

What Saith the Scripture?

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All Things for Good to Those That Love God- No. 1

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Lecture IV

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Text.--Rom. 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

You will observe that the apostle speaks with all confidence. He does not say--we expect, or we believe or we conjecture that all will be well for God's friends,--but he says--we know. There is no doubt about it.

Let us then,

I. Inquire, what does his language mean?

II. Show how the result of good to all that love God is secured.

III. Notice some particulars as illustrations of the general truth.

IV. Show how we know it to be true.

I. What is the apostle's meaning?

Here the great question is--Shall his language be interpreted as strictly universal?

In terms, he announces a universal proposition. All things, he declares, work together for good to those that love God. But does he mean to affirm a proposition strictly universal?

Not all universal language should be taken in a strictly universal sense. In the scriptures we not infrequently find it necessary to modify universal language. There may be things in the text or context which forbid the universal sense; or there may be declarations in other parts of the Bible which preclude it, or the nature of the case may render the universal sense either violently improbable, or perhaps absurd, and hence may demand some modification. It should be remembered that the language of the Bible is the language of common life, and everybody knows that in the language of

common life we often affirm in the form of universal proposition when we really mean something much short of this. For example, it is common to say of a well known fact--"Everybody says so"--but our "everybody" is by no means intended to embrace all mankind.

But the language of our text I do understand to be used in the strictly universal sense, meaning that absolutely all things, present and future--all things, above and beneath--in heaven, earth, and hell--do and will conspire to the ultimate blessedness of the saints. The Bible obviously teaches this doctrine, and I know of no facts in the universe that militate against its universal application.

II. How does this come about? How is this result secured?

In order to see this matter in its true light we need to consider that the happiness of moral agents is conditioned on their holiness and results from it. The holy will of course be happy, and have real enjoyment in proportion to the degree in which they are holy. Still further, let it be considered that the holiness of moral agents is conditioned upon their knowledge. Every moral agent is more or less holy according as he knows more or less and is more or less conformed in heart and life to what he knows. I speak now particularly of the knowledge of God, whether obtained through His word or through His works.

Now all events are matters of knowledge, and not only all events that occur under God's government, but God Himself is also an object of knowledge. According to the Bible, all events will ultimately be known to the saints, for the judgment day will bring them all to light. Hence we learn that ultimately the entire history of all God's doings will be known to all His creatures. All He has ever done or shall ever do--whether in this world or in other worlds, will be open subjects of knowledge to His creatures, and will be known as fast and as far as their limited capacities will admit.

Now it is very plain that if all things, embracing all events and all the works of God, are matters of knowledge, and if moreover knowledge is a condition of real holiness, then all the knowledge which the saints attain will be at once available to their happiness. It will go to enhance their real blessedness. Especially will this be true of all their knowledge of God and of His countless works and various ways. All things, the saints will then see, are parts of one great plan--both those which God Himself performs by His direct agency, and those which are done through His permissive agency by His creatures. It will then be seen that all things are arranged and planned for the good of His obedient children, and when this great all-controlling principle in God's administration comes to be seen in all its bearings, the knowledge of this truth cannot fail to be a source of ineffable blessedness to all the holy. God's infinite grace as the great and good Father of all His loving children, will be so revealed as to show that He makes all things work together for their good.

III. Let us now turn our attention to some particulars as illustrations of the general truth.

It is generally supposed that what we call mercies and blessings, and what we recognize by name as God's good gifts to men, are really good things to those that love God. We can see that they are, and men universally recognize them as good.

The same is equally true of what we call judgments, and chastisements--the rebukes of God; for all

these too are means of grace, and are blessed of God for the spiritual good of His children. Their only design as they come from our Father's hand is that they may work out God to His saints. He does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men from caprice or from any pleasure in their pain, but only and wholly for their profit, that they may the more deeply "partake of His holiness." Under this broad principle, we know that all the losses and crosses which befall the saints--all their burdens of care and responsibility,--and all their infirmities, shall be overruled for their good. All these things will conspire to teach the saints more of God and more of themselves. By the aid of such revelations they will be able the better to appreciate God's character and plans of discipline and their own infinite obligation to His manifold grace.

Nor from the "all things" of our text can we except the sins of God's people. They are indeed altogether blame-worthy for all their sins and none the less so for the good which God educes from them by His overruling agency. The sin of Peter was overruled of God for his good. He was a more humble and a better man as long as he lived. He better knew his own weakness, and better appreciated Christ's tender compassion. He felt the force of the admonition--"When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren," and there was none among all the original twelve to whom Christ said more emphatically--"Feed My sheep"--"Feed My lambs."

This sin of Peter brought him into great peril. "Satan desired to have him that he might sift him as wheat,"--and if Christ had left him to himself, he would doubtless have fallen fatally into the snare of the devil. But Christ did not leave him in this hour of his need. "I have prayed for thee," said He, "that thy faith fail not." Christ kept His hand and eye on him, and soon plucked him from the destroyer's grasp. In this scene Peter learned more of the length and depth of his Savior's grace than he had ever known before.

This is only a single case, yet it was by no means a peculiar case, and therefore it serves to illustrate the general law of God's administration over His people.

Similar was the case of David. No thanks to him, but all thanks to God, that his sin was overruled, so as in the issue to make him a more meek, humble, penitent, and holy man.

Not only are the sins of the saints overruled to their good, but the sins of others, of sinners, and even of the most wicked. All the mistakes of our associates--their infirmities--the thousand nameless things that try us among the "all things," which God makes subservient to the good of His people. There is a woman whose husband is a bad man. His temper is uncomfortable--his ways are adapted to make his intimate associates unhappy, and hence he causes his wife many sore trials. Yet if she loves God and makes Him the Refuge of her soul, all these little trials shall certainly work out her good both in this world and the next.

Not less so of the husband who has a bad wife. Not less so of those unhappy families in which the husband and the wife are great trials to each other. So of parents and children. Parents may be a source of trial to their children, and it often happens that children are a source of the greatest trial to their parents. But howsoever the trials occur, the great principle of our text applies to them all. To those that love God, they shall all work together for good.

The principle also reaches and applies to all the temptations of the devil. Let him poison his darts with demoniac skill and hurl them with hellish malice, they will not ultimately harm those that sincerely love God.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower into which the righteous run and are safe." The Christian has a panoply complete, wherewith he may be able to withstand all the fiery darts of the devil. And what is more to our present purpose, though wounded by these darts he shall not be slain,--though cast down he shall not be destroyed, for there is a healing, overruling hand under whose agency even the wounds that Satan inflicts shall be wrought into better health and more spiritual vitality than the saints enjoyed before. God knows how to foil Satan with his own weapons and make even his apparent temporary success react in terrible defeat and disgrace upon his own head. God knows how not only to rescue His saints but to do much more than simply to rescue them: He imbues them with new vigor and sanctifies to them their most bitter and humiliating experience.

Yet further, all events are designed to illustrate God's true character. The whole creation is only a revelation of God, and all events that occur in it only serve to reveal more and more of God to intelligent beings. "The heavens declare the glory of God--the firmament showeth His handy-work." How many lectures upon God are read to us by the silent stars! How many lessons are repeated to us day by day by His rising suns and nightly dews and timely showers! Where in all the works of God, whether in nature or providence, is there a thing that does not speak His praise and bear some testimony which He can bless to the souls of His saints?

IV. We know that all things work together for good to the saints.

So says Paul. How did he and his brethren know this to be true? Perhaps they knew it by revelations already made in God's word; or it may be that his mind rested this truth upon the general knowledge of God enjoyed. It is a matter of revelation. The Bible amply affirms this truth. And it is also a plain dictate of reason. When we come to understand what God's attributes are as affirmed by the reason, we shall see that such a God can suffer nothing to occur which shall not in some way result in good to His friends. This must be so, if it be true that God loves His friends, studies to promote their highest good--has all events under His control--had His choice in the depths of a past eternity among all possible events and could determine to cause and suffer to exist such only as should subserve the ends that lay near His heart.

It is often a matter of experience and observation in this world that things which seem freighted with destruction turn out to be full of life and salvation. For a time, all looked dark and desolate, but light and joy came out at last. Look at the case of Job. You can scarcely think of one form of grief and sorrow, which did not blend in the throng that rushed upon him as if to crush him: but he lived to see all these things work together for good to himself both for time and eternity. So in general, I remark that observation and experience will often show that this doctrine applies even to the present life and has its exemplification even here. Yet the apostle did not mean to affirm that God's plans have their full development in the present world. His affirmation contemplated a future world in which results but partially unfolded here can have their full and everlasting development.

REMARKS.

1. Saints will in eternity blame themselves for what they cannot on the whole regret. Seeing the results which God has educed by His overruling agency, they cannot wish they had never done those wicked things; yet surely they will none the less blame themselves for their own sins. As to the blame of sin, no matter how much good may come from our wrong-doing, it never can affect the question of our guilt, nor its measure. Take the case of Judas. No thanks to him that his infamous treason was one of the agencies which provided a Savior for a ruined world. The good which accrued from the death of Christ changes not the intrinsic character of his sin; cannot in any measure make it less mean, less sordid, less revengeful. Hence he must blame himself as much as if no good but only evil had resulted from his betrayal of Christ. It was God alone by His own infinite wisdom and power, who overruled this sin to great good. All praise therefore to Him, and none the less blame to Judas the traitor.

2. Our subject shows how the saints can be perfectly happy in heaven to all eternity. For there is in many minds a point of obscurity in this matter which needs explanation. The saints will see all their past sins in heaven's clear light, and they cannot but blame themselves for every sin they ever committed. How then can they be perfectly happy?

The answer is, they will see how their sins have been overruled for good, and they will rejoice in this good which God brings out of their iniquities. In this exercise of joy, they will be deeply humble, as indeed they will have all reason to be, and their joy will be purely a joy in God, blended with everlasting adoration and praise that He had both the power and the heart to bring much good out of their own wrong doings. Every view taken by a saint in heaven of his past sins will redound in praise to God, but in deeper humiliation to himself. Yet this humiliation will by no means conflict with the saint's happiness--for he enjoys being humble--he enjoys giving all glory and praise to God.

3. God blames a multitude of things, but has no regrets. He has often expressed Himself as we do when we feel regret, but these forms of expression are shaped in accommodation to our modes of speaking, and when used by God should be interpreted in accordance with His known character and known relations. It cannot be that on the whole, under all the circumstances of the case, He really regrets the occurrence of anything that takes place. He blames the guilty author, He condemns the sin; but it has not taken Him by surprise; it is no new thing to Him, and it has not in any wise frustrated His purposes and plans for the government of the universe. Before this sin was committed, or its author existed, God saw how He could over-rule it for good, and for so much good that on the whole He judged it better to let its author come into existence and commit this sin rather than prevent either the one or the other. Yet He blames every sin as much as if no good could be educed from it. The sinner is none the better for this development of good, through God's overruling agency. To God alone belongs all the praise, for both the good intention and the good results are His alone. But for His good hand interposing, all the results would have been evil, and the sinner's intention is of course all evil and only evil continually.

Yet while God blames both sinners and saints for all their sins, He freely forgives the believing penitent and accepts him as a son. Then He so overrules the sin as not to be agonized by anything that occurs.

We sometimes see results corresponding to this in the earthly discipline which parents exercise over

their children. The parent sees that his child has sinned; at first he regrets the thing exceedingly; but having in the fear and help of God done his utmost to reclaim and improve his child, he sees his efforts crowned with the divine blessing, and he says--That sin of my dear child almost killed me, but now I see him so much changed for the better that I can no longer regret the means which have resulted in so much good.

4. From this it does not follow that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good. For if under the very circumstances in which they sin, men would obey rather than disobey--do right rather than wrong--then yet greater good might accrue than accrues from God's overruling of the sin. But God prefers His own course to any other which He can take. Under the circumstances He always does the wisest and best thing possible to Him, and hence He has no occasion for regret. He brings out the greatest good possible to Himself. If His creatures who do in fact sin, would be persuaded to do right instead of wrong, their agency for good, concurrent with His, would educe a still augmented good.

For illustration; a father commands his son to perform some certain work. But he has good reason to believe that the son will not do it unless he himself stays at home to control the son by his presence. Yet it is so important for him to go away that he decides to go, though at the hazard of his son's disobedience. In case the son disobeys, he trusts he can subject him to such discipline as shall bring out some good, and the good to be secured by his own presence elsewhere is too great to be sacrificed. The greatest good possible can be secured only by the concurrent agency of father and son. The father can secure the greatest good possible to himself by going away, even though his son should disobey in his absence.

5. But if sin were overruled so as to be at last the means of the greatest good, no thanks to the sinner. Suppose it were the case that the whole world would have been damned if Judas had not betrayed Christ, so that his sin secured the salvation of the world--no thanks to Judas for such a result, for he meant not so, neither did his heart think so. He intended no good to the world, nor to any being in it except himself. His act of betraying his friend would be none the less mean, sordid, and revengeful, for the good which in the case supposed would ensue. The good wrought out would be wholly attributable to God.

6. It is naturally impossible to sin benevolently. There can be no such thing as a benevolent sin. To sin with design to do good is an absurdity in terms. To say therefore that we do evil that good may come is absurd and impossible. To do evil for the sake and with the motive of securing real good is a self-contradiction. For the doing evil implies a wicked intention, and the having a good end in view implies a good intention. But to have both a good intention and a bad intention at the same instant, each determining the same act, is surely a self-contradiction. If a man intends good by his act, it is not sin. No man ever sinned in order that it might redound to the glory of God. No tyrant ever persecuted the saints of God that it might do them good. Suppose a wicked man were to say--My wife is a good woman; let me plague her now for her good. It will only make her a better woman, so let me torment her all I can. There is no way in which I can do her so much good.

He can't do any such thing! It is naturally impossible that a man should be honest in trying to do good by wickedness. This sinning benevolently is a natural impossibility.

7. Saints should always be in a position to fall back upon God in all their trials in this life. They should stand in such relations to God that they can rationally and naturally trust Him to shape and control all events even here so as to make them work out good in the highest degree. If they walk humbly before God, they may know that all things shall be made to conspire for their good. Only let them truly love God and trust Him; then they need not fear the issues of any events whatever that may occur. None can occur without God's permission, nor independently of His direction. They may therefore be assured that God will shape all their bearings for the good of those that love Him.

But if professed Christians are living in sin, they have no claim on this promise and no right to expect its fulfillment to themselves. But if they are not in sin, they may like Micah cry out triumphantly--"Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy; when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me."

8. This truth affords ground for strong consolation to the saints. Why should they ever be sad? Suppose all things do not apparently work well now. Let them still have faith in God and rest in His promises. Has He not said that all things shall work together for good to His loving friends? No wonder saints are often seen smiling through their tears, for joy lies deep in their souls, though sadness may overcloud their face. Joys and sorrows are often strangely blended in their bosom. Calamities, disappointments, bereavements befall them as they do other men, and these things are not for the present joyous but grievous; but their faith in God assures them that all will yet be well. Many things will befall them in life that burn and agonize their sensibility; but deep within are trust and faith in God and a sweet leaning upon His promises--for they know that the ground of their consolation is firm and strong as the pillars of the universe!

9. We may rejoice in whatever befalls any of God's real children; whether ourselves or others. Parents may rejoice in whatever befalls their godly children or friends. Many things may occur which cause tears now--yet as Christians our watchword should be--It will surely be well for them in the latter end. The things which give the severest shock will do most good, and those which seem most afflictive, when God has brought out all their results, may be found to be most blest to His saints. Those fearful events which seemed to come with a crash as if they would break down all the pillars of your foundation--Oh how sweet to see even those strange things so strangely overrule for the good of the saints!

10. Very few Christians can live a single week or even day without needing the consolation which this truth affords. Hence they ought to hold it fast, to keep it treasured in their memory--lying near their hearts--ready to be applied for consolation and for strength in every emergency.

This truth may well reconcile the saints to any and all events of divine providence. They can afford to be submissive, while they know that their Father will make all things work together for their good. They can afford to have travail and suffering, for even their most intense sorrows shall all conspire to work out good to their souls. Therefore let not unbelief deprive us of this consolation. Apart from the light of faith many things will occur that are inexplicably dark, but faith illumines and explains all.

How wonderful are God's marvellous works. Well may it be said of Him--"He is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working." Results may lie hidden long, but they will come out at last in glorious

sunlight, showing that God's hand has guided events to their results with unerring wisdom. In the light of eternity if not in the light of time, they shall see it all, and seeing it shall wonder and adore. God, they will shout aloud, hath done all things well! Then, do not allow yourselves now to be deprived of this great consolation.

But do you say--ah, if I only knew that I am a child of God, if I only knew that I really love God, then I could receive this consolation legitimately. Then I could feel that it belongs to me. Then I could say--Let come anything that God is pleased to send, for I am anchored in His love and on His promise.

Now you may be very guilty for these doubts, for surely you may be free from them altogether; but still if with all your doubtings, you are really God's child, they shall all be overruled for your good, so that in heaven you will have it to say--How wonderful are God's ways! That He should bring me out of a region, so dark and desolate, and then make all my doubts and darkness subserve some useful ends to my own soul and to His glory--that out of such materials He should bring out any good at last--how wonderful!

Finally, we can see that the volumes of glory and praise to God must be to all eternity continually accumulating. Fresh revelations each hour of His wonderful wisdom and love must evolve from humble and holy hearts fresh accessions of praise and honor to His blessed name. Is it not delightful to think that such a God shall be thus praised and honored through eternity!

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite

benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.