

THE FAVORITE TEXT OF FAMOUS PEOPLE - Pat Boone
“What To Do When Difficulties Dare and Impossibilities Defy”
Dr. John Allan Lavender
Rom. 8:28

While the late Stanley Baldwin was Prime Minister of Great Britain, he made this cogent comment,

“The Bible is a high explosive. It works in strange ways. No living man can tell, or know, how that book, in its journey through the world, has startled the individual soul in ten thousand different places, to a new life, a new belief, a new concept, and a new faith.”

I don't suppose there is any one verse in the Bible which more clearly supports the Prime Minister's claim than that which is the favorite text of a young man who has become the idol and ideal of millions of people, both young and old.

Pat Boone has enjoyed a spectacular rise in the entertainment field. He has received most, if not all, of the significant awards that can come to someone in his profession. But he is best known and rightly so, for the clarity and cleanness of his Christian character.

Pat Boone is not an entertainer who happens to be a Christian. He is a Christian who happens to be an entertainer! The depth and sincerity of his commitment to Christ is an encouragement to many, and a challenge to all. But let me read Pat's letter,

“Dear Dr. Lavender,

I am glad that you would think of me in your list of lessons concerning favorite texts from the scripture, and am happy to comment further on Romans 8:28. I believe Mack Craig has already suggested this text to you, since he knew it was a favorite with me. There are many reasons why Romans 8:28 is a real favorite of mine. I have seen this truth put

to the test time and time again in my own life, and it has never failed.
God has been very good to me, and his goodness has been demonstrated
many times out of very trying experiences. I certainly hope your lesson
will be of help to those who hear it. And I am most grateful to you for
including me in the presentation.
Sincerely yours,
Pat Boone.”

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called
according to his purpose.”

Here indeed is a high explosive! Here is power to pry us loose from the tenacious tentacles of
tribulation. Here is energy to elevate us out of the doldrums of despondency and despair. Here is
the strength to square our shoulders, lift our heads and face adversity with courage, competence
and composure.

“For we know that all things work together for good to them that love
God to them who are called according to his purpose.”

For We Know

Who knows? We know! You and I, we who are the children of God. One of the special
privileges of being a Christian is that in these fear haunted days, when life has gotten far too big
for far too many, we who name the name of Jesus can know with calm and sweet assurance that
“all things work together for good.”

It is not the prerogative of all people to be able to say with confidence, “We know.” In fact, our
time has been tagged the age of anxiety because, for the most part, people don’t know. They
stand helpless and abashed, their little ones and loved ones huddled about them, wondering what’s
going to happen next. In case after case, they’ve found the promises and plans of people to be
either empty or erroneous, and they are seized, sometimes, by a fear that borders on paralysis.

Not so with the informed Christian. The one who has taken time to total up the assets which are his in Christ. The born again believer knows that teamed up with God he cannot be stymied, or nonplused, or overcome. He knows that while difficulties dare, and impossibilities defy, he has a God who can, and will, take these things and actually use them for his good.

This is not easy optimism. There is nothing in the operation of the universe to support the assumption that some happy coincidence will somehow cause everything to automatically work for good. As a matter of fact, the very opposite is true. The universe is cold and barren. Its movements are mechanical. Its laws are impersonal. At the same moment you and I may stand on this side of the earth gazing up at a star studded sky, some poor soul on the other side of the globe may be cowering before the fury of a hurricane, or an earthquake which has left a horrid harvest of devastation in its wake. No, there's nothing in the operation of the universe to support the hope that some happy coincidence will turn evil into good.

But, and this is vitally important, there *is* something in the constitution of the Christian to support that view! In the midst of anxiety and uncertainty, he can look at that which is coming to pass upon the earth and say with a sense of serene sureness, “*We* know! We *know* that all things work together for good.”

A man who was trying to explain something to a stranger who didn't seem to understand, said in exasperation, “But, sir, it's as plain as ABC.” To which a third person who was standing by replied, “Yes, but the man you're talking to is DEF.”

It's impossible, you see, for anyone to find sense and meaning out of the experiences of life as long as he is deaf to the inner ear through which God gives light and leading. The reason a child of God knows all things ultimately work together for his benefit, is because his life is linked to the divine purpose of One who holds the whole world in his hands.

The Christian has a God who, in turn, has a purpose. A purpose which is operative in this world

right now. By working *with* that purpose, a child of God can enjoy such mastery over life he or she can actually see evil transformed into good.

Let's be clear on one thing, however, our text does not say all things are good. Obviously, that isn't so. There are many things which are clearly evil. The Christian does not stick his head in the sand ostrichlike, and pretend life's problems do not exist. He does not make a sentimental assertion that things are not really evil, they only *seem* to be so. No! The Christian looks heartache and heartbreak straight in the eye and calls them what they are.

The Bible does *not* say all things are good. It *does* say all things will be made, by God, to work together for good to those who are his own. The Bible *does* assert that, in his plan and purpose, all things will ultimately find their place on the positive side of the believing Christian's ledger.

Further along, in the great eighth chapter of Romans, Paul gives us a list of things which come under this “all” God has promised to work together for the Christian's good. Look at verse 38 and 39,

“For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

If all these things can be made to work together for our benefit, then we, indeed, worship a God whose providence is absolutely limitless, for there is no experience common to man but such as is mentioned here.

Death

To begin with, there is death, and there is no question but that it is the most formidable of man's foes. Viewed by itself, death is, as Dr. George Gordon says, “The supreme sarcasm of life.”

But, you see, a Christian cannot view death by itself! He cannot think of the empty cross, apart

from the empty tomb. The two are one.

That’s why there is no “wailing wall” in the Christian faith. *We* know, and there’s that stubborn assurance again, we *know* even death can work together for the good of God’s children, and we join Paul in his matchless phrase, “To live is Christ, to die is gain.”

E. Stanley Jones tells of a friend who was asked to conduct a funeral. He was the leading layman of a little country church which didn’t have a pastor. He had never conducted a funeral, and didn’t know how it was done. So he turned to the New Testament to see how Jesus did it. To his amazement he discovered , in “Brother Stanley’s” words,

“Jesus didn’t conduct funerals. He conducted resurrections.”

Jesus turned every funeral he ever attended into a resurrection party. And then, to top it off, when he died, he took his cross and used it as a battering ram to break open the backend of the grave, so those who were yet to die in him might march *through* the door of death into the glory of eternal morning. Yes, even death, or should I say especially death, will work for good to those who love God.

Life

And then, Paul speaks of life. I’m thinking of this just now as being synonymous with the downward drag of the declining years. There’s no question but that young people need Christ. But let’s not forget that older people need him, too.

The tireless twenties and fiery forties soon give way to the slacking seventies and the aching eighties. There are many who look at the declining years with a sense of dread. They fear the prospect of decreasing activity and responsibility. But thanks be to God, even old age with its drains and downward drags can be turned into good. By the grace of Christ, the child of God can make his golden years a triumph, instead of a tragedy.

Old uncle Eben Jones gave evidence of having made that discovery when he applied for a life

insurance policy. The salesman took one look and said,

“Why, uncle, you’re too old for us to take the risk. How old are you anyway?”

“Ninety-seven come next August,” said the old man, adding testily, “and if you folks will take the trouble to look up your statistics, you’ll find that mighty few men die after they’re 97!”

Well, as someone has said, youth is not a time of life, it’s a state of mind. The declining years can be a triumph instead of a tragedy, *if*, in cooperation with the God of all things, we let him take our life and do with it as he will.

A lovely old Quaker lady who, at the age of 82, had as beautiful a face as you’ll ever see, said,

“I’m going to live till I die, and then I’m going to live forever.”

Is that possible? Absolutely. For the Christian knows that *all* things, including the declining years of life, *and what comes after*, can be made to work together for good to them that love God.

Angels

But, on with Paul’s list.

“I am persuaded, I am sure, I *know*, that neither death, nor life, nor angels . . .”

Angels? Yes. But what are they?

The Bible uses the word to define and describe a variety of things, but in this instance the word means “messengers.” Since they’re found among this list of negativism, Paul must have those “messengers of mischief and meanness,” those false friends who let us down and leave us stunned by the sickness of disillusionment. And my! How deeply disillusionment can hurt us. How dreadfully false friends can let us down.

A little boy who was spending his first summer away from home at camp wrote a letter to his parents.

“Dear Mom and Dad,

We went on a trip yesterday. It was a mountain climbing trip.

It was fun, except we climbed the wrong mountain.”

All of us have that trouble at times. We listen to the wrong people. We set our sights on the wrong goals. We pattern our lives after the wrong standard. We climb the wrong mountain, and we wake up disillusioned.

But in the midst of our disillusionment, we can make a great discovery. We can discover Jesus, a friend that sticketh closer than a brother, and will never let us down. We can learn to say with Florence White Willet,

“I thank God for the friends who failed to fill my heart’s deep need.

They’ve driven me to the Savior’s feet, upon his love to feed.”

The messengers of mischief may deprive us temporarily of our peace of mind, but they cannot keep us down for long. For *we* know that all things, even angels, work together for good to them that love God.

Principalities And Powers

“Nor principalities, nor powers.”

Have you ever had a day when everything went wrong? When it seemed as if the heavens were made of brass? When you felt you had been deserted, because no matter where you turned, you met nothing but delay? You were struggling against what Paul calls, “principalities and powers.”

Those forces of darkness which Satan himself has devised to test your Christian character, and to pull you down. But even these red tape entanglements, and delaying tactics, can be turned to good, if you let Jesus take over your life.

Delay need not always be denial. Disappointment sometimes turns out to be his appointment! A period of set-apart-ness when, through the discipline of delay, you are taught the power and perception of patience, and are made stronger and wiser than you were before. Yes, even the delays which make it seem the whole world is against you, can work together for your good.

Things Present

And then, Paul speaks of “things present.” The list of these is endless, but let me mention just a few. Discouragement. Difficulty. Disaster. Disease. But, however long the list, even these can accrue to your benefit and blessing when confronted in the power of the living Christ.

Norman Vincent Peale is without doubt the most influential pastor of this generation. And yet, during the early years of his ministry, he suffered from a near nervous breakdown. For a time he lived in such a terrifying wilderness he had to leave his church, and travel to Europe in an attempt to regain his health.

But through that wilderness wandering, he made a great discovery. He found God as a living and never failing presence. Drawing upon the compassion and understanding which had come to him through his own midnight of the soul, he wrote, The Power Of Positive Thinking, a book which has been a boon and blessing to millions. A book he could never have written apart from his illness. Yes, even such hard “things present” as discouragement, difficulty, disappointment, disaster and disease, can work together for good to them that love God.

Things To Come

Then there are those “things to come.” These are those uncertainties about the future which hang out there, just beyond our grasp, and cause us to doubt sometimes, because there is so little we can do about them.

Somewhere I remember reading a reference to Hannibal, the great warrior. One day he learned, to his dismay, that in crossing the Alps he had literally marched off the map. That is to say, he had gone farther than the charts he was following said he could go. He was standing on ground which apparently did not exist. Instead of feeding his fears by turning back, he marched on and had the joy of seeing doubts give way to discovery.

All of us have had experiences like that. All of us have confronted situations which were new to

us and, as it were, force us off the map. But we can be a match for these “things to come,” if we meet them in the name of him who works all things together for good.

“I know not if tomorrow’s way
Is steep or rough,
But when his hand is guiding me
That is enough.
And so, although the veil has hid
Tomorrow’s way,
I walk in perfect faith and trust
Through each today.

The love of God has hung a veil
Around tomorrow,
That we may not its beauty see,
Nor trouble borrow.
But oh, ‘tis sweeter far to trust
His unseen hand,
And know that all the paths of life
His wisdom planned.”

Nor Height, Nor Depth

Then Paul declares both “height and depth” -- those mountains of distinction and valleys of defeat -- can work together for our good.

Many people who know how to handle defeat. Perhaps it’s because they’ve had to face it so often, and they’ve learned how to be good losers. There are some who know how to handle success, although not many, for success is much more difficult to handle than defeat.

Few, indeed, are those who know how to handle both success *and* failure equally well. But the

glory of the gospel is that when we turn our lives over to the God who doeth all things well, he takes both the mountains of glory and the valleys of gloom, and weaves them into the warp and woof of life, so whatever comes, height *or* depth, distinction *or* defeat, it is for our good.

Nor Any Other Creature

Last, but not least, Paul draws a gigantic circle around everything else, and concludes his list of “all things” God has promised to work together for our good, with the words,

“Nor any other creature.”

Literally nothing, nothing that *is*, nothing that *has been*, nothing that *shall be*, absolutely *nothing* can touch you, except for good.

For we know that *nothing* -- death, the declining years, disillusionment, delay, difficulties, discouragement, disappointments, disaster, disease, doubt, distinction, defeat *and any other creature* -- can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

“For *we* know that all things . . . *all things* . . . all things work together for good to them that love God.” Excuse me, but hallelujah!

To Them That Love The Lord

Which leads to *our* involvement in this great text, for first and foremost among our concerns must be loving God. Loving him, not for what he does, but for what he is. Loving him for himself alone. Loving him with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Loving him in the sense of actually enjoying the privilege of his presence.

When we love him in that way, when we know him intimately, we will know his will intuitively.

We will have the Christian’s confidence that whatever confronts us --

“death, life, angels, principalities, things present, things to come, powers,

height, depth or any other creature” --

we will ultimately gain the victory. “For *we* know that all things work together for good to them

that love God.”

There was a terrible shipwreck out in the south seas. The only survivor, after clinging to a bit of wreckage, was finally thrown up on an uninhabited island. He managed to build a rude hut in which he placed the little “all” he had saved from the sinking ship. Each day he thanked God for the gift of life, and prayed that if it be God’s will, he would be delivered. Then, rising from his knees, he would scan the horizon for the sight of some ship that might be passing by.

One day, upon returning from a hunt for food, he was horrified to find his little hut in flames. Everything he had was gone. To the man’s limited vision it was the worst that could have happened. In a moment of despondency he dropped to his knees and cried out as did the Lord Jesus, “God, why have you forsaken me?” As he knelt there, tears racing down his cheeks, a strange thing happened. The burden lifted. His soul began to sing. In the very midst of the smouldering ruins he found himself praising God for his goodness.

There’s no way of knowing how long he prayed, but when he arose from his knees, he looked out to sea as was his custom, and something on the horizon caught his eye. He rubbed his eyes to be sure he wasn’t seeing things. No, there on the horizon, was a ship, and it was heading his way. When he had been lifted on board, he asked them how they had found him. The captain answered, “Why, sir, we saw your smoke signal!”