

MEN'S LIFE BLOOMINGTON & GOD @ WORK

Tuesday, September 13, 2016

There is a Positive for *Every* Negative

Romans 8:28; Philippians 1:12-14; Romans 5:3-4

Definition: When we think about the promise that God works everything for good we tend to think of the big challenges we face. But the promise covers everything... even the small things. How would your life change if you looked at *every* negative thing as something that could bring a positive?

Segment Questions:

- What stands out most to you in the Philippians 1:12-14 scripture?

Have you ever been in a situation where you were being “persecuted” in some form for standing up for Christ? What were the negative or positive results?

- In the past, has Romans 8:28 been a meaningful scripture to you personally. If so, how and why; or why not?

Note that this scripture says “...God works for the good of ***those that love God and are called according to His purpose.*** Who do you think that includes and excludes, and what are the implications of that?”

- In regard to Roman’s 5:3-4, what are your thoughts about the suggestion that this passage could apply broadly to even “small sufferings,” like those described?

Note that Paul doesn’t just say that our character can be strengthened through suffering. He professes that by saying, “but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because....” How and why is “rejoicing” important in this context?

Action Questions:

- Take a minute to just think about how this lesson might apply in the area of “forgiveness.” What comes to mind?
- Has this lesson and this axiom given you a different perspective on anything in particular?
- Are there any specific ways that you want to apply any new perspective to your life?

For many years, Romans 8:28 has been one of my favorite scriptures. In it Paul writes, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose." From this scripture I have often found encouragement and reassurance by believing that God can bring something good out of the bad things that happen in our lives. We all need that encouragement, because no matter how amazingly blessed we are, we all encounter difficulties, heart breaks, tragedy and challenges.

You may recall specific situations in your life where you have seen good things that have come from extremely difficult and trying situations. Have you ever recognized them as situations that God has used for your good? My guess is that most of the situations that came to mind were related to fairly significant events, and that the examples that you can recall might be somewhat few in number. As I was thinking about this verse recently, I realized that it applies to much more than major trials of our life.

This scripture says "***in all things*** God works for the good..." It does not say "sometimes;" it does not say "God can;" and it does not say in "tragic or difficult times." It says "***in all things***." That means nothing is excluded from God actually using it for good in our lives. To me, that realization means that *nothing bad can happen to me that God will not use for my good*. Transformed into an axiom, that became "There is a Positive for Every Negative." Could that really be true?

God gives us many examples of that principle in scripture. When the apostle Paul was in prison, he wrote in Philippians 1:12-14, "... what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."

While this example shows the good that comes from an extremely bad event, Paul provides a different illustration in Romans 5:3-4 when he says, "...but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." Doesn't everything that happens "bad" to us produce a form of suffering within us? Can't this apply to small "sufferings," like a sharp word from a spouse; being treated unfairly; being cheated by someone; or just being cut off by another driver? Isn't Paul saying that all bad things that happen to us should cause us to grow in our character or benefit us in some way?

The obvious message in this passage is that God uses the negative things in our lives in positive ways. However, He can accomplish this most easily, and effectively, if *we recognize* what is happening, and consciously choose to react in a way that honors Christ. What if we developed an awareness that virtually every contact and situation in our life offers the potential to further conform us to the nature of Christ. What if we recognized that indeed *every* negative thing that happened to us during a day could indeed be a positive for us? What if we lived a life where we saw and believed that "There is a Positive for Every Negative" Would our attitude change? Would we react to others differently?

By expecting that God will bring some good out of every negative we experience, I believe we are effectively inviting God to help us change. We are voluntarily participating with Him as He works for good in our life. When we are open and willing partners in the work God is doing in us, His work is easier, and we are truly transformed. I believe that God would say that for His children, those who love Him and are called according to His purpose, that He indeed intends "**There is a Positive for Every Negative.**" Let's live that way!