

"ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD"

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

It is almost a daring thing to attempt an exposition of a verse like this. It is somewhat like a man attempting to cross an ocean in a canoe, or trying to fathom the depths of a sea with a yardstick, or presuming to measure astronomical distances without the aid of a telescope. Through the years myriads of Christians have found great comfort in the wonderful words of this verse which is both a tonic and a challenge to our faith. In it is something sublimely satisfying to every child of God.

After observing people in the midst of the disappointments, tragedies and sorrows of life, I am persuaded that, next to introducing souls to Christ, one of the greatest services that a minister can render is to comfort God's children. Dr. Joseph Parker, the great and famous London preacher of a generation ago, used to say to young ministers: "Preach often to broken hearts. You will find one in every pew. You will find them where you least expect them."

All of us have bright days and dark ones. In most of our lives there are more joys than sorrows. For those who love God, He causes the lights and the shadows, and the joys and the sorrows to work together for good. Even though this is one of the most blessed truths in the Bible, many do not believe it. They do not believe that God is behind everything, working it out for the benefit of His children.

I. A Glorious Certainty

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." This was a remarkable statement for Paul to make, especially when we consider how much he had suffered because of his love for God and for the truth. There was much in Paul's life that was unpleasant, undesirable and painful. He had a physical handicap. His life was rough and hard, filled with heartaches and grief, the loss of friends near and dear, and trials of every kind. He was despised, stoned, beaten, scourged and imprisoned because of his loyalty to Christ. In spite of cruel treatment and numerous imprisonments, Paul was full of faith and of optimism because he believed implicitly in the unfailing love of God. He truly appreciated the joys of life, but he also believed that there was a wise purpose and a great blessing in life's trials and sorrows. Speaking out of a rich mine of experience, he declared that every difficulty that flared up was a blessing in disguise.

Paul had certainly lived through tempestuous days. Almost every conceivable form of suffering had been his. Standing in the thick of it all, he said, "In everything God works for Good with those who love him." That bracing certainty gave Paul peace of mind and joy of heart. But, how did Paul know that all things work together for good to the souls of those who love God? The Holy Spirit told him so. Furthermore, he knew it from experience. He had seen it work out in his own life. Experiences that had seemed dark and mysterious had turned out to be blessings.

This verse is not a statement about God's dealings with men in general. It has to do with His dealings with His children who trust, love and obey Him. All things do not work together for good to people who do not love God. He does not say that all things work together for the pleasure of His people, or to give them what they want. Many times the things we want are not the things that are good for us. God is to be the judge of what is good. Things will not work together for good unless we love God and live for Him. Only to those who love God do all things work together for good.

In our text Paul proclaimed a glorious certainty which should be possessed by every Christian, regardless of the experiences that he may have and the situations with which he may be called upon to deal in this unpredictable age.

It is glorious to know that, as Christians, we are in the hands of a wise and beneficent God, Who has a deep interest in us, and arranges the events of our lives so that all things contribute to our ultimate good.

This good is spiritual in nature and consists in progress toward Christlikeness of character. This is something that this world can neither give nor take away. All the circumstances of life, whether they be hard or easy, painful or pleasant, are by infinite power and wisdom being made to work together harmoniously for the accomplishment of God's grand purpose that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. This thought is meant to sustain us and to comfort us when adversities come, or when we are called to pass through trying circumstances.

Out of great suffering and sorrow come great souls. A teacher said to a gifted student whom she had trained to the very best of her ability: "I have done all I can for you. If you would be a great singer, God must break your heart in order that your voice may possess tenderness and sweetness." Someone spoke a great truth in the words, "When God sends distress of soul, He is preparing to enrich the world."

Fanny J. Crosby, the blind hymn-writer wrote: "I have heard that this physician (who unwittingly caused her blindness while she was a child) never ceased to express his regret at the occurrence; and that it was one of the sorrows of his life. But if I could meet him now, I would say, 'Thank you, thank you, over and over again, for making me blind!' Although it may have been a blunder on the physician's part, it was no mistake on God's. I verily believe it was His intention that I should live my days in physical darkness, so as to be better prepared to sing His praises and incite others to do so."

Professor Robert Rainy of Scotland said: "There have been many happenings in my experience which I did not understand as I came along. Yet, when I look back over my life I can see them working together according to something like a plan, which was above and beyond my own designing."

Years ago two young men, whose names were Storrs and Hall, were students in Andover Theological Seminary. One Saturday shortly before their graduation, Hall was preparing to go to Braintree to preach on the next day, hoping that he might receive a call to the pastorate there. In the act of splitting some wood, his hat fell from his head beneath the axe and was cut in twain and ruined. The circumstances were such that it was impossible for him to replace it then, so he arranged with Storrs to go in his place. Storrs went. His preaching

pleased and he was invited to return. The result was that Hall was forgotten, a call was extended to Storrs and he accepted it. In due time he moved on the field and remained as pastor of that church until his death more than half a century later.

Disappointed as one might naturally suppose at this thwarting of his hopes, Hall had his mind turned to the foreign mission field. He became the famous Gordon Hall, the first missionary of the American Board, whose name is forever linked with the early enterprise of that great organization. No one who has any belief in divine providence will doubt that God stationed Storrs at Braintree and sent Hall to India; but does it not also seem as if He effected that arrangement by means of the accident to the hat? The obvious lesson of this incident is that all things work together in the execution of God's purposes, and "for good to them that love him."

It is easy for us to believe that many things work together for our good. Many think that good is to be found only in health, prosperity, pleasure and delight, but they find it hard to see any good in sickness, adversity, poverty or sorrow. We can see how some things work together for our good, but this verse includes all of the experiences of life. When some Christian suffers a crushing blow, one is asked to harmonize that ugly experience with this statement, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." Our reply is that God can take that unpleasant experience along with all other experiences and make them work together for our welfare and for His glory. He brings sweet out of bitter, light out of darkness, and blessings out of reverses. Everything that happens to us is not good, but through everything that does happen to us God works positively so that it is possible for something good to emerge. It takes all the experiences of life to make the whole. Because God has said it is true, because of what I have experienced in my own life, I know that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose."

II. A Great Comfort.

Many of God's children have drawn great strength and comfort from this blessed verse. It has been as a rock beneath their feet in the midst of their perplexities, trials and persecutions. In the trying and puzzling experiences of life, it is such a great comfort to know that God can use every circumstance as the raw material for the shaping of a new and unexpected good. Usually we do not see it when it happens. Afterwards, when we look back and reflect, we can trace the mysterious hand of God working for our benefit. No matter what happens to you, never lose faith and hope, and never carry about with you that most crippling of all afflictions -- a grudge against God.

While those who love God and are called by Him are not excused from all suffering and sorrow, every cloud has its silver lining of hope, and every event in our lives is capable of producing final and lasting good to our souls. Frequently sickness is designed for our benefit. The mind may become darkened and need enlightening, the heart may become hard and need softening, or the life may become barren and need pruning. Cruel circumstances often turn lives into the paths of loving service. The treachery of so-called friends has often driven Christians to closer communion with the faithful and true Friend in heaven. David said: "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." When meekly and bravely borne, sorrow transforms the lives of men, making them beautiful and

touching them with a grandeur and dignity not perceived before.

Our text does not say that all things are good. It does say that when God puts all of them together they will turn out for our good. Was it a good thing when you met some great disappointment? It did not seem to be, did it? Was it a good thing when your loved one died and left you broken hearted? It did not seem so, did it? Was it a good thing when you had that accident or that unexpected illness and were confined to the hospital or the home for weeks? It did not seem so, did it? Yet God works all these things in together and one day He will cause you to see that they are all for the best.

You go to the doctor and he gives you a prescription. You take it to the drug-store and the pharmacist begins to fill the prescription. The very first ingredient that he puts in would kill you if you took it alone. But he doesn't stop there. He puts in another ingredient and still another. Then when he mixes all these ingredients together, you take the medicine and find that it was just what you needed for what ailed you. In like manner, we see that all the things which happen to us in life are not good things, but when God mixes them all up together we see that they work for our good.

Anything that brings us closer to God is something that is working for our good. George Matheson loved a beautiful girl. They were engaged to be married. Then he developed eye trouble. A specialist told him that he would be totally blind in a few months. This broke his heart. But he knew where to find comfort. He would go to the girl whom he loved. Surely she would be a source of strength to him in that hour. But when he told her the sad truth, she said, "I don't want to be married to a blind man." She broke the engagement and George went home with a heavy heart. He sat down in his loneliness and looked out upon a life of shattered dreams and hopes, mourning not only the loss of his eyesight, but the loss of the girl whom he loved. But in his sorrow he was drawn closer to God than ever before. It was then that he sat down and wrote:

"O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's glow its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to hide from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be."

If you will only believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose," you will find it to be invaluable to you when disappointments, troubles and heartaches come to you. In this connection Barbara Cornet Ryberg expressed a gloriously comforting thought when she wrote:

"God's "No" means "Something better," ---
I can trust Him with my all.
The God who formed the universe
Attendeth when I call;
And when in love and wisdom
He withholds my heart's request,
His "No" means "Something better," ---
He will give me what is best.

God's "Wait awhile's" bring blessings
That His "Right away's" withhold.
When He's tried me in the fire
I shall then come forth as gold.
Oh, what peace it brings in sorrow,
And what comfort fills my breast
Just to know, whate'er His answer,
He will give me what is best."

After all, if God is for us, it does not matter too much who may be against us. As David said, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?" Therefore, let us not worry and murmur about God's providences. God will arrange and rule or overrule the events of the lives of His children so that all things will work together for their ultimate good. As long as we are doing God's will we can count on His providences. If you love God, and you are living in the manner to which He has called you, all things will work energetically, harmoniously and beneficently for you. This is a glorious certainty and a great comfort.