It means that he is at work when I cannot begin to understand how God could be involved in a particular set of circumstances.

For example, you will remember how God's servant Joseph went through so much trial and was apparently in a situation where everything had turned out to make his life bitter and painful. And looking back on it on that day when his brothers came to meet him in Egypt, you remember the most embarrassing meeting of a family that the Bible ever records for us. And his brothers come and Joseph looks back upon these horrendous days and he says, You intended it for evil for me, but God meant it for good.

God is universally at work on behalf of his children. Now I think that must include even using the folly and the failures and the sins of other people which touch our lives and affect us. And we begin to ask, why has God allowed such a thing as this to happen? My dear Christian brother and sister, we need to grasp that there is nothing in our circumstances, there is nothing that flows out of the hearts of evil men, but he is able to turn their wrath to praise him and to weave out of it something glorious.

I was visiting a family a few weeks before Christmas time and they were finding it difficult to get their little girl to sleep. And the mother said to her, Now if you go upstairs, uncle will come and read you a story. Uncle had never been consulted about this I may say, but we went upstairs and she had some of these marvelous fairy stories.

I actually came across somebody the other week who was writing a PhD on the theology of fairy stories. Would you believe? I really wished I'd been able to do it because there is so much theology in so many of these stories. And the one that she wanted me to read was Rumpelstiltskin.

You know the story of Rumpelstiltskin? How the miller's daughter took straw and wove out of the straw some gold. And I really got into this as she took up this ordinary rough stubble from the floor of the miller's house and she began to weave it and out of it she wove gold. I ought to tell you that by the time I had really launched into it she was fast asleep and was missing the benefit of so much of it.

But I tell you I got the benefit of it if she didn't. And I thought how gloriously true it is that the hand of the eternal God if you take that story and multiply it by infinity and baptize it into Christ how gloriously God takes the poor stubble that in our lives seems so utterly useless and weaves it into gold. He is universally at work.

Notice secondly He is benevolently at work for us. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. Now let me just point out to you that that is an affirmation about the goodness of God.

It is not an affirmation about the goodness of life. And it's important to distinguish that because it is one thing to say life has been good to me. Many, many people have said that to me.

I find many of our prosperous businessmen who come to us in the center of the city at lunch time during the week. Many of them will say to me when there has been success in their business Ah yes Padre, life

has been good to me. But to say that is one thing.

To say on the other hand God has been good to me is a quite different thing. And Paul's affirmation is about the goodness of God to His people. He says in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.

Now that is the integrating factor in everything that God is doing. He is working universally in every circumstance, in every moment. But the unifying factor of His work is that He is engaged in producing the good of His children.

It is as though you gathered all the rays of the sun in a glass and focused them as you will know you can do and bring tremendous heat to bear through it. God is gathering all His purposes together for the good of His people. Now it is that that runs right through the whole of the Scripture as one of the central testimonies about the character of God.

The psalmist says at the beginning of Psalm 73 God is good and nothing but good to His people. Now he says there were occasions in my life when I began to doubt that, when I was uncertain of it. But it is the central conviction of Scripture.

It is the central affirmation of this text that God is good and nothing but good to His people. And when He is at work on our behalf, He is at work for our good. Now there are several ways in which we may be assured of that but one of them is here in the 32nd verse of this chapter that we read this evening.

It is one of the things that the apostle cites as being in a sense the ultimate argument upon which we may rest our confidence in the goodness of God. How do we know He is good? The apostle asks. Well, he says, here is the answer.

And it is one of these arguments from the greater to the lesser. He says, He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also along with Him graciously give us all things? If this is what the character of God is like revealed in what He has done for us in Jesus Christ, if He did not withhold Him, now that is a phrase that is packed very tight. What it is speaking of is God the Father not withholding His Son from all the reality of sin bearing and of becoming our substitute and our Savior.

He says, If God the Father has not withheld His Son from us but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him freely give us all things? His goodness is guaranteed to us, you see, at Calvary. Now that is one of the great importances of having your understanding of what God has done in Jesus Christ on the cross clear. It makes an enormous difference to your daily life and to your practical understanding of what Christian experience is.

This is the God who is dealing with me day by day. He is the God who has not withheld but has given up His only Son. And in Him He has guaranteed to us His goodness beyond our minds to grasp.

He is at work universally. He is at work benevolently. But notice also He is at work sovereignly on behalf of His children.

We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him. Now the implication that is undoubtedly behind that text is that only a sovereign God can lay hold of circumstances of all kinds and employ them for the good of His children. It is an essential element in what Paul is saying and he develops it through the rest of the passage we read this evening.

It is the essence of God's character that He is the sovereign Lord and there is therefore nothing that He cannot employ to bring about the purpose of the good of His people. Now that means that He not only has an unlimited interest in our well-being, He also has unlimited resources to do whatever He desires for us. Have you grasped this? Is this the God in whom you trust? The God who has unlimited resources of wisdom and power.

That is what makes God's fatherhood different from ours, you know. You know what it is like to be a father and your children live under the delusion that you have unlimited resources. In their very early days of wisdom too.

Very early days. But most of their days they imagine you have unlimited resources of all kinds. But we find ourselves so often limited in wisdom and we turn to God and cry, What on earth should I be doing at this point? I went into a home a little while ago and the father was saying to his teenage son, Well, I've never brought up a teenager before either.

And we know our limitations and our weaknesses. My dear friends, God never suffers these embarrassments. He has all the resources of the universe with which to work for the good of His people.

Now, if that is so, and it is clearly what the apostle is saying, that God is working universally, that He is working exponentially, that He is working sovereignly on behalf of His people. We need to ask the question before we finish. Of whom is this statement true? Who may say with the apostle, We know that all things work together for good.

Well, quite clearly, he is not vague about that either. He is quite specific. He is not saying, Everything will work out perfectly alright for everybody in the end.

Because that is clearly not what either Paul or Jesus or any other part of the Bible teaches us. He is quite specific. I say, notice what he says.

We know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him. That's the first category or description. Now, those who love Him, who are they? Well, there are many of us who will say, Well, of course I love God.

One of our businessmen said to me a few weeks ago, I want you to know, Padre, I've got nothing against God or the Bible or the church or anything like that. In fact, I'm very well disposed to it all. But this love in Scripture is a very particular kind of love.

It is the love of commitment. That's why in the Bible, marriage is the reflection of it. It is in marriage that you begin to see something of the relationship between God and the believer.

Jehovah is our husband. And Christ is our bridegroom. And the relationship is one of commitment in love.

And now you will know that there are certain kinds of profession of love that avoid commitment. I frequently find students who will come to me in great distress and say, I have fallen madly in love with this girl. And I frequently, never being a matchmaker, but I'm always delighted when I see this happen.

And I say, that's wonderful. No, it's not wonderful, he said. I declared myself to her and she said to me, well now, I don't want to get too serious.

Let's just be good friends. And I said, what did you say? He said, I said, I don't want to be your good friend. I want to be your husband.

And what he was wanting was to have commitment. And there are many people who profess to love Christ and who are saying to Him, no, I don't want us to get too serious. Let's just be good friends.

And the Lord Jesus Christ says, I do not want just to be your good friend. I want to be your Savior and your Lord and your Master. I want to be the husband and bridegroom of your soul.

I want everything that there is of you. Notice the second description of these people. They are not only those who love God.

They are those who are called by God. We know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called. Now, of course, you will be familiar with the idea of this call in the Bible.

The Apostle himself knew it. That is the call of God in the Gospel. When God called him by his name, Saul, Saul, he said, and arrested him and drew him to himself.

But you see, there is something more in this word. If you look at it in its context, it is not just the call of God in that more general sense. It is the call of God in the specific sense that a man or woman is drawn to God.

It is not simply the invitation to be saved. It is God's determination to save us that is expressed in this. Notice what Paul says.

Verse 29, Those God foreknew, He also predestined. Verse 30, Those He predestined, He also called. Those He called, He also justified.

So this is not just a voice spoken out into the dark. This is the living God who actually draws people to Himself. It is what the Reformers called the effectual call of God.

And that is what every believing soul has experienced. Every true child of God has known that what actually was happening to me was not simply that I came to Jesus as I was. Of course, I did.

Blessed be God. But I have discovered since that I was drawn to Him. And that in His call, He has secured me as Christ's.

And the last description, they are not only those who love God, who have been called, but those who have been called according to His purpose. Notice what the Apostle is saying to us. He is saying that when God calls us and draws us to Himself, what happens is that He draws us up into His purposes.

And these are the purposes of which the Apostle is so convinced and sure. What are they? Well, they may be summarized in this in verse 29. And with this, I close.

For those God foreknew, and He is expanding on the idea of calling. For those God foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. That is what God's purpose is.

There is nothing more glorious in the whole universe than this, to discover that the living God who is universally and benevolently and sovereignly at work on behalf of His children has this great aim in view that at the end of the day, He is going to present us faultless before His presence, changed into the image

of His Son. Now that's why sometimes we may not be able to understand God's purposes. That's why we may not be able to grasp what He is doing and say, how in God's name can He, a heavenly loving Father, be involved in this circumstance? Ah, my dear friends, it is because He has something infinitely greater in view than our mere happiness.

He is changing us into the image of His Son. And one day, we will bless God that all His purposes have climaxed in this, that the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ will be seen in our very face and character. Oh, may God set our heart on that this evening for His great namesake.

Let us pray together. Our great God and Father, we bow before You. You are the Lord and there is none beside You.

Great in Your wisdom and love and tenderness and goodness, we thank You that Your love is as great as Your power and knows neither measure nor end. Grant us to rest in it for Your glory through Christ our Savior.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/2/SID2337.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/eric-j-alexander/part-1-tues-toronto-spiritual-life-convention-1993/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**