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ALL THINGS WORKING FOR GOOD

Sermon preached by Mr. F L Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, on Lord's Day morning Nov. 8th 1959

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 v. 28

This is a precious chapter, and yet the blessed truths and doctrines it contains, flow out from an experience of the 7th chapter. We shall never know the blessing of justification, and that there is therefore now no condemnation, unless we have been brought under the condemning power of the law of God. In a more or less measure the Lord's people are reduced to wretchedness in themselves: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (7:24) It is a great part of experience. If I might express it so, it is a blessed wretchedness, and out from that wretchedness the apostle saw eternal blessedness: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (7:24,25) There was the door of hope. "There is therefore," for that reason, through Jesus Christ our Lord, "now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (8:1)

Well, some people take this very lightly, and say 'What a beautiful chapter the 8th of Romans is!' And so it is – but you will notice that immediately the apostle discriminates: "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (v.1), and so he comes down through the chapter discriminating, separating, between the flesh and the Spirit; and it is a very solemn declaration he makes also: "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (v.9). It has caused me much searching of heart, because a man may have much, and yet be destitute of the Holy Ghost. If he has much, that much one day will be taken away from him: "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he *seemeth* to have." (Luke 8:18) It is a very solemn thing to have a *seeming-to-have* religion; very solemn to be 'almost a Christian,' as one said to Paul – "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." (Acts 26:28) O my friends, may we seek, and not be satisfied without, some internal evidence of the Holy Spirit's work!

But then for the comfort of poor tried sinners, he says, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us" (v.18), and he takes up the case of those who know not how to pray as they ought. He gives them this encouragement, and how we have to cast ourselves upon the Word of God, upon His mercy: "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities ... with groanings which cannot be uttered." (v.26) This was a comfort to David when he was before the Lord in all his sense of sinnership and defilement: "All my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee." (Psalm 38:9) So the Spirit helps our infirmities; and it means this, that His people shall be increasingly conscious of infirmities. We meet together compassed with them, and yet, my friends, it is in this way that he comes down to the text. We know we are in the wilderness; we have not got to heaven yet. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

In the chapter that we read, that full, rich chapter, 1st Ephesians, we have the first cause of salvation, the source and spring of salvation, and the reason why any poor sinner is blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." It is "according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (v. 3,4). The purpose of God – nothing can frustrate it. The natural mind rebels against the sovereignty of God. A natural man wishes that God was not what He is, wishes

there were no God, and tries to think there is not. The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'¹ Oh but there is a people taught by grace who are thankful that God is, and that He *is* what He is. It is a very great and solemn thing to have a right conception of the infinite Being of God. We might look, if we had grace to look honestly, into our hearts and lives, as to whether we give evidence that we in a measure know Him. That wonderful Psalm, the 139th, where the omniscience of God is set forth with such majesty – the Psalmist there says that he would not take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, nor attempt to hide in darkness away from the omniscient God.² We could not if we would. But would you flee from Him? Would you wish Him less than He is? He "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." (Ephesians 1:11) A poor helpless sinner will be thankful for it, especially if it is given you to realise what and where you would be if you were left to your own counsel, your own will. One of the greatest blessings that can come into a sinner's life is for the Lord, as it were, in mercy and grace, to step in front of him and say, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther.'³ "Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price." (1 Corinthians 6:20) The purposes of God in sovereign election, His sovereign decrees in the covenant of grace, must take effect in the individual experience of every sinner given unto Christ. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come," and "of all which He hath given me I should lose nothing." (John 6:37,39) Oh, the stability, the immutability, of the everlasting covenant, which is "ordered in all things" (2 Samuel 23:5) concerning all things in the lives of His dear people!

So we would speak of the end of the text first – "His purpose." There is a sovereign purpose in God for everything that He did. He did nothing of necessity. Had He never created, the eternal incomprehensible Trinity would have been self-sufficient. The Being of Jehovah is underived. God alone needs nothing, possesses all things, and "of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things; to whom be honour and glory for ever." (Romans 11:36) And that purpose runs through all His works. But He determined to create, and the end for which He did anything was for His own glory. The end for which He created the world was that He should create a creature, man in His own image, a creature capable of knowing Him, His mind and will, a creature capable of union with Him, of being brought into an eternal relationship with Him, a creature that can be exalted into a condition suitable to dwell with Him in eternal glory, a people to whom He shall be married – the Bridegroom and the bride. This is the end for which the world was created, and that is the purpose of God. And He will work everything in the world, however contrary it may be, though the world may be upside-down, though "the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing" (Psalm 2:1); yet He is working according to His own purpose, His own will, in the midst of all the confusions of this world. "Yet," says He, "I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion" (Psalm 2:6). God is very great, and therefore salvation is great, and there is a people that belong to Him.

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose," His will, His predestination. "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called" (v.30). So that this must take place in experience. Oh, if this God is for us, then we are inside of the decrees of the covenant of grace! And if this "God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) But if this God is against us, who can be for us? Oh the importance of it! I believe I

¹ "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Ps. 14 v. 1).

² "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me" (Ps. 139 v. 9-11).

³ "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further" (Job 38 v. 11).

“tremble and rejoice.” It is a great line of a hymn we sing – I have long admired it – concerning His holiness, his glory:

“Though we tremble while we sing,
We would not wish it less.” (J Hart; Gadsby’s 854)

So that there will be this effectual calling; it *must* take place, and so important is it that the apostle exhorts: “Make your calling and election sure.” (2 Peter 1:10) You cannot make it sure by merely thinking. The only true evidence of election is the coming, with power and the influence of the Holy Spirit, of the Gospel into the heart, and therefore that is one evidence of effectual calling. It is through the Word of God.

“Who are the called according to His purpose.” Paul speaks of it as being apprehended, and when he was called by grace he had such a view of the glory of the grace that had apprehended him, that he desired more and more to apprehend that by which he was apprehended.⁴ The first thing in effectual calling is this: there will be a separation. The first separation will be from self. The purposes of God take effect in experience internally in the heart; it is an inward calling. And I might say this, for it is solemnly true, that if we separate ourselves from the world, yet if we are not separated and made to differ in our nature from what we once were, then no other separation is to any purpose. We must begin within, and this is an internal call. And therefore this is necessary: there must be a light shine into our hearts, to discover those things from which we are separated. Perhaps one of the greatest and most blessed interpretations of this point we have in the 2nd chapter to the Ephesians: “and you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world ... and were by nature children of wrath, even as others.” (Ephesians 2:1-3)

Now that will be discovered to us – “the power of darkness” (Colossians 1:13). Darkness is a tremendous power – dead works; and this is by the sentence of death. We shall see in God’s light our state and condition by nature; and when light enters, life also enters at the same time, and from that moment the conflict begins, and in that conflict there is a calling, a separation. Paul, for the comfort of the pilgrims, reminds them of this. He says, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” (Hebrews 10:32) They did not fight a good fight of faith *before* they were illuminated, because they had nothing to fight for, and nothing to fight against. They had no enemies. But when the law entered, sin revived;⁵ and what a sight it is! Now that comes in an internal call.

But this will break through. What is wrought inwardly in the soul will be wrought out in practice and in experience, and there will be an outward call. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:17) And there is this: it is not merely a separation, just a cold separation, but it is a separation that *unites*. As the Holy Spirit calls away from self and sin and the world, so there is a calling that gives a poor sinner to need and to seek that which this world can neither give nor take away, and they begin to “ask their way to Zion with their faces thitherward.” (Jeremiah 50:5) We read in Zechariah, “I will hiss for them, and gather them, for I have redeemed them.” (Zechariah 10:8) Oh to see this work of the Spirit made manifest! We need it in our own heart, and we would be glad and rejoice to see evidences of it among our young people and in others. So it is not only what we are called from, but

⁴ “I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3 v. 12).

⁵ “I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7 v. 9).

what His people are called to: "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus." (1 Peter 5:10) There is the end of faith. There is to be completed salvation. The end of it is heaven itself. There is an end of calling. You noticed just now in reading the Ephesians that the apostle prayed "that ye may know what is the hope of His calling" – may know what it is – "and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe." (Ephesians 1:18-9) The apostle desired that they may know it, that they might have that object in view. Oh how it did strengthen Moses! He "had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Hebrews 11:26); and Abraham: when Lot separated from him, the Lord said to Abraham, "Lift up now thine eyes from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." (Genesis 13:15) And you may depend upon it that God in this sight gave him a view of the inheritance of the saints. And so Moses "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). Well, it is a mercy to have any evidence that the Lord has thus changed our hearts, renewed our will, and turned our feet to Zion's hill.⁶

"We know that all things work together for good ... to them who are the called." This calling is to a pilgrim's life. We are not called to sleep; we are called to war, to fight the good fight of faith. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom." (Acts 14:22) If you notice, right from the time that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, all their movements, all their history, all their experience, was with difficulties; it bristled with difficulties and enemies. Why? Why did not the Lord bring His people out of Egypt with an outstretched hand *at once*? Why did He allow Pharaoh to harden his heart? And when they did come out, why did the Lord bring them to bitter waters that they could not drink? And so you follow on. Take the case of Hezekiah: why did the Lord bring him into that trouble when He knew he would live for another fifteen years? Why did He say, "Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live" (2 Kings 20:1)? And if you read that chapter you will see that the Lord brought upon him sickness and disease which threatened him with death. Why all these things? Well, Hezekiah tells us why: "By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit." (Isaiah 38:16) Oh, a pilgrim's life! One who is called by grace is brought to wander in a solitary way, and can find no city to dwell in. But what a glorious Leader! "He led them forth by the right way" (Psalm 107:7); and you look through that 107th Psalm, and it will connect up with the text: "We know that all things work together for good ..."

"To those that love God." We were speaking on Friday, you remember, of the love of God to His people: "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." (John 13:1) And you remember that we tried to show that the Lord loved His people through all His own condescension, loved them in becoming "poor that they might be made rich" (), loved them as a Substitute in all His temptations and sufferings, loved them in His agonies in the Garden, loved them enough to go to the cross and offer Himself for them, and then loved them in all their individual cases, in all their unregeneracy and backslidings. He loves them to the end, all their lives. Well, my point is that this people are brought to love Him, and the reason is in Himself: "We love Him because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19) Oh, it is good, it is suitable to me, that the Lord is first. Yes, and so His people, by His grace, are brought to love Him to the end. As He loved them through all His sufferings, so they are brought to love Him through all the changing scenes of life, and there is something very living, very blessed, about this love in a conflict. Do you love Him? If you do, has that love ever compelled you to make a sacrifice for Him? The greatest sacrifice the Lord made for His people was Himself, and

⁶ "The appointed time rolls on apace, Not to propose but call by grace; To change the heart, renew the will, And turn the feet to Zion's hill" (Kent; Gadsby's Sel. 76).

if you make a sacrifice, your love will first deny yourself. It is comparatively easy to deny yourself £100 if you have got £1,000. But to deny ourselves is to deny our nature, ungodliness, and the lusts of the flesh. Oh, has love to the Lord enabled us in any sense to deny ourselves? We sing much. Oh that we could be more tender and exercised in our singing –

“I could from all things parted be,
But never, never, Lord, from Thee.” (Medley; Gadsby’s 1105)

To say that honestly, to confess it in the sight of God, needs much grace.

“To those that love God.” You will love His Word; you will love His gospel. It will be a joyful sound, “good news from a far country” (Proverbs 25:25) You will love His people. You won’t be able to love all their ways and their natural part; it would not be honest to say you could, but you love the grace that is in them, and that will help you to “make great obstructions small.” You won’t take about a magnifying glass with you to try to magnify their faults. The best thing is to take a telescope and turn it the wrong way round!

“Love all defects supplies,
Makes great obstructions small.” (J Hart; Gadsby’s 793)

“The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts” (Romans 5:5). Peter said, “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee” (John 21 v. 17).

To these people “all things work together for good.” The apostle says we know it. Now “all things” means just what it says – everything without exception. But you might say, ‘Well, if sin is excepted; *that* cannot work together for good.’ Well, I agree with the hymn:

“Sin for my good does work and win,
Yet ’tis not good for me to sin.”
(Erskine: Gospel Sonnets – The Believer’s Riddle, Sect. III)

These two lines - I was a long time before I could agree with it, but I do now. Even sin is made to work together for good. You take the 51st Psalm and the 38th Psalm – there is conviction of sin, deep, penetrating conviction of sin, when one is brought to self-abhorrence. Oh, said David, “My loins are filled with a loathsome disease.” “Mine iniquities are gone over mine head ... they are too heavy for me.” (Psalm 38:4) Do you think that worked for good? If he had not been convinced of sin, we should not have those Psalms. How it made mercy sweet, drove him to the throne of grace and brought him to seek unto that “fountain opened” especially “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zechariah 13:1)! Oh the love that filled the heart of the Lord Jesus, that fills the heart of a poor sinner coming trembling, repenting, confessing his sins at the throne of grace! It works for good.

And it works this way: “godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” (2 Corinthians 7:10) That is how it works - one convinced of sin and brought into deep repentance and godly sorrow. It works for good; I am sure it does. There is a line that is very expressive and sweet, and this is how it works for good:

“Love and grief compound an unction
Both to cleanse our wound and heal.” (Hart’s Hymns 54)

So that we start with the worst of things, and it works “for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.” In your experience, in all the conflicts and changes, can you detect that all things are working together for your good? Everything works together for good that

brings you to God - I don't mind what it is; and I would say this too, that you are safe in any matter that brings you to the throne of grace. However heavy your trial, however deep the pit you may feel to be in, however bitter your sorrow, you are safe if you are Godward. Oh may we be kept Godward!

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." One of the strangest things that worked together for good was Jonah's disobedience - not that disobedience is good. Oh but the immutable purposes of God work in the midst of all our contrary ways! If you read the book of Jonah, you see what the conviction of his disobedience wrought in his heart. The second chapter is very blessed, and Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God: "Out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice." When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord" (Jon. 2 v. 2, 7). It brought the conflict; it kept his soul alive. He remembered the Lord. He was in such distress, such darkness, that he could not see Him. He had no comfort, was in the bottom of the sea, and the weeds were wrapped about his head; but faith has a memory. It worked for good in the belly of hell. I know what it is for the pains of hell to get hold upon me, and then to remember the Lord, that He is omnipotent, omniscient and immutable. It was a comfort to Jonah.

Well, may the text itself be made a comfort to those that need it.