

ALL FOR THE BEST

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

It is easy to believe the Bible, but it is often difficult to apply its teachings to our personal lives. This is especially true of our text which is one of the boldest, most comprehensive and most assuring statements in holy writ. The world would have been greatly indebted to Paul if he had written nothing more than this precious truth which explains the strange and bewildering experiences of life. People want light thrown upon life, and the person who helps his fellowmen to solve life's problems is a real benefactor of the human race. This text is a tonic. Its invigorating truth changes every aspect of the conflicts of life. There is something sublimely satisfying in its for every believer. To know that God is working all things together for good to them that love Him is the very acme of Christian faith.

I. A Great Certainty.

Paul tells us that we are in the hands of a wise and beneficent God, Who has a deep interest in our lives and arranges and rules the events of our lives so that all things work together for our final good.

Paul did not say that all things are good or that every experience of life is good. No sane man ever said that. But, Paul did say that all things work together for the ultimate good of those who love God. This good is spiritual in nature and consists in Christ-likeness of character. The chief good in life is progress in Christian character, the attainment of the fulness of the stature of a righteous man in Christ Jesus. It is to share in the likeness of Christ. It is something the world can neither give nor take away. This good will continue to endure when the material wealth of this world has crumbled into dust, when the pleasures of this life have been swallowed up in the joys which are to be found at God's right hand forever.

Neither did Paul say that all things work together for the good of all men because that is not true. This working together of all things for good is based on the condition that we love God. No man can love God unless grace has been poured into his heart, to turn him from that natural enmity of the heart toward God. If any man loves God he does so because God gave him the grace to love Him. True believers love God as their Father. They love Him as their King; they are willing to obey Him, and to walk in compliance with His demands is their delight. They love God also as their Portion, for in Him they live and know and have their being; God is their all, and without Him they have nothing. They love God as their future Inheritance; they believe that one day they shall dwell with Him and enjoy His everlasting favor.

And how does God call us to love Him? It is never by force because love does not come that way. He calls us to love by exhibiting the lovable in Himself, by manifesting His mercies to awaken gratitude, by demonstrating His perfection to awaken esteem, and by revealing His benevolence to awaken a hearty goodwill. Love to God is that quality that makes life happy and blessed. It sweetens every bitter cup and lightens every heavy burden.

All things do not work for the pleasure of God's people. He does not give us all that we want or request because we frequently want things that are not good for us. He withholds many things from us because they would be injurious to us. He is not greatly interested in giving us what would afford pleasure, but He is deeply concerned with the building of our characters and the shaping of our lives. After one has accepted God's purpose for his life, all of life's experiences will result in the development of Christian character.

We serve a God who knows and plans in advance. In this world things do not happen by chance or luck. They come because God purposes them. God thought of us before we ever thought of Him and was deeply concerned about us long before we were concerned about Him. God is working in His own way, and making all things work together, to carry out His plan for our everlasting good and His imperishable glory. This is not a proposition which needs to be proved, but a fact to be accepted. It is neither a beautiful dream, nor a pleasing fancy, nor the expression of a hope that faints or falters, but it is an absolute certainty.

In this life, where most people only conjecture, surmise, imagine or speculate, it is inspiring to find even one man who can honestly declare he knows what he says on this great subject is true. His emphatic and positive "we know" implies that this should be common knowledge among all believers. Many Christians lack that personal assurance which, with Paul, was equivalent to knowledge. In this case it was not a mere conjecture or opinion, but a declaration of absolute certainty. How did Paul know this fact for a certainty? He knew it from experience, as well as the fact the Holy Spirit said so. He had seen it work out in his own life. Experiences that had seemed dark and mysterious to him had turned out to be great blessings.

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 that was unpleasant, undesirable and painful in Paul's life. He had a physical handicap. His life was hard and rough, 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 resigned, full of faith and full of optimism because he believed implicitly in the unfailing love of God. He appreciated the joys of life, but he also felt that there was a wise purpose and a great blessing in life's trials and sorrows.

It is easy enough for us to believe that many things work together for our good. How natural for us to believe that life and health and joy and peace are for our good. However, if we think that all things work together to give God's children all they want, to deliver them from trial, trouble, worry and distress, to make them prosperous, smiling and contented with their lot in life, we entirely misread these words and we shall be disappointed.

Many think that good is to be found only in those things that give pleasure and delight. They readily admit that there is good in health and prosperity, but they find it hard to see any good in sickness, adversity, poverty or sorrow. When sickness and sorrow come, and money is gone, and friends are few, it is difficult to believe that all of these things are working together for our good. We can see how some things work together for our good, but this text includes all of the experiences of life. All things -- fair and foul, smooth and rough, prosperous and adverse, joyous and painful -- are working for the welfare of those who truly love God.

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 good and for His glory. He brings sweet out of bitter, light out of darkness and blessings out of reverses. Sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, joy and sorrow, life and death all work together for good to the loving obedient children of God. There is no greater certainty than that. Whatever develops Christian character; whatever makes us more Christlike, whether it be health or sickness, riches or poverty, the life or death of our loved ones, must be for our good and His glory.

We know that "all things work together for good to them that love God" because God the Father, Christ the Son and the Holy Spirit are absolutely and irrevocably committed to the welfare of God's children. And we know it because God has said it is true, because others have testified that it is a fact, and best of all, because we have experienced it in our own lives.

II. A Glorious Comfort.

I don't know of any verse in the Bible which claims more than this one, or which offers more hope and comfort. Because what this verse says is true, 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. Some of us are able to say with Paul, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

God's Word does not teach those who love Him will be excused from all suffering and sorrow. We are taught that often sickness is designed for our good. The mind may become dark and need enlightening, the heart may become hard and need softening, or the life may become barren and need pruning. Cruel circumstances frequently turn lives into the paths of love and service. The treachery of so-called friends has often driven us 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." The vanity of this world has often led us to seek more earnestly the solid realities of the world to come. The wreck of mortal hopes has enriched our immortal hopes.

Bereavement is often for the good of those who love God. It is good for those who go to be "present with the Lord." It is also good for those who are left if it solemnizes their thoughts and sanctifies their souls. A broken family circle here frequently becomes the means through which all the loved ones are reunited in heaven. When meekly and bravely borne, sorrow transforms men's lives, makes them beautiful, and touches them with a certain grandeur and dignity not perceived before.

Blessed are those who, amid the changes and disappointments of life, when there are events that perplex and cares that burden, never lose sight of the fact that a wise and loving Father over-rules all. They can say with Cowper:

"Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs,
And works His sovereign will.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

Great souls are produced by suffering and sorrow. A young lady, who possessed a remarkable voice, studied long and faithfully under a famous teacher. After she was highly trained, the famous teacher said to the gifted student, "I have done all I can do for you. If you would be a great singer, God must break your heart in order that your voice may possess tenderness and sweetness." A similar thought is expressed in that statement, "When God sends distress of soul, He is preparing to enrich the world."

Paul argues that since God is for us, it does not matter much who may be against us. That God is for us is evidenced by the fact that "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Since Christ gave Himself to redeem us from our sins, we can say with David, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, tho' all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no never forsake."

Amid the pains and perplexities of life, let us trust in the unfailing wisdom and goodness and power of God. Life yields its greatest joys and satisfactions only when we surrender fully and completely to the will and way of God. Truly, "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." If you will only believe that, it will be invaluable to you when disappointments and troubles come. Barbara Cornet Tyberg 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."