

God Is In Control Working Everything For Good

Life is strange. Sometimes we wonder if God is in control. Everything can be going along just great and then from out of nowhere disaster strikes. We are knocked down sometimes with a single blow, sometimes with repeated blows which come so quickly we don't have time to react. Before we know it the life problems can leave us lying, wounded and bleeding, in the ditch. If God is in control why do bad things happen to good people? Does God really care.

Problems of all sizes and degrees happen to everyone. Are they just unfortunate things which must be endured or can they work for our good? How much is God in control? In Rom. 8:28 we find a famous verse which a lot of Christians know by heart. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" [NAS]. Can all our problems and disasters really work out for the best? That seems pretty incredible!

We should note from the beginning, this verse is talking about Christians. Unbelievers have no claim to this promise until they accept Jesus as the Lord of their lives. Negative things may work out for good in their lives, especially if faced with a positive attitude, but there is no guarantee. God is in control but His promise of working good out of problems applies to His own children.

Before we examine how this works in our personal lives, let's take a brief look at the lives of some Biblical men and women. Did God work good out of tragedy in their lives? Was God in control when their lives spiraled in hurt and confusion?

Moses was a man who knew the will of God. He knew God wanted Israel delivered from slavery, and he knew God had called him to do it. However, as a young man of 40, he decided to help God and killed an Egyptian. He ended up fleeing for his life. So much for his dream of being a great deliverer. For the next 40 years he was hiding in the wilderness as a shepherd - a job his Egyptian training would have loathed. Had his over-anxiousness foiled the purposes of God? Was God in control?

God did not forsake Moses. Whether Moses knew it or not, he was learning vital lessons in the wilderness. Although Moses didn't believe it, when God called to him from the burning bush, he was ready for the job. The 40 "wasted" years in the wilderness were a necessary part of God's plan. God was in control.

Daniel was a young man when war came to his country. Violently he was torn from his parents, friends, and nation. He was taken to a strange land where he was tempted to compromise his faith and was trained in heathen culture. His life would never be the same. Whatever dreams he had had were gone forever. And yet out of a lonely, young man's tears, was God in control? Over the years Daniel became a top man in the land. He was able to advise different world rulers and influence the course of history. More importantly, he developed a close, intimate relationship with God.

What about Ruth? After about ten years of marriage her husband died. The man of her dreams was suddenly gone. Not only that but also she was left a poor widow. How could she survive? In those days a single woman couldn't just go out and apply for a job and there was no welfare office. She was totally helpless. Still, in spite of the grief and pain, she decided to go to a strange country with her mother-in-law and commit herself to the God of Israel. Was God in control? He gave her a new [and wealthy] husband. She also became one of the ancestors of Jesus. And she was honored by having her story told in the Holy Word of God. None of this would have been possible if not for the first tragedy. Naomi was likewise blessed with a daughter-in-law like Ruth and the joy of grandchildren even though she had lost her husband and her two sons.

We don't know how old Esther was when she lost her parents but she was raised by her uncle, Mordecai. When the king decided to take a new queen, because he was angry with the old one, Esther was one of many girls taken to the palace. Gone was any hope of a normal marriage to a man of her own race and beliefs. Instead, when she was chosen Queen, she became the wife of a man who would not only never be sexually faithful to her alone, but who could also order her death anytime she displeased him. Talk about having one's dreams dashed and living under constant pressure! But was God in control? God gave Esther favor in the sight of the king and he treated her well. She was then in the right position to rescue her people, Israel, from total destruction. If not for the tragedies and disappointments of earlier life, none of this could have happened.

One more example and we'll move on. Joseph was a young man when his own brothers sold him as a slave. He was violently ripped from his beloved father and home. All his dreams of the future were destroyed. In Egypt God blessed him and he rose to be the head slave in house of a wealthy man. And then disaster strikes again! He is falsely accused of rape and thrown into the dungeon. For thirteen long years he was either a slave or in prison. Was God in control? In God's timing Joseph rose to be second-in-command of all Egypt and saved many people from starvation.

When we come face-to-face with the problems, disasters, and tragedies of life, we need to remember God IS in control. Our lives are in His hand. If we are walking in fellowship with Him, then nothing can touch us unless it is allowed by God for our good.

God does not rescue us from the 'facts of life.' We face the same problems everyone else faces plus the fact that the Satanic realm would love to get its grimy paws on us. Even when evil people deliberately hurt us, God is in control. He doesn't always stop it but He takes what they mean for our harm and turns it around for our benefit.

Joseph said to his brothers in Ge. 50:20: "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive" [NAS]. Notice, they pre-mediated evil against Joseph, and God allowed them to carry out their plans. But God took their plans, turned them around, and worked good out of it. Even when we find ourselves victims of people who are out to hurt us in every possible way, God will take their plans and work them out to our benefit.

Sometimes what we see as a defeat is actually a victory. We need to remember the spiritual realm is more important and permanent than the physical realm. If we can face problems and tragedies and not be shaken in our faith in the goodness of God, we have won a major victory. As in Job's case, Satan sometimes tries to prove we only love God for what He does for us. If when we suffer we can still love and praise God, Satan receives a major embarrassment/defeat and we have grown closer to God.

Does this mean we enjoy our troubles? Not really. We can rejoice at the good we know will come of it, but when something hurts, it hurts! We don't like the problems or tragedies of life, but we face them knowing God is in control and we will come out on the top in the end. We may have to wait until heaven before we understand how it worked for good. In most cases, I believe, we will see in our lifetime, how it worked for good, although we may have to wait a long while.

Some Christians have become afraid of making a "negative confession" and so are afraid to admit when they are hurting. There is no point in denying when unpleasant things happen to us. Denying something doesn't change it. We can be free to admit when we are hurting and receive help and encouragement from others. No one said we had to go it alone. It is important that we remember even when we are hurting that in some way, God will work good. That is trust. That is realizing that pain has purpose - it is not wasted. Trust doesn't happen overnight. It is built one brick at a time.

Another point of confusion is that when something bad happens, do I thank God or rebuke the Devil? As stated above, when we walk with God, everything which happens is allowed by God for our good and His glory. We have to start with this premise. Even though Satan was

personally wreaking havoc in Job's life, Job did not blame Satan. He took his case before the throne of God.

Do we then passively accept everything that happens to us? After all, if God allowed it then we should just mildly bear it for Him, right? Wrong! Nothing could be further from the truth. We start with the realization this negative experience is allowed by God for our good. It is going to be, if we handle it properly, a growing experience. God allowed David to face Goliath but if David had sat down and passively accepted it, he would have been killed. Goliath was permitted by God to enter David's life but David had to rise up and in the Spirit of God conquer him. [There are some cases, like Job, where there is nothing we can do. Then we take to God and leave it in trust with Him.]

Just because God allowed something into our lives doesn't mean He wants us to stand by and be crushed by it. If we properly handle difficult situations we will come out better on the other side. Also, there is nothing wrong about talking to God about it. Paul did this with his "thorn in the flesh." Jesus pleaded in the garden to escape the torment He knew was coming. In both these cases God had to answer "no" to their requests and they went on to face what was set before them. But sometimes, when we come before Him, God will answer "yes." It is certainly NOT a sin to ask Him. We have to be willing to accept the answer whatever it may be.

From the beginning we have said that if we are walking with God, then God is in control and He will work good out of it. What if we are walking in a way that is not pleasing to God? Will He still work good out of it? Basically I believe the answer is "yes," although, if we continue with a rebellious heart we may not benefit from the good God wants to bring us. God loves us so much that when we walk away from Him, He will do whatever is necessary to motivate us back to Him. Only when we are in intimate fellowship with God can we be truly happy and satisfied.

One of the many kinds of problems we face is sickness. Sickness can illustrate many of the points we have made. If we become sick, as we are walking with God, we know God allowed it. We know it is not the general will of God for His people to be sick. So how do we handle it? First, we look for any obvious reasons God may have allowed it. Is it a result of sin? If we search our lives and find that it is, then we need to repent. If we find it is not a result of sin, then was the sickness allowed because we are not taking proper care of our bodies? Are we eating properly, getting enough sleep, etc.? Are we allowing our emotions to tear at our bodies through fear, worry, etc.? If so, then we need to get Godly counsel on how to change these destructive life patterns. In the above cases, when we change God may remove the sickness, or He may allow us to work out the consequences of our actions.

In some cases though, sickness does not come because of sin or mistreating the body. It comes as a Goliath which must be defeated. We fight this giant through faith in the goodness of God, prayer for healing, going to the doctor, taking medicine, etc. In short, we use whatever means God has placed at our disposal. Whatever the results may be, as we meet it in the power of God, God will take it and turn it around for good. All this can be applied to any specific problem.

We do serve a good God. He is in control. It is our unswerving faith in the goodness of God which will pull us through experiences which would crush others. God is in control and He never loses control. We cannot see the future but God sees it as surely as He sees the present and the past. As we face the problems and difficulties of life in the Spirit of God we will be gaining eternal benefits.

"This is the reason why we never lose heart. The outward man does indeed suffer wear and tear, but every day the inward man receives fresh strength. These little troubles...are winning for us a permanent, glorious and solid reward out of all proportion to our pain. For we are looking all the time not at the visible things but at the invisible [2 Cor. 4:16,17, Phillips].

Important warning: People who are going through tragedies and tough times do not need a lecture from well-meaning friends on the goodness of God. If they don't know it, they will discover it in time. What they do need is support, understanding, encouragement, and help. Remember, God did not have anything good to say about Job's well-meaning but condemning friends.