

# Romans 8:28 in the Navajo Bible

Copyright (c) 2009 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

Diyin God ayóó'ádayó'níinii t'áá bí yinahaz'áanii bik'ehgo yíká ádíniidígíí bich'í' áhooníígíí t'áá áłtso bá yá'át'éeh dooleelgo ahinidaalnish áyósingo nihił béeedahózin. (Romans 8:28)<sup>1</sup>

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

This is a familiar passage for any Christian. Some manuscripts say, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28, margin). So the question is whether God works for our good, or whether the events themselves work for our good under God's direction. In either case the result is the same. God is watching out for us. He is working through events, and shaping events, in such a way that in the end His children will benefit. But there is one more thing to notice in our passage.

## An Interesting Expression

When translating it is often necessary to shift the order of things so as to get the thought right. In the English (NIV), the word "purpose" comes last in the verse. In the Navajo that same thought is expressed earlier. Notice which word is used: *yinahaz'áanii* ("what He established "). This is not the same as, but is very similar to, *bee haz'áanii* ("His law"). In Romans 8:28 there is nothing about law, but anyone who reads this passage in Navajo would be struck by the similarity of the wording. And it is true that God's law is something He has established. It is an expression of His will – an expression of His purpose.

In Calvinist theology the sovereignty of God's will (the idea that God's will cannot be resisted or altered) is an important doctrinal position. But if God's purpose can be neither resisted nor altered, how would be inconsistent with this to say that His law does not change – that its is still binding? By writing His law on stone God made clear that He wanted it to remain. This law is an expression of God's sovereign, immutable, irresistible will and purpose, and yet it lasts only for a time and then goes away? Or it remains in force but need not be obeyed? Or it must be obeyed, but only after interpreting away certain parts of what it says? Here is where I personally would see inconsistency.

---

<sup>1</sup> Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> English Bible quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

The reader will realize, as I say these things, that I'm talking especially about the fourth commandment of the law, which tells us to set aside the seventh day of every week for rest and worship.

There are other theological systems which emphasize the freedom of the will, i.e., the freedom of human beings to choose God, or not; to choose to obey, or not. It would perhaps be reasonable within those systems to speak of God's will also being free, and therefore changeable, but not within the context of Calvinism – or even Lutheranism, which like Calvinism derives from an Augustian source.

## A Further Meaning of the Term

The same term *yinahaz'áanii* occurs in 1 Corinthians 2:10. There the context has nothing to do with writing laws or with establishing what anyone else should do, which is the context in Romans 8:28. Here's what the verse says in Navajo:

Nidi nihí éí Diyin God biNíłch'i Diyinii bee nihíł bééhózingo áyíilaa. Háálá Níłch'i Diyinii t'áá altsoní neiłkaah, Diyin God yinahaz'áanii doo bééhózin da yéę nidi bił bééhózin. (1 Corinthians 2:10)

And in English:

but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. (1 Corinthians 2:10)

Now, going back to the discussion on p. 1, where is the part of this verse in English that corresponds to Navajo *yinahaz'áanii*? In Romans 8:28 we said it refers to God's "purpose." What does it mean here? The phrase, *Diyin God yinahaz'áanii doo bééhózin da yéę*, comes over into English as, "the deep things of God."

"The deep things of God" are not laws. Nor are they precedents, laid down or established for the purpose of showing people what they need to do. Instead the reference here is just to the way God is. And that gives wonderful insight into the way God's law is. The law says what it says because God is who He is. The law is a transcript of God's character. It shows us what God is like. The reason why God wants us to do certain things is because, in His own sphere, those are the things He does. In all of this, what He wants is for us to be like Him. How do you change a law like this?

## Discussion

In one passage Paul says, "having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross" (Colossians 2:15). If we quote this passage to free ourselves from the Sabbath, please notice that it says "the written code," not "one certain part of the written code." If this written code is the law of God, written on stone, and if He has taken His moral law of ten commandments away, nailing it to the cross and abolishing it, there is no one to

distinguish one part of the law from any other. If we take away the law about the Sabbath, we also take away the law about murder, the law about adultery, and so on. The word "code" is singular.

Are we free from one part of God's law, but not another? Is abortion still wrong? It was wrong until Jesus died on the cross, but now it's not wrong. Is that it? No one would say so. But there are many who say we are free from the one part of the law which talks about keeping the Sabbath. At last, we're free from the obligation to rest! But that sounds like an obligation to work. Which of these positions is more consistent with resting spiritually in what Christ has accomplished for us – by faith? Which position is more consistent with a religion of works? The word "Sabbath" means "cessation" or "rest." Is this really something we want to be free from?

We write the ten commandments in our classrooms and our court houses, and this is good, but God wants to write them on our hearts (see Hebrews 8:8-13). The issue is not where we display them, but whether we do them.

## Conclusion

In Romans 8:28 the translators of the Navajo Bible have given us an insight into what the law of God means. The word *yinahaz'áanii* ("what He established ") is not the same as *bee haz'áanii* ("His law"), but the two expressions are strikingly similar. By comparing these two different expressions we can see that the law is an expression of God's will and purpose for mankind.

1 Corinthians 2:10 adds to this insight by showing that God wants us to do what the law says because the law is a reflection of who He is. He wants us be like Him – to think toward other people as He does, and to think toward Him as He thinks toward us.

Understanding the law in this way should make the law a delight – not because it will save us. Christ saves us. But because it's what Jesus and His Father want for us and because it will be a blessing to us. As Jesus says, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them" (John 13:17).