

All for good

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[0 : 00] Will you now join with me to what you will find in the portion of Scripture read in the Ephesians of the Romans, chapter 8, and verse 28. Romans, chapter 8, verse 28.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the cause, according to his purpose.

It is a characteristic of all the apostles that when they declare their message, they make it perfectly clear that they are not following cunningly devised tables of Peter Pusset.

Now what are we giving, not attempting to give, to their hearers, the consensus of current political opinions, or of current philosophical theories?

We are dealing with facts, the most important facts in life. Facts.

[1 : 08] Facts. Facts. That which ye have seen and heard this John declare we unto you. And he announces his purpose in so doing, that ye may have fellowship with us, and surely our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

If they are not advocates, they are witnesses, or indeed if they do lapse into advocacy now and again in bearing witness, they are still drawing upon personal experience and sounding a very positive note.

They are not asking their hearers to consider this possibility as against that possibility. They are not saying we think like this or this is our conjecture.

They say as Paul does here, we know. And a study of Paul's possibility would indeed be a most profitable exercise for us this day.

And we couldn't by any means exhaust them in one day. And the things that he knows are the things that we would want most of all to know.

[2 : 37] We'd want to know, for example, how light is going to end for us and particularly what lies beyond the narrow confines of this light. And the apostle speaks positively there, as they do about the things of our mortal existence.

I know, says Paul, whom I have believed, and I am persuaded, convinced, that he is able to come to safeguard that which I have committed unto him again that day.

And John likewise, we know that we shall be like him. And so it's all going to work out, for we shall see him as he is.

And so, Paul is dealing not only with the things of eternity, and he is indeed dealing with these. That's obvious.

But he's dealing with the various experiences that the believer has to pass through in the course of divine providence during his earthly life.

[3 : 56] And this is what he says about it all. This is his review of the whole of life. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are recalled according to his purpose.

It's not a case of let's hope for the best. But let's cling to the promise of the best. For I'm persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate ourselves from the love of God.

It is in Christ Jesus our Lord. My friends, what a faith with which to go through life. So here then we have, first of all, the believer's character.

And then the believer's confidence, and lastly the believer's comfort. First I want to say something about the believer's character. It's the normal procedure to begin at the beginning.

But the difficulty here is, and you may think that I'm not beginning at the beginning when I believe, when I begin with the believer's character. The difficulty here is just to see where the beginning is.

[5 : 20] And it seems to me that we could profitably make our beginning at the statement with which the text closes really, who are the called according to his purpose.

What I want to do is at the very outset to establish the identity of the people to whom the assurance, this great assurance about text applies.

For nothing could be more obvious than that these words cannot be regarded as common properties. The apostle is addressing believers. Now what do we mean when we describe a man as a believer?

Well we are told elsewhere that he that cometh unto God must believe that he is. Faith begins there. He must believe that he is. But that wouldn't be so very comforting unless it were added, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seeked him.

The believer is a man who believes that God is, that is cardinal to his faith. And he believes that although he by searching cannot find out God, nevertheless God has given out a revelation of himself and indeed is continuously doing so, in grace and providence.

[6 : 52] To show that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him. He is making that revelation of himself in every answer that he gives to the believers prayer. Paul is of course drawing upon personal experience here.

He is a man whose life has been profoundly influenced by the revelation that God made to him of himself and of his character.

God is his days who commanded the light to shine out of darkness has shined in our hearts. To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God is that profound experience from which these words of our text emerged. Given him undoubtedly by the Holy Spirit.

For he was the penman of the Holy Spirit. But nevertheless attested by his own personal experience. So that with the true believer, faith is not a sterile theory.

[8 : 14] But rather a vitalizing experience. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. All things have passed away, behold all things have become new. And this is the point that one must make in particular in drawing your attention to the closing verses, the closing words of this verse.

It is a faith that worketh by love. He thinks it is that hold true to them who are, to them that love God. Who are the called according to his purpose. And the commendation, as Paul puts it elsewhere, of this love or the demonstration and proof of it, came from God himself through Jesus Christ.

God commended his love toward us. God exhibits his love toward us. God demonstrates it. God demonstrates it. God proves it. God puts it beyond all question. In that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

God. God. God.

[9 : 54] God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God.

God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God.

God. God. God. God.■■■■. God. God. God.

God. the response of the believer's heart to love in the heart of God. Go to any place that you will, where you can awaken an echo. Cry out whatever you want to cry on the spur of the moment, and back it will come to you more faintly, it's true, yet recognizably, you are getting back what you sent forth. And that's what's happening in the life of faith in the believer. God is getting back only what he himself sent forth. From the heights of heaven he cried to this wondered world, I love you. And back from the heart, changed by his grace comes the echo, I love you. We love him, says John, because he first loved us.

Oh, perhaps you want to move on in my definition of the believer, but does it not say further on that God? They are called according to his purpose. Yes, he does. But I want you at this moment, you'll get tremendous comfort out of those closing words, called according to his purpose, and the whole doctrine of predestination that you find in this chapter, but I want you to begin where God wants you to begin. So then, thus, love, God.

[12 : 12] There are so many, unhappily, who, if I may put it like this without sounding irreverent, seem to want to look over God's shoulder and see the Book of Life to see if their own names are theirs. Am I among the elect? Am I among those who are predestinated unto eternal life?

What is very understandable that we should desire the answer to those questions? So much depends on our standing before God. But my dear friends, when will we learn to give attention principally to those things to which God desires us principally to give attention?

One of the old worthies, was it John Bunyan? I'm not quite sure, or was it Bunyan quoting somebody else? One said, I'd rather find in my heart a love to God, than that an angel should come from his presence to tell me that he had seen my name in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Look for it there, my dear friend. You'll never see the Lamb's Book of Life.

That's not open to your inspection or mine. God gave diligence to make your calling and election sure. So, look into your own heart. Look into your own heart. See if the love of God is there.

[13:52] And if you can find in your heart a love to God and to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, then you can appropriate to your own soul all the comfort of the election of grace and of eternal predestination.

It is the doing of the Lord. And what he does, can never fail.

That then is the character of the believer as delineated by Paul in our text. They love God. Their faith in him is a faith that worketh through love.

And the very faith that they have in him and that worketh through love is an indication to them and should be regarded by them as such an indication that they are embraced in the redeeming love of God.

For love to God is the surest possible indication of a change of heart. The change that he alone can work.

[15:17] Do you love the Lord then? Looking into your heart this time of mourning, do you love the Lord? Never mind for the moment that part of us being called according to his purpose.

That will stand. Feel free to them. But do you love the Lord? Well, if you do, I say this with all confidence, the measure of your love to God will never, never satisfy yourself.

And there are so many who distress themselves because their love is so much less than what they want it to be.

They distress themselves that they don't love the Lord at all. Many of the choicest believers have days, weeks, months, years of distress over that very thing.

They're afraid that they don't truly love the Lord because they don't love him as they want to. My friend, you'll never, if your love to the Lord is sincere, you'll never, I repeat, never be satisfied with its measure as long as you're in this present world.

[16:28] But if the disposition of your heart is changed into one of love to the Lord from one of indifference, one perhaps of hostility, if now you can truly say we love him, then it's proof to you that he first loved us.

Isaac Watts had it right. Love so amazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all.

It began there. Love so amazing, so divine, and what love I bear to him is but the echo. Oh, the poor faint echo, forget the echo of his love to me.

We pass on, then, secondly, to think of the believer's confidence as that is brought before us here.

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

That's his confidence. We know. Now, there's a ring of certainty in those words that sounds strange to us in a world that has lost its confidence.

[17:58] this persuasion, this conviction that Paul expresses is not one that is easily come by, nor indeed is it one that is easily maintained.

when he speaks about persecutions and distresses and famine and nakedness and peril and sword as he does in this chapter.

He's speaking about situations of which he has had abundant experience. But these seemingly adverse things didn't weaken his faith after all.

on the contrary, they strengthened his faith and gave it direction. One of our poets has told us about a German baron who built a beautiful castle for himself and set in one of its towers an aeolian harp, an instrument that made its music when the wind blew.

But he was totally disappointed in it. Not a strain of music was coming from it. He listened on the calm evenings when the wind was blowing softly.

[19:12] Not a strain of music. And he thought he would never hear it. And then one night a storm broke. A hurricane raged.

And the mute harp became vocal. It sang out the praises of him who controls the very wind.

It took the storm to make it audible. And then the baron had his music. And isn't it often the case, my dear friends, that the believer makes his sweetest music, sounds his sweetest praise when he's passing through the storm.

It may not and indeed it will not seem like that to himself. But it's like that to God. Habakkuk, we may believe, sung his sweetest song in that distressing time of which he tells us in his prophecy. Terrible things had happened, terrible things were happening, he could foresee that terrible things were yet to happen. And yet he's got something that he's going to hold on to or that is going to hold on to him and keep him from shipwreck.

[20 : 42] Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be found in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail and the herd shall be cut off from the stall.

The flock shall be cut off from the fold and the herd and there shall be no herd in the stall. Well, it's a bleak prospect. But what has he got to say about it? Yet I will rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Don't you think that was sweet music in the ears of God? Paul had experiences like that himself. Think, for example, what happened in Philippi as they cast him into the jail to the innermost dungeon after having scourged him, put his feet in the stocks.

What a miserable experience to pass through. But at midnight, the prisoners heard the strains of the Aeolian harp. Paul's harp.

[22 : 02] Oh, they couldn't enter into it. They didn't understand it. There was something wonderful that any should be singing at midnight. Singing in the innermost dungeon. Singing with a bleeding back that had been scourged.

Singing with the discomfort of the stock. And the prisoner heard them. Not as a better translation would be, the prisoners were listening. It had caught their attention.

It had amazed them. They were listening. Behind that song was the conviction that Paul expresses here, all things work together for good to them that love God.

He says that again and again. He tells us here about the difficulties he's been passing through. And he says now in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

And even with the shadow of martyrdom falling heavily upon him, he declares I'm not ashamed. for I know whom I believe and I'm persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

[23 : 24] He knew that God's purpose, the purpose which he refers to in our text, that God's purpose was being worked out through everything. All things work together for good.

Yes, at the very last. to them that love God. His God is a God that can be trusted. Lastly then we come to the believer's comfort.

And this of course is an obvious corollary to what we've just been saying because where there is confidence there will be comfort. It is the confidence that produces the comfort.

the believer is aware of the shaping hand of God in his experience transforming the things that he regarded as the cruelest adversity into the most blessed prosperity.

a bond has been formed between that soul and Christ that nothing shall ever break.

[24 : 37] Listen to Paul again. He's working to this same theme who shall separate us from the love of Christ shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or terror or sword as it is written for thy sake we are killed all the day long we are counted as sheep for the slaughter nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

And he wants these Romans to share that comfort with him. For these Roman believers were having a hard time. Their faith had brought them into conflict with the powers that be.

Their loyalty to Christ had brought them into conflict with loyalty to Caesar.

And the clash of the two loyalties meant so trial and tribulation for them. But this sense of everything being under the direction of God everything being made to serve his supreme purpose would have taken the sting out of it all.

Now when Paul says he has all things work together for good he is obviously thinking about God's sense of the term. If you asked the unconverted man what he would regard as his good you would find that he wouldn't ascend above earthly things.

[26 : 23] Worldly good is his highest conception of the term. The only idea of good is that which advances his own temporal prosperity.

And he's wrong even there. for the psalmist says the Lord God is a sun and shield he giveth grace and glory and withholdeth no good thing from them that walk uprightly.

And yet the upright have got their own ups and downs in life, their own reverses as it seems, as well as their own advances. But they're all included under that term good.

he withholdeth no good thing in this life or in the life to come from them that walk uprightly. All things work he says.

And there's something comforting even in that statement. All things work and are being made to work by the all wise worker.

[27 : 38] but he doesn't leave it at that he says all things work together. And that's better still. All things are not under the direction of a blind faith.

They're under the guidance of the supreme intelligence of the supreme love in the experience of God's people.

And they're all directed to this one name for good. Perfectly integrated. Now it doesn't always look like that. Let me use a very simple illustration.

Not many Sabbaths ago I drove up to church here with a car that in the last part of the journey showed that something was going wrong. I managed to get it to the parking place.

I left it there and attended the service and I went back and tried to get away but I couldn't. And yet all things seemed to be working. All things so far as I could see.

[28 : 51] What was wrong was a lack of integration. Quite a simple thing it was. But it was sufficient to immobilize me until that was sorted.

Just the replacement of a single nut to coordinate acceleration with transmission. Just that. Things were working. We were not working together and therefore the purpose of the vehicle was not being realized.

Now it's not like that in Christian experience. Things are working but they are working together.

Take Jacob for example and Joseph upon whom his heart was set. Jacob beyond that in famine bitten Palestine Canaan and Joseph down in Egypt ignited influential.

They both prized God's promise regarding their future and yet things didn't seem to be working together. Jacob in the midst of famine and Canaan and Joseph down in Egypt and both looking for something better than has yet appeared.

And then a message was brought back to Jacob by his own son that Simeon was held in Egypt and that the governor of Egypt wanted Benjamin to be brought down and Jacob couldn't make sense of it any longer.

[30 : 43] All these things he said are against me. Joseph dead, Simeon dead, although he wasn't. neither of them and you would take Benjamin away.

God was working, making things work together, bringing Canaan and Egypt together in his great plan and purpose to make all things work together for good for them that love God.

And Jacob lived to see when Joseph and he met again. There was a man in England last century who was well known as a man of God in his own very limited circle, a man called Stephen Holloway, a man who had considerable wealth beginning of his life but whose wealth deserted him and he finished up in a poor house.

But it was in the poor house that he came to the true riches, to the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ. his chaplain was very kind to him and Stephen was afraid that the chaplain was not a converted man.

So one day when the chaplain was in with him he said to Stephen, is there anything I can do for you this morning Stephen? Yes, it's Stephen, I wonder if you'd be good enough to give me my insurances.

[32 : 37] Your insurances? said the chaplain. You have insurances? Oh yes, he said, I'm fully covered. You'll find them in my strong box across there and he pointed to his Bible.

So the chaplain picked up the Bible and gave it to him and Stephen looked up his insurances. I've got a life insurance, he said.

He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die. He read it out to him. And he said, I've got an accident assurance.

And he read out text to him. All things work together for good unto them that love God, who are the called according to his purpose. So I'm covered, he said, against all accidents.

And I've got a fire insurance also, he said. And he turned up 2 Peter chapter 3 verses 12 and 13, looking far and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heaven being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with a fervent heat.

[33 : 51] Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. And it was the means of his chaplain's conversion that he entered

into the wealth that had come to Stephen Hall.

well then, do we share this comfort?

Do we look for these things that Paul was looking for and that he tells about here? If the love of God is in our hearts, we may do so and do so confidently. Jesus shall reign where the sun of his successive journeys run, his kingdom reach from shore to shore.

him. Till moon shall wax and wane no more and it shall be so, not because Isaac Watts said it, but because God is.

And you will share in all that with him, if his love is in your heart. All things work together for good to them that love God who are called according to his promise.

[35 : 15] Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we thank thee for these reassuring words and pray that we may indeed be able to appropriate them, to claim them, and to plead them in thy presence.

We thank thee that we cannot come to thee with any stronger argument than that which thou thyself hast given us by known promise. And, O Lord, we present our case in Jesus Christ, the intercessor, the advocate within the vein, who himself ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Give us grace now to close our service with thy praise as we begin, and abide with us, for Jesus sake. Amen.