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No. A.2.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

OR

Proving an Unqualified Promise.

(PART 1).

(An Exposition of Rom. viii. 28).

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CHAPTER I.

“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” (Rom. viii. 28).

THIS verse is, in some respects, one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, and, in order to enable us to see something of its importance as well as its beauty, we will travel through it step by step, remembering as we pass along that not only each verse, but each clause, and each word of Scripture has its significance.

The first step is, “*And we know.*” Faith is not satisfied with thinking; faith must have a foundation on which to rest; therefore, faith must *know*. As believers we know a great many things which are worth knowing, and these can easily be ascertained by tracing the verb “to know” through the Scriptures.

The second step is “*And we know that all things.*” These two words occur frequently, both in the Old and New Testaments, and a careful examination of the places where they are found, together with their connections, would prove a fascinating and instructive study.

The third step is, “*And we know that all things*

work together for good.”

This is indeed wonderful. All things might have worked together for ill; had we received our deserts they would have done so, but God has not dealt with us after our sins, neither has He rewarded us according to our iniquities. He has dealt with us in *grace*, and, therefore, all things work together for good. We do well to remember that, in all the “ins and outs” of our daily experience, God is behind the scenes and is always working, ruling, and overruling, everything in His own way for His eternal glory, and our present and future blessing. The words in Psalm cxix. 68, can only be true of God Himself, “Thou art good, and doest good.” Yes, God is good, the very essence of goodness, and because of this He doeth good. The Lord Jesus was the perfect manifestation of God, and, therefore, of Him we read in Acts x. 38, that He “went about doing good.”

The fourth step is, "And we know that all things work together for good

to them that love God."

The passage does not read, "to those whom God loves," and the distinction is exceedingly important to bear in mind. God loves everybody, but everybody does not love God. We read that God loved the world (and He loves the world still) but the world does not love Him. There are a certain number who love Him, not professionally, but really, and if the question is raised as to why we love Him, the only adequate answer is, "Because He first loved us." And yet, how cold, how thin, how small, how poor is our love compared with what it should be. We marvel that we do not love Him more, but when we probe our hearts for the cause of its lack of intensity we arrive, sooner or later, at the inevitable conclusion that it is because of our lack of appreciation of His love toward us. When His mighty love was first shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, then it was that our love went back to Him in response, and it is only as we realize increasingly the height and depth of that love which passeth knowledge that we shall resultantly love Him as we should. However, to revert to our point, Romans viii. 28, cannot be claimed by any unregenerate person; it is exclusively for God's people, "to them that love God."

The fifth step is, "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.

Thank God this is inserted. We hide our faces with shame when we think of our poverty-stricken love to Him, but we lift them with joy unspeakable when we lay hold of the tremendous fact that we are an interested party in His eternal purpose which originated with Himself in the past dateless eternity, and which will be culminated and consummated when we are conformed to the image of His Son in the ages to come.

Furthermore, nothing can frustrate or alter God's purpose. It is irrevocable as is His truth, and according to that irreversible purpose we have been called.

Having travelled through the verse by these short stages, we will now look at this wonderful truth in another way. To a very great extent our lives are made up of contrasts—light and shade; sunshine and storm; joy and sorrow; success and failure; health and sickness; realization and disappointment! *ups and downs*. Now it is compara-

tively easy for us to understand how the brighter and pleasanter things of life work together for good, *e.g.*, the sunshine, joy, health, success, etc., but it is difficult to understand how the dark and unpleasant things do so, *e.g.*, the storms, failures, sorrows, disappointments, etc. But the fact is that they *all* work together for good. God help us to grip this stupendous fact. *All things*—the great things and the little things; the ugly things and the nice things; the sweet things and the bitter things; the rough things and the smooth things; the crooked things and the straight things; the light things and the dark things—yes, *ALL THINGS*—not fifty per cent. of them; not ninety-nine per cent. of them, but *all* of them. Truly this is one of the great outstanding miracles of our daily life.

CHAPTER II.

A REMARKABLE scene is presented in the opening verses of John xiii. The Lord knew that His hour was come; He knew that He would depart out of this world unto the Father; He knew that the Father had given all things into His hands; He knew that He was come from God and went to God; and He who knew all this, the Lord of life and glory, the Creator of the entire universe, the Eternal Son of God, actually laid aside His outer garments, girded Himself with a towel, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet. Verily, He was the embodiment of humility. "Then cometh He to Simon Peter," and that impetuous disciple said in a tone of genuine surprise, "Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?" (The emphasis in the Greek rests upon the two pronouns "*Thou*" and "*My*," expressing the vivid contrast between them). Our Lord's answer was as beautiful as it was consoling, "What I do thou knowest (perceivest) not now; but thou shalt know (understand) hereafter." These ever memorable words apply to many, possibly the majority of God's dealings with us. How many experiences there are through which we pass, the reason for which we are at a complete loss to understand. There are times when God seems to hide His face, and to veil the purpose of His loving heart. We frequently wonder why He allows us to have so many strange experiences. Some of His loved ones lie on a bed of sickness for months together; some are suddenly, without any warning, plunged into the valley of sorrow and bereavement; some continue in business splendidly for a time, when, on a sudden, the business fails, and financial ruin ensues; some who mean well and act with the best of motives are entirely misunderstood, and are

consequently censured rather than commended; some have their hopes raised to the highest possible point, only to see them ruthlessly dashed to the ground. Yes, there are occasions when

Everything seems to go wrong,

and being human, we reason with ourselves as to the "why and wherefore." How difficult it is with many of us in such circumstances to willingly acquiesce in these divine interpositions. O that we might hear the voice of our Beloved saying in that calm, gentle, and loving tone, of which He alone is capable, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." It is possible for us sometimes to understand the purpose behind God's dealings with us at the time we experience them, but in any case *we shall surely understand all things* in that coming day when that which is covered shall be revealed, and that which is hid shall be made known, and *then* we shall find that God has been behind the scenes every step of the way and that all things have been working together for good.

How wonderfully interesting and instructive is the 8th chapter of Deuteronomy relative to this subject. There we have a dazzling picture of divine love and care manifested towards the children of Israel. Blessing follows blessing with extraordinary rapidity. In verse 2 we see that God *led* His people; verse 3, He *fed* them; verse 4, He *clothed* them; verse 15, He *gave them water* out of the rock of flint (almost the last place in the world from which one would expect water to issue). But why did God so deal with His earthly people? Why all these blessings so undeserved; and yet so freely bestowed? The reason is stated at the end of verse 16,

"To do thee good

at thy latter end."

There is no need to ask ourselves if God has blessed us more than we have deserved. The fact is that He literally deluges us with blessing day by day, hour by hour. How many divine favours are crowded into one short day of our experience? In Psalm cxxxix. 17, 18, David mentions two characteristics of God's thoughts toward him—they were *precious* and *innumerable*; and such are His thoughts toward us. He has made every provision for us during our pilgrimage journey. Every earthly blessing, which we so often take as a matter of course without any expression of appreciation, as well as every spiritual blessing, comes from His loving hand by the way of the cross. And why does God deal so

graciously with us? Surely *to do us good*, not only at our latter end, but also during each passing hour.

Another suggestive passage bearing upon this truth is the early part of Jeremiah xxiv., and as we carefully read verse 5 we see that God had sent His people into the hands of the Chaldeans, because of their stubbornness and disobedience, in order to teach them the lesson they so urgently needed to learn, viz., that of dependence upon Himself. Now here we see God's judgment upon His erring people, in contrast to His blessings recorded in Deuteronomy viii., but the divine purpose proved the same in both instances, because the last three words in Jeremiah xxiv. 5, are "*for their good.*"*

When we get cold and careless, it is essential that He should deal with us accordingly, and, therefore, He has to use disciplinary measures, correcting us by means of the rod of chastisement, and leading us into the path of affliction:

but it is all for our good.

He doth not *willingly* afflict the children of men, but He sometimes afflicts them *necessarily*, and behind the rod, the correction, and the affliction there is the love of Deity.

Eliphaz the Temanite was right when he reminded Job that the Lord made sore only that He might bind up; and that He wounded only that His hands might make whole (Job v. 18). The Lord frequently stirs up our nest; upsets our calculations; frustrates our plans, only that He might "leave a blessing behind Him," and so which ever way we may consider the divine dispensations to usward who believe, we find that "*all things* work together for good to them that love God."

CHAPTER III.

HAVING examined this remarkable verse in various ways, we will now look at a few incidents recorded in Scripture, some comparatively small and some on a larger scale,* and endeavour to see in them the overruling hand of an all-wise and ever-gracious God.

1. Aquila and Priscilla.

The first mention of these two devoted servants of God is in Acts xviii. 1-3. By occupation they were tent-makers, and for some time they had been residing in the world's capital. It is quite safe to assume that, whilst in Rome, they were fairly successful in their craft; as a large number of tents were undoubtedly used by the Roman soldiers. It is, moreover, quite within the realms of possibility that they had made definite plans for the further development of their business as well as for their

*For those on a larger scale, see Part II.

future generally. Suddenly, however, all their arrangements were completely overthrown by a cruel edict on the part of the unscrupulous Emperor Claudius, that all Jews should depart from Rome. Consequently, Aquila and his wife were compelled to seek a home elsewhere, and the place they decided upon was Corinth. No doubt they were at a complete loss to understand why they should be called upon to suffer such inconvenience, but *God was behind the scenes*, planning all things for their blessing.

The apostle Paul had left Athens, and came to Corinth where he found Aquila and Priscilla. Being himself a tent-maker, an amicable arrangement was made whereby they occupied the same house together, with the result there was inaugurated a friendship which was not only never to be dissolved, but which was to be cemented as days advanced. How Aquila and his helpmeet endeared themselves to the apostle can be estimated by a careful examination of Romans xvi. 3, 4; whilst, on the other hand, we can easily imagine what an inestimable help and comfort the apostle was to them. Thus we see that an apparent catastrophe eventuated in *untold blessing*.

2. Philemon.

In the shortest Pauline epistle we have on record, Philemon is mentioned as a beloved brother and fellow-labourer, implying that his life was as consistent as his profession. Some time previous to the writing of this letter, Philemon had taken into his home a slave, named Onesimus, and had doubtless shewn the kindness of God unto him with the ultimate object of winning the dear fellow for Christ. This undertaking, however, did not develop as Philemon wished. Instead of manifesting any desire God-ward, Onesimus cruelly robbed his benefactor and fled to Rome. At the time this most unfortunate event happened Philemon perhaps wondered why God allowed such an untoward circumstance to take place, little knowing what a remarkable sequel would transpire.

Whilst in Rome, Onesimus heard the Gospel from Paul's lips and was gloriously converted. Let us endeavour to depict the subsequent unfoldings of this extraordinary incident. Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon with the message, "*Receive him as myself*" (that is, "reckon to him my merit"), followed by the further injunction, "*If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account*" (that is, "reckon to me his demerit"). Philemon, therefore, had the supreme joy of welcoming Onesimus into his home for the second time, not now as a servant, but infinitely above a servant, *a brother beloved*, and, as the name implies, *profitable*. In view of all this the significant words in verse 15

should be carefully noted—"For perhaps he departed from thee for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever." This exquisitely beautiful statement clearly suggests that the hand of God could be seen bringing abiding good out of a temporary disaster.

Onesimus departed *for a season* as a slave and a thief, that Philemon might have the joy of receiving him *for ever* as a devoted brother in Christ. This does not mean that God was responsible for the misdemeanour of Onesimus, but rather that He graciously overruled the event to the eternal blessing of both master and slave.

3. The Apostle Paul.

The apostle's life was exemplary, so much, so that he was able to exhort his fellow-believers to follow him as he followed Christ. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the influence he exercised, the testimony he bore, the truths he enunciated, the letters he wrote. Christ was the mainspring as well as the main theme of the whole of his heavenly career. Wherever he went he carried with him a reflection of his Saviour. He lived a life of beautiful unselfishness, always thinking of others and seeking their highest welfare. He placed himself at the disposal of his fellow-saints, praying for them, instructing them, pleading with them, exhorting them, loving them as only one could love them who himself was constrained by the mighty love of Christ, seeking by all legitimate means to lift them on to a higher plane of spiritual experience.

Toward the close of his life's journey, Paul was unceremoniously placed in a Roman prison, greatly to the joy of his enemies who thought that in this way his lips would be practically sealed, his influence curtailed, his power to spread the Gospel of Christ reduced to a minimum. As a matter of fact his incarceration had exactly the opposite effect, so that he could write to his beloved Philippians and tell them the joyful news that the things which happened unto him *turned out rather unto the advancement of the glad tidings*. This advancement of the Gospel was effected in many ways, of which we will quote three, evidencing as they do the fact that, behind the cruel machinations of the enemy, God was working out His own eternal designs. 1. *His bonds in Christ were manifest in all the prætorium, and in all other places*. His enemies little expected such an outcome as this. Many of Caesar's soldiers and servants became monuments of divine grace, and this accounts for the magnificent Apostolic greeting in Philippians iv. 22. 2. *The Gospel was preached with greater boldness than*

previously. God's servant was bound, but God's Word was *boundless*, and many of the brethren in the Lord increased in confidence through Paul's bonds and were enabled to proclaim the Gospel the more fearlessly. 3. *Five of the most beautiful of the Pauline epistles were written during the apostle's imprisonment,* and when we read and study the wonderful and sublime teaching of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and 2 Timothy, we do well to remember that these letters emanated from a Roman prison. It is, therefore, gloriously possible for us to thank God that His beloved servant had the honour of being "an ambassador in a chain" (Eph. vi. 20), seeing that "all things worked together for good" not only to the great apostle himself, but also through him to his fellow-saints who were then living, as well as to those who have since believed.

4. The Apostle John.

John is designated "the disciple whom Jesus loved" no less than five times (reminding us of Benjamin's portion). He enjoyed a great measure of the Lord's confidence; he leaned on the Saviour's breast at supper time; he wrote the fourth Gospel, in which so many of us revel. Like his namesake the Baptist, he was "a burning and a shining light," and because of his loyalty to the Word of God, coupled with his unflinching testimony for Christ, he was cruelly banished to the lonely isle of Patmos, where he was separated from his friends and from the outside world. What an unfortunate catastrophe! What a sudden curtailment of a life so eminently useful! Yet here again we see God working in His own peculiar way. John's enemies happily overlooked the fact that although they succeeded in separating him from his earthly friends, they could not separate him from THE FRIEND which sticketh closer than a brother.

One of the most remarkable portions of literature in the world is the last book in the Bible, where the curtain separating time from eternity is withdrawn, and where the future is unfolded as nowhere else in Scripture. Where was the book of the Revelation written? Where were all those unique and wonderful visions imparted to God's servant? ON THE ISLE CALLED PATMOS, whither the apostle of love was banished "for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Yes, my beloved fellow-believer, what was true in those far-off apostolic days is equally true in our day, "*All things* work together for good to them that love God."

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