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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Ebenezer Clapham on Monday evening  
16th. May, 1949

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Text Romans 8.28

"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.

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We cannot read the Scriptures without noticing three important features.

The first is the separating, dividing line that is drawn between two distinct and opposite parties. In some Scriptures particularly, the two are set forth in contrast one with the other and they are defined as being the righteous and the wicked; the righteous in that sense that they, while they are sinners in common with all mankind and fallen, yet being of the divine choice of the covenant God, are made righteous in Jesus Christ, His righteousness being imputed to them and they bringing forth the fruits of God's grace correspondingly, in integrity and uprightness of life. The others, the wicked, and so termed, in that they, being left to the hardness of their hearts, their impenitence, unbelief and despising of God and His word, follow the course of this world and ultimately reap the fruits of their doings. It is very solemn to live!

Another point is the particular way these people are led in their pilgrimage and what they are called upon to experience in this life. All those who follow the course of this world and its ways and who live to it, have, as it does often appear, much to their advantage; so at least, it was felt to be, superficially viewed by Asaph in Psalm 73. They are allowed to prosper while the righteous suffer tribulation, or persecution, and bear often a weighty cross; they are shown hard things and have to prove that this is not their rest.

A third point consists in the destiny that is awaiting both parties. There is a destiny, an end, before us all - to which we are moving, hastening and to which we must come in the purposes of God; and this is the most important point of all. "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The great point with us is to know or to be rightly assured what our destiny is. A day of final separation will assuredly come when the two parties, now separate in the purposes of God and yet living in common, more or less, in the earth, being born, living, dying, will be for ever separated to a state that can never know a change - the glory of the presence of God - or the bottomless pit! The importance of this is tremendous! To be right for eternity surpasses all and if indeed we are thus being prepared by the grace of God in us, effectually wrought by the Holy Spirit, the issue, the destiny, the ultimate end confirms the fact, the truth that all will work together for our good.

It will work together viewed in this sense, that all (however painful some particular things may be) are working up, fitting us, preparing us, in this way, for that which God hath prepared for us. The salvation of the church is through the atonement of Christ; there is no other way to heaven. Yet by divine teaching in the soul, it is so appointed that all through which we pass, is a means of preparation - and it is a wonderful mercy when we can rightly view that important truth and receive teaching, even by adverse dispensations. There are indeed some Scriptures that are hard to believe and which we cannot rightly believe unless we have a divinely-given faith. We may assent to certain things being right, because there is no alternative to it; but we need something more than that - we need something more than a mere deduction or assent that this, or that, must be true because it is in the Scriptures. We need grace and faith to receive it, to fall under it, and to walk, as we may be helped, in line with it - and those Scriptures, being of such a positive nature, can be most confirming to us when faith is active in Christ and we can view the ultimate accomplishment of the purpose of God unto this end.

The apostle Paul was disposed to speak positively; he was not a Yea and Nay man. The Gospel that he preached was "Yea and Amen in Christ", and when God dealt with him, brought him down, convinced him, wounded him, killed him, healed him, made him alive and blessed him in his soul with a revelation of Christ, he seems to have been enabled to hold fast to that testimony, as to his own case, although he did on one occasion speak of having preached to others yet fearing lest he himself might prove a castaway. He was not immune from fears - "Without were fightings, within were fears" - but for the most part he seems to have enjoyed a gracious confidence in the oath and promise of God, and his own standing.

"We know"! Not, we think, it may be possible, but we know, that all things, not some things, a few things here and there, but we know that all things work together for good. It is a very important truth because it incorporates and covers the whole of our lives. But as far as the apostle is concerned, with all the sufferings, and persecution and trial that he endured, it did not move him from this conviction; he says, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Evidently it was this looking forward in his own case, which brought him into the sweet and blessed sense of the fact that all must work together for good. He does not say, I know that all things will work together for good to me, but they may not to others. No; it incorporates all the redeemed of the Lord, all that love God and are the called according to His purpose.

What things may these be, mentioned as working together for the good of His people? Well, all things in the purposes of God concerning the church

must assuredly work together for their good, His immutable designs, His decrees, His appointment of them, that irrevocable choice, whereby they are joined to Christ in a bond that can never fail. It is sometimes confirming to me to dwell upon divine immutability, with a hope in the mercy of God in my soul. It is most confirming! If you can feel a good hope through grace in your soul, divine immutability can be a wonderful strength. "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." An unchanging God is our comfort. He must be that, else He could not be God. Those perfections constitute Him what He is, and, at times, those perfections shine before the view of faith, humble the spirit, give us a sense of our insignificance and nothingness, and produce worship in Christ.

"Though His majesty be great,  
Yet His mercy is no less!"

We tremble and rejoice. His purposes and decrees are immutable; therefore these must work together for our good. O, you may be walking down a street and feel a little sweet hope spring up in your heart that God has shown His mercy to you; you lay hold of His promise and see immutability in it to your soul's comfort, and you can look at that, look at His decrees, His purposes, His perfections, and feel persuaded that all will work together for your good.

"All things", in God, in His choice of His people; we must not quarrel with that. If we do, we quarrel to our own injury. The truth will stand. But if we can fall before God and confess our utter unworthiness of the least of His mercies, and pray for an inward witness and testimony that we are the purchase of His blood, and get an answer to that, we shall bless Him for all His divine appointments and shall be persuaded that they will work together for our good.

Not only so, all things in the Person of Christ must necessarily be for His people's good. The treasury of grace is there; the work of redemption was committed to Him in the covenant of grace with all that was involved in it, the sealing thereof with His most precious blood, the ransom He paid for His own people. O blessed covenant of grace! It may be that sometimes when you feel a little spiritually-minded you have some very sweet meditation upon that blessed covenant in all things ordered well. If it is opened up to the soul and the Trinity is seen in it, with the wonders of divine love in each divine Person, as concerned with the salvation and glorification of the church, it will fill your soul with admiration and praise and love; it will melt you. You can look by faith at such a time at the blessings of grace in that covenant, and say and feel that all things there, all things, every blessing in it, must assuredly work for your good. They will, they must; all the blessings of the covenant are for the sheep of Christ. "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." O, if you can get hold of that and feel its sweet

embrace in your soul you can say, all things will work together there for my good. You cannot doubt the blessed issue. When you get that token of His grace and love in your heart, you fall so sweetly into His hands, you are like a piece of clay in the hands of the potter; you commit yourself unto Him. "All things" We know they will work together for good to them that love God.

All things in the blessed gospel of His grace will work together for our good. What a gospel this is! His people will have to know something of both sides - of the law in its condemning power and of the gospel in its delivering power. O if we could be brought feelingly into this verse! "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." You look at that, a poor sinner feeling condemned "bound in affliction and iron" seeing nothing but your sin, guilt, ruin and death, and fearing the consequences; you look at this, then you say, O but I do not know that that belongs to me; I know I am a sinner, but I could not say there is no condemnation for me. If the blessed Spirit of God were pleased to bring Christ into your soul you would know it, and you would not doubt it; that would bring you out of the prison of the law with all its legal binding, with all its claims, and bring you to feel that you are delivered from it, by the body of Christ - married to Christ. O it is so blessed to get a view of Him, to see "Jesus, Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." There is no condemnation there! No condemnation in Him! "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The law of sin and death is the law which, when it is charged home upon the conscience of a poor sinner, brings him to feel his sins and to know what he deserves; it reveals sin. "When the commandment came", said Paul, "sin revived and I died." There is no sin in the law, but when it is charged home on the conscience, then it brings sin under review as before God with conviction; but the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus is the blessed gospel with its liberating power, which delivers from legal bondage and brings into the experience of the soul the sweetest liberty that can ever be known. If you could feel a little of that liberty of the gospel in your soul, the good news of redemption through blood for you, then you would be able to say, "I know that all things will work together for good for me."

It is true that there may be some circumstances in our lives that are like a dark shadow, and will remain so, possibly, for the rest of our days, or they may not - the Lord can clear them. The most adverse circumstances can so be ordered in His purpose, and will be, to work collectively for our good.

"We know that all things..." It is such a great word. You hear some good people say, and quite rightly so too - I believe this can work for my good. You have had to walk through something dark and difficult and perhaps,

have felt very dark about it in your heart, but when the Lord has lifted the veil or sanctified the dispensation to you, painful as it was, you have had to say, This has worked for my good. You have felt it because of the effect it has had upon you, in the teaching you have received in it, and you may have had to thank Him even for some painful things. But there may be some things which still remain dark and cloudy and often fill you with confusion, so that you "reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man". How can they be cleared up? Who can lift that cloud? How can this or that circumstance, this trial, that loss, this bereavement - how can that work for good? How can it? There is no possibility of it, unbelief will say, though faith will not - faith will not say there is no possibility of it, but faith viewing it in all its darkness and difficulty, will take it to the Lord and say, Lord, bring something good out of this for my soul, painful and distressing as it is; cause that it shall be one of the "all things" that shall work together for my good.

How much concerned are we as to whether these things shall "work together for our good"? How much concern have we about this? Do we watch and pray in them as we should? Do you look at some things and examine them as you are passing through them to see if, or how, they may be working for your good? Do you have to watch your spirit in them and how you are affected by them, whether adversely or profitably? "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." Yes, but you see, some things, material things, and some things perhaps, that cause disturbance and anxiety of mind - certain things in your life may so get hold of you, as for the time being to rob your soul. Do you ever find that to be true? Do you find on occasions that you become so surfeited with care, about this or that, that you become hardly able, as it were, to concentrate upon anything good? They rob you for the time being of that private, quiet meditation and spirituality of mind. They rob you, and it does not take much sometimes; a sentence can do it, can rob you of that inward enjoyment of the gospel in your soul as to the sensible comfort of it. Perhaps someone will wound your feelings and all the comfort you have felt will vanish and you find old nature as alive as ever; then you feel guilty and you know you have sinned in it, in your feelings, and then you have to confess before the Lord. But if these things bring forth this confession in your heart - then they work together for your good.

"Sin for my good will work and win  
But 'tis not good for me to sin."

That is very true! O but some of these things can be such robbers; they starve your soul, do they not? They starve your soul for the time being, and then guilt comes. And yet it is all ordered - they loosen us, we become weary - and we find and feel that the soul has no rest but in Christ. Then you say,

O if I could get back to Him or if He would come again to me, if He would speak pardon to my soul and lift the barrier, so that we could flow together again and His sweet love fill my poor heart. Do you feel like that? O, then wait on Him, wait on Him, confess and pray, and one day, or moment, you may feel the sweet inflowing of His grace and love in your soul again, to melt you down before Him so that all works together for good to make us hate ourselves and our sins and to depend more and more upon Him, to cleave to Him.

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." This is true in relation to all that we may be called upon to pass through in this life. This seems to be borne out by what the apostle refers to in the 5th. chapter; we "rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience experience; and experience, hope." It is all working together, you see. "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." They work together. We are so apt to look at one particular thing, one link in the chain, so to speak, and we are just confounded; we cannot see how it can be so ordered; but the Lord can cause all things to work together without us seeing it. It is not necessary for us to see it and yet I believe, we shall be brought to know it, and to believe it and to leave it with Him. We know that all things, all trials and afflictions in the Lord's account must work together for our good!

Take too, the changes in providence that come in our lives. How wonderfully the Lord orders those things to work together! You look at some circumstances, separate in themselves, and may remember how you fought against this and struggled against that, and for the time would not be submissive or subjective to the Lord's ways with you in certain things; and yet you had to prove that when He shut none could open, and when He opened none could shut, and He has ordered it well. He does all things well! There is no mistake on His side. This fact or truth that all things work together for good, does not mean that we shall never make a mistake, or take a wrong step, or leap into something that may bring much trouble to us; we may. Yet even so the Lord can, and He does, cause that to work for our good, to bring down our pride or fleshly confidence, to make us more cautious and careful of our ways, to confess our folly, and bring us to a closer dependence upon Himself.

Moreover, you may see the Lord's hand going before you and ordering things in a particular way surprising to you. It may be as though He took you by the hand and led you into this or that path, opened a door, made a way, wrought deliverances, so that you had just to look on while the Angel of the Lord did wondrously - and you have seen things work together for good. And they will! But we need faith to believe this; and if we can truly believe it in a right way, it will keep us steady. I believe it will save us from

many flounderings and from much tempest tossing, although I know that may be difficult to affirm, but there is that Scripture:- "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee." O, I feel more and more the need of faith, and I have thought today of what the Lord said to His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me." O if we could come there, what a quietness it would bring, what a sweet stillness. O it is very wonderful! Yes, but you know we have to prove that we are poor things when left to ourselves; and yet even so, there is an inward conviction that all things will work together for good.

They work together for good because they are in good hands; they are not in our keeping. They shall rejoice! Why shall they rejoice? "They shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven". Our times are in His hand, and when you can see all your concerns in the hand of your spiritual Zerubbabel, what a confidence you can feel in your heart, - all your times are in His hand to the moment of your decease, they are all set in His purpose.

"My life's minutest circumstance  
Is subject to His eye".

"We know". O, have you ever really been brought to such a point as that, we know that all things work together for good? The apostle here - referring to the blessed effects of God's grace in the soul, the ground of our hope and things of first importance, including sufferings and other things - yet says all these things will work together. The people of God are in good hands. But here comes the separating line. This is not a general, broadcast statement to all. It defines a people! They will "work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." This may be a test for us, because it is not much love that we feel to the Lord often; no, at best it is cold and faint; yet if we are His people it is there, it is in the heart, and sometimes when we are revived a little by His mercy, it bubbles up. It is in the heart, renewed by divine grace and the affections move after Jesus. Just at moments you may feel able to say,

"Compared with Christ, in all beside  
No comeliness I see;  
The one thing needful, dearest Lord,  
Is to be one with Thee."

If you could really say that, you must love Him. If you really long for Him in your soul, you love Him. If you hunger and thirst for Him and pray for Him to come and be a guest, not just a passing guest, but to dwell in your poor heart, you must love Him, else you would not want Him; but sometimes this love flows out so sweetly after Jesus, it is so beautiful to faith. He is fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into His lips. He is so

attractive, He is all fair. He is as the apple tree among the trees of the wood. If you really have any religion at all, there will surely be moments when your poor heart is filled with love to Jesus, even though it is not as you would have it. It is true what a good old man said once to a young minister, when he shook hands with him after the first time he had preached, The religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of love. And he proved it, although after preaching 50 years, he said, I seem but half to believe it now; but it is true. And yet how often we have to mourn and complain that our love is so cold and faint, do we not? Yet, there it is, and at times it is proved when your heart is warmed a little in the precious things of God.

Not only so, but when you feel the warmth of that love in your heart to Christ, there is such a receiving of the fact that all will work together, you just commit your way and say, Lord, be with me to the end, these trials, difficulties and burdensome things are in Thy hand. Help me through them, help me to forget things behind and reach forth to the things that are before. It is wonderful to have a prospect! We are not here for long and days fly by so rapidly. O, but to have a prospect, to be able to lay your head upon the bed and feel a good hope of heaven in your soul, it is wonderful! What peace it brings and what love in your poor heart to the Saviour, that He should have shed His precious blood for a poor unworthy sinner like you! As for circumstances in this life, it is but as a vapour compared with what lies before, the ultimate end, the reward, the destiny. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." O, may He enable us to lay hold, to receive His word and be strengthened by His sacred truth, and to look, at times, across the valleys and above the mountains, in humble faith, and to lay hold of omnipotence and believe that all will be ordered well. O, have there not been times when you have revolted against some things in your spirit, and yet ultimately have had to bless the Lord for that very thing? He knows. He makes no mistakes. O, then may He keep us lively, help us to hold fast to the truth, and give us to see that all is being ordered, and will work together for our good, as we believe they will, "to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." That is true of His people, but if He comes and blesses your soul, you will feel it is true of you, and you will be able to lay hold of it and bless Him for the truth. The Lord grant it to us. Amen