

LIFE IS GOOD

"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.

I shall ever be grateful for many lessons that I have learned from God, from others and from experience. One of these important lessons is that for the Christian life is good. Even though disappointments, hardships and sorrows come into the lives of those of us who are Christians, and we face many problems for which there does not seem to be any solution, it is still true that life is good. When all the experiences of our Christian lives are cemented together by God's love for us and our love for Him, we can know that, regardless of what happens, life is good and there is much for which to live.

It is almost a daring thing to attempt an exposition of a verse like this: "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." It causes one to feel somewhat like a man setting out to cross an ocean in a canoe, trying to fathom the depths of a sea with a yardstick, or presuming to measure astronomical distances without the aid of a telescope.

This verse does not state that everything which happens in our world is good. The fact that God is good and loving does not mean that nothing but good can happen in this world. No sane person would say that every experience of life is good. All things of themselves do not produce good.

This is not a statement about God's dealings with people in general, but only with those who trust, love and obey Him. It affirms that "in everything God works for good with those who love Him."

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.

I. A Glorious Certainty.

"All things work together for good to them that love God." This is not a beautiful dream or a pleasing fancy, but a glorious certainty. "We know." In dealing with His children God never leaves them to grope in darkness nor to wander about in uncertainty. Scientists may say, "We may well suppose," or "We expect," or "We think," but revelation from heaven enables children of God to say, "We know," and not "We think," or "We hope," or "We believe," but "We know." Christianity always sounds a positive note. Doubt leads to despair, ultimately bringing confusion into the heart, and especially in the time of trial. It is glorious to know that 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 Christ-likeness 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 harmoniously together for the accomplishment of God's grand purpose that we should be conformed to the image of His Son. Just as Michaelangelo could see an angel in a shapeless block of stone, so in the most unlovely and unpromising life the Divine Sculptor can see the possibility of a Christlike character, if that life is placed under His control. This thought

is meant to sustain and comfort us when adversity comes, or when we are called to pass through trying circumstances.

Paul had 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 him 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. Perhaps Paul went for quite some time without understanding how some of his experiences were working good for him, but what he did not understand and could not explain he accepted by faith in the character and promises of God.

It is through the experiences of a lifetime that this precious truth is really learned. Speaking out of a rich experience, Paul proclaimed the glorious certainty that every difficulty that flared up was a blessing in disguise.

Here is the key to the strange and bewildering experiences of human life. However dark and sad the experience, however sore the sorrow, however heart-breaking the misfortune, if you love God, you may rest assured that these things will work together for the ultimate welfare of your soul. The final outcome of all things working together proves to be your greatest blessing. 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 has spoken a great truth in the words, "When God sends distress of soul, He is preparing to enrich the world."

When we are puzzled over certain events in our lives, and find it hard to understand why our cherished plans should be so suddenly, ruthlessly and completely spoiled or upset beyond repair, it is glorious to know that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." We know that this is a fact because God has said that it is, because thousands of godly people have testified to its certainty in their own lives, and because those of us who love God have experienced it ourselves. Every Christian should possess this glorious knowledge that all things work together for the good of the soul of him who has put his trust in God and loves Him. God can take the twisted, knotted and broken strands of life and weave them into a perfect pattern of loveliness as we pass through this unpredictable age.

Experiences that had seemed dark and mysterious to Paul had turned out to be invaluable blessings. There were many things in Paul's life that were unpleasant, undesirable and painful. He had a physical handicap. His life was hard. It was filled with heartaches and grief. He suffered the loss of friends who were near and dear to him, as well as trials of every kind. Because of his acceptance of and devotion to the truth, his love for God and his loyalty to Christ, Paul was despised, stoned, beaten, scourged, imprisoned and persecuted. In spite of all the cruel treatment to which he was subjected, Paul was resigned, full of faith and optimism because he believed implicitly in the unfailing love of God. Appreciating life as he did, he was thoroughly convinced that there was a wise purpose and a great blessing in life's trials and sorrows. He knew that all things were working out

in him, for him and through him. Even so, the life of every Christian has a bright side. No matter how dark the side that is turned to you, the Godward side is bright.

Fanny J. Crosby, the blind hymn-writer, wrote: "I have heard that this physician (who unwittingly caused her blindness when she was a child) never ceased to express his regret at the occurrence; and that it was one of the sorrowful 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 darkness, so as to be better prepared to sing His praises and incite others to do so."

Robert Rainey 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."

Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, lied about by his master's wife, and thrown into prison. As a result of his imprisonment, he explained the king's dream, was made a prime minister, and thus was in a position to supply food to his brothers when famine drove them down to Egypt. When his brothers stood before him, fearful of what he might do to them, he saw the providence road running through his tangled life and he said, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it for good."

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, however, 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 all things work together in the execution of God's purposes, and "for good to them that love him."

God can take the unpleasant experiences along with all others 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. Whatever develops Christian character; whatever makes us more Christlike, whether it be health or sickness, riches or poverty, the life or the death of our loved ones, must be for our good and His glory.

II. A Great Comfort.

Through the centuries many of God's children have drawn 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 comforting and reassuring to know that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." Two very important things are involved here -- God's wise plan and man's conformity to it.

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, we can trace the mysterious hand of God working for our good. No matter what happens to you, never lose hope and carry about what is that most crippling of all afflictions -- a grudge against God.

When health is good and labor productive, when business is profitable and seasons are fruitful, we recognize the benefit and comfort of these things and can trace them back to God. But, when sickness, poverty, distress or death enters the home, we wonder how it can be for our benefit.

Those who love God are not promised freedom from all suffering and sorrow. 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." 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.

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

"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."