

The Safety and Security of the Christian

by Robert Milligan

The Christian's safety and security are based on their relationship with God, and all things will work together for their good.

Scripture: Matthew 25:31, John 14:15, Romans 8:28, Romans 8:31, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Ephesians 1:3, Hebrews 12:6, 2 Peter 1:5, Revelation 14:6

Topics: "Eternal Security", "Divine Sovereignty"

Description

Robert Milligan preaches about the assurance that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, emphasizing that even in the face of trials and afflictions, God's plan for His children is secure and cannot be thwarted. The sermon delves into the concept of unconditional election and reprobation, clarifying that God's decrees of security and final triumph are based on individuals loving God, with obedience being the test of true love and faith. The sermon encourages believers to endure patiently through suffering, drawing strength from the promises of God and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, highlighting that God's ultimate plan for His children is one of eternal well-being and glory.

Transcript

"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."--ROMANS viii: 28.

T is a question which, I suppose, is likely to occur sometimes, even to the most pious, whether the Christian, having done all that he possibly can do to inherit eternal life, will certainly enjoy it; or whether he may not, like many a poor, unfortunate adventurer in the affairs of earth, be finally and for ever disappointed.

It seems to me that this question is very clearly and definitely answered in the words of my text. For, if all things work together for his good, then surely the possibility of his failure and final disappointment is utterly out of the question.

True, indeed, the child of God, during his present state of trial and discipline, may, like other men, be subjected to many severe afflictions, temptations, and privations. Like Job, he may have to suffer the loss of all his property. He may lose his friends. And even his very life may be sacrificed by the diabolical hate and malice of his enemies. But, the Bible being true, all these temporal [371] losses will result in his

eternal gain. For while God rules the universe, all things must and will work together for the good of those that love him. These light afflictions, which are but momentary, must serve to work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor. iv: 17), so that no absolute evil can ever befall any one of them.

And the reason of this is, that God has so ordained it. Christianity is not an experiment. God is not a man, that he should make experiments. Our knowledge is limited; and hence it follows, of necessity, that our schemes of government, finance, education, and internal, as well as external improvements, are all the result of many experiments. But God makes no experiments. "Known unto him are all his works from eternity." (Acts xv: 18.) He knows not only what is, and what certainly will be; but he also knows what would result from any and every conceivable change of circumstances. (Deut. xxviii: and 1 Sam. xxiii: 10-12.) And hence it follows, that every thing pertaining to the scheme of Redemption was well understood, and clearly defined and arranged in the Divine mind, before the foundations of the earth were laid. Before the morning-stars sang together, and the Sons of God shouted for joy, God perfectly understood who would, in the course of future ages, be disposed to love, serve, and obey him. And for the benefit of all such, he provided, in his remedial plan and purpose, every thing that was necessary in order to their being called, and justified, and sanctified, and glorified. (Rom. viii: 29, 30, and Eph. i: 3-14.)

To some persons all this may seem very much like the old and, we hope, almost obsolete theory of unconditional election and reprobation. Indeed there is, perhaps, no passage in the whole Bible that has been more frequently quoted in [372] support of this doctrine than that which we have now under consideration. But, nevertheless, I am persuaded that a little calm and sober reflection will suffice to convince at least all honest doubters on this subject, that there is not, in this whole connection, the shadow of a foundation for such a hypothesis. For observe, these decrees of security and final triumph rest wholly on the assumption, that the persons to whom they refer shall have first become lovers of God. Take away this characteristic or moral attribute from any man, and the aforesaid decrees have no reference to him whatever. This is evident from both the text and the context. "And we know," says the apostle, "that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow," as about to become his humble, faithful, loving, and obedient children, "he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called," in his purpose; "and whom he called," in his purpose, "them he also," in like manner, "justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

Evidently, then, these decrees and assurances have reference only to the lovers of God. But we all know that love can not be the result of any arbitrary decree or enactment. All the decrees of heaven and earth can not make any man constituted as he is, love that which is unlovely, or which he is not disposed to love. We love that in which we perceive the attributes of loveliness. And hence it is said, "We love God, because he first loved us." (1 John iv: 19.) And when love is thus generated in our hearts, it leads us to a perfect and unreserved obedience. For "love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans xiii: 10.) [373] And as long as we love God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds, and strength, and do his commandments, so long God is faithful, and will not allow any absolute evil to befall any one of us.

All this, then, is very plain, and simple, and rational. The argument of the apostle, in this case, is just such a one as you would severally employ, if you were endeavoring to persuade your friends and relatives of other lands to become citizens of this Republic. In such a case, you would, of course, say much about the fertility of our soil, the salubrity of our climate, the vast resources of our country, the enterprise,

intelligence, and moral character of our citizens. But you would dwell particularly, and with special emphasis, on the liberal provisions of our Constitution, on the chartered rights and privileges of every faithful American citizen. You would assure your friends that if they would renounce their allegiance to all other governments, and become citizens of these United States, that in that event, all the powers and resources of this vast and mighty Republic would then be pledged for their security and protection.

Now, suppose that your arguments should prevail, and that many of your friends should really leave their foreign homes, and become American citizens; would any one in his senses even imagine that there was any thing compulsory in the case? that this change of citizenship was owing to any decrees of necessity or fatality passed by the framers of our Constitution? Would any one suppose that these persons were deprived of their free agency, and made the mere tools and chattels of our Government? That their being once citizens of our Republic implies, of necessity, that they shall always remain so? that henceforth they have no power whatever to expatriate them [374] themselves; and that even if they should do so, our Government would still be under obligations to extend over them the shield of our Republic? that they could rightfully claim the honors and protection of our flag in a foreign land, even after they had renounced their allegiance to our Government, and become the sworn and naturalized citizens of another nation.? No one would so reason. No one would so imagine. The most that could be claimed for these persons, in any case, would be the protection of our Government so long as they remained in the relation of its faithful citizens and subjects.

And just so it is in the kingdom of heaven. There is nothing in its constitution, or its laws, or its administration, that in the slightest degree interferes with the personal liberty and voluntary agency of any man, whether he be a citizen or an alien. But, so long as he is loyal to its King, and faithful to its laws, all the powers and resources of the universe are pledged for his safety and security.

The object of the apostle, in this section of the epistle, is to encourage his Roman brethren to endure patiently their many trials, sufferings, and afflictions. For this purpose, he draws an argument; first, from the lightness and insignificance of these, their present tribulations, compared with the glory that is afterward to be revealed, and of which all who now suffer patiently for the sake of Christ, will be finally made partakers. His second argument is drawn from the assistance and consolations of the Holy Spirit. It lays hold of our burdens, helps our infirmities, and makes intercession for us, even by and through our inarticulate groanings; and finally, in the language of our text, and the following context, he calls the attention of the saints--to and for whom he is writing--to the [375] Constitution of the kingdom, and to the unbounded philanthropy and resources of their reigning Sovereign. He unrolls the volume of God's decrees; and there he finds it clearly and indubitably recorded, as the immutable purpose of Jehovah, that all the riches, and treasures, and resources of the universe shall be made tributary to the present and eternal well-being of his children, and that all things shall work together for their good, so that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, can ever really injure or separate from God's infinite love, the weakest and humblest saint that confides in him.

"In every condition, in sickness, in health,

In poverty's vail, or abounding in wealth;

At home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,

As their days may demand, so their succor shall be."

I am fully aware that we are slow of heart to believe these great and precious promises. We look out upon the world, and we see that the good, as well as the bad, are subject to heavy losses and severe afflictions. And hence, we are prone to become skeptical, and to say, with the practical atheist, that the government of the world is all a matter of chance; and that Dame Fortune is still, ever and anon, from her rolling pedestal, dispensing her gifts without regard to either the character or the destiny of mankind.

But this is all a delusion--a delusion that arises from a still more alarming and fundamental delusion. We are all, alas! too prone to look upon this world as our home; and upon its riches, and its honors, and its pleasures, as the portion of our souls; and hence we are, perhaps, all [376] too much inclined to estimate our fortunes and our happiness by our success in our efforts to accumulate these things for ourselves and for our children.

But the Scriptures teach us--and our own experience and observation teach us--that God himself is the only satisfying portion of the human soul; and that to attempt to fill it, or to satisfy it, with any thing else, is like attempting

"To fill the ocean with a drop,

To marry Immortality to Death;

And with the unsubstantial shades of time

To fill the embrace of all eternity!"

They teach us, moreover, that if we would enjoy God as the life and portion of our souls, we must be like him; we must become holy as he is holy. (Heb. xii: 14, and 1 Peter i: 16.) And hence, it follows that all of God's gifts to man are to be estimated in the ratio of their tendency to this end; that is, in proportion as they serve to bring us to God, to make us like him, and to unite us to him, as the only eternal and unwasting fountain of life and happiness. If the riches, and honors, and pleasures of the world have, in any case, such a tendency, they are a blessing to their possessor. But if they have the opposite tendency, if they serve to blind the understanding, and to draw away the heart from God, they are just so far a curse, and an occasion of evil.

Now, that they often have the latter tendency is, alas! but too evident to every man of observation and experience. All that we see, and all that we know of such matters, is but an impressive commentary on the words of our Savior, that a rich man, or a man devoted to the honors and pleasures of the world, can hardly enter into the [377] kingdom of God. (Matt. xix: 24; John v: 44.) And hence it follows that poverty may sometimes be better than riches; that the frowns of the world may be better than its honors; and that even sickness, and extreme suffering, and destitution of physical comforts, may be far greater blessings than an abundance of all things that minister to our sensual gratifications and animal enjoyments. (Luke xvi: 19-3 1-)

Suffering is a necessity, and, if you please, a terrible necessity, designed and ordained by God as a means of purifying our hearts, and of enabling us to overcome the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life. (Heb. xii: 6-11.) And hence, David could truthfully say: "It was good for me, that I was afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." (Psalm cxix: 71.) And hence, too, Paul could say, in behalf of all his Christian brethren: "We glory in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope." (Rom. v: 3, 4.)

But all these tribulations and afflictions are in the hand of God, and under his control, just as fully and as perfectly as are the means of our present physical comforts and enjoyments. "Is there evil," says he, "in the city, and the Lord has not done it?" (Amos iii: 6.) And again, he says to Cyrus: "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things." (Isa. xlv: 7.) And hence it is that he measures out to us, day by day, our necessary portion of discipline, as well as our necessary portion of food. He willfully grieves and afflicts no one; but, as our great and benevolent Educator, he simply directs, and governs, and controls all things, so as to make them work together for the good of his chosen. [378]

If any of my readers should ask how God accomplishes all this--how it is that he allows no absolute evil to befall any of his children--I must, in that event, plead ignorance. I can answer the question but in part. It is not to be expected that the finite should comprehend the infinite. It is not to be expected that such beings as we are, who live in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, should, in any case, or under any circumstances, comprehend the vast schemes, and purposes, and resources of Jehovah. Mystery is written on all the works and ways of God. It is seen in the heavens above us. It is seen in the earth beneath us. It is seen in our own constitution. It is seen on every page of the three great volumes of creation, providence, and redemption. Such themes, therefore, as the one proposed, are too high for us--too wonderful for us to comprehend perfectly.

The subject, however, is not entirely beyond our knowledge. We may all understand it in part: perhaps, indeed, as far as is necessary for our comfort and our happiness. Something very similar to it is seen in the care that every parent exercises over his children. Owing to their ignorance, inexperience, and waywardness, they are constantly exposed to danger, accidents, and harm. But their father loves them, and cares for them. His knowledge becomes their instructor; his experience, their monitor; his wisdom, their guide; and his power, their shield and protection. Now, we have only to suppose that the attributes, capacity, and resources of the father are infinite, and then, on this hypothesis, all is well with the children. Then, indeed, they will not only be saved from a thousand ills and misfortunes, but all things will also work together for their good, under the government and administration of such a guardian. [379]

But this supposition is fully realized in the Divine character and infinite resources of our heavenly Father. All the laws, and forces, and ordinances of nature are at his disposal; and, if these are not sufficient, he has but to command, and ten thousand times ten thousand angels are at once present to minister to the heirs of salvation. (Psalm xxxiv: 7; Matt. xviii: 10; Heb. i: 14.) And, if any thing more is wanting to consummate their safety, their security, and their happiness, he has only to draw on the infinite resources of his own Divinity, and their wants are all supplied. He has but to speak the word, and their tribulations are all ended; their graves are opened; their bodies are clothed with light, as with a garment; and their souls are filled with the joys and transports of life and immortality! "If," then, "God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how will he not with him also freely give us all things? Who will lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies: who is he that condemns? It is Christ that died for us; yea, rather that has risen; who is at the right hand of God, and who also intercedes for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall affliction, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom. viii: 31, 37.)

The ability of our heavenly Father to so manage all the infinitely diversified interests of his government, as to cause all things to work together for the good of his children, has been very clearly and very beautifully illustrated in the fulfillment of many other great and precious promises. Take, for instance, the first implied

promise of [380] mercy to fallen man. "I will put enmity," said God to the serpent, "between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head; and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Gen. iii: 15.)

How very improbable, to the eye of sense and reason, did the proper fulfillment of this promise appear, for a long time. The very first of woman-born was a murderer--a slave of the old serpent. And, after the lapse of about sixteen hundred years, we find millions under his banner, arrayed against the government and interests of the promised seed. Time rolled on; and, soon again after the flood, nearly the whole world was given up to the idolatrous worship of the old serpent. The service of Jehovah was confined to a little district in Western Asia. And even there, how often was the land stained with blood, and polluted with every species of abomination; until, finally, the sin of even God's chosen people culminated in the betrayal and crucifixion of the Promised Seed.

True, indeed, viewed from the proper stand-point, this was a mighty triumph over the old serpent. Christ, in this case, but stooped to conquer; and hence, for a time, his cause triumphed gloriously. But soon again the forces of Satan were rallied. The Church was driven, like a poor disconsolate widow, into the wilderness, for the long period of one thousand two hundred and sixty years. And at the close of this period, in A. D. 1793, when the persecuting power of the Man of Sin was broken by means of the French Revolution, there really seemed to be but little of pure Christianity left in the world.

But since that ever-memorable epoch, how great has been the change, and how mighty have been the triumphs of truth over error! Every thing pertaining to Christian [381] civilization is rapidly advancing. The Church is coming up out of the wilderness, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and, to her foes, terrible as an army with banners. The apocalyptic angel is even now "flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." (Rev. xiv: 6.) And every thing in the signs of the times, as well as in prophecy, seems to indicate that the time is at hand when "the kingdom, and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom, under the whole heaven, shall be given to the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; and all dominions shall serve and obey him." (Daniel vii.)

How true it is, then, that all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. (2 Cor. i: 20.) And how exceedingly great is the security, the consolation, and the happiness of those who have fled for refuge to our glorious Immanuel, and laid hold on the hopes and the promises that are in him. Nothing can ever molest them to their real injury. They may, indeed, for a time, like the Church, be driven into the wilderness; or, like their Redeemer, they may have to pass through the furnace of affliction. But, in the end, it will all be for their good. And, with Job, they will each have reason to say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." (Job xiii: 15.)

There is just one thing, therefore, and but one, about which we should all be extremely solicitous. It is not necessary to be anxious about what we shall eat, and what we shall drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed. If God takes care of the sparrows, and even clothes with beauty and loveliness the lilies of the field, he will not forget his children. But that which is now to us of paramount importance, is to know certainly, that we are his [382] children; to be perfectly sure that we do really love the Lord with all our hearts, and souls, and minds, and strength. If we do this, we may safely leave all the rest to God. Our bread will then be given us, and our water will be sure.

On this important question, then, the evidence of the Scriptures is very clear and satisfactory. "If ye love me," says Christ, "keep my commandments." (John xiv: 15.) And again, in the same discourse, he adds: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." (John xiv: 21. See, also, 1 John v: 3.) Obedience, then, is made the test of our love, as it is also made the only sure criterion of our faith. (James ii: 14-26.) And hence it is, that in the final judgment, the destiny of every man will be made to depend, not directly on the degree and intensity of his faith, but on the evidences of his faith; not directly on the purity and strength of his love, but on the evidences of his love.

Hear, on this point, the testimony of the Great Judge himself: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: and he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then will the King say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then will the righteous answer him, saying: Lord, when saw we thee [383] hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came to thee? And the King will answer, and say to them: Verily, I say to you, inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it to me. Then will he say to them on his left hand: Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying: Lord, when saw we thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee? Then will he answer them, saying: Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into everlasting life." (Matt. xxv: 31-46.)

Dear hearer, where will you be on that great day? And what sentence will you hear from the lips of the Omniscient and Omnipotent Judge? Do you love God with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength? If so, are you keeping his commandments? Do you believe, with all your heart, that Jesus is the Messiah--the Son of the Living God? Have you repented of all your sins? Have you openly and publicly confessed the name of Jesus as your only and all-sufficient Savior? Have you, by his authority, been baptized into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? And are you now giving all diligence in adding to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and [384] to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love to all men? If so, all is well. For just as sure as the Lord God Omnipotent reigns, if you continue in these things, and abound in them, you will at last receive an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter i: 5-11.) There God himself will lead you to fountains of living water; and there he will himself wipe away all tears from your eyes. That this may be your happy and glorious destiny is my humble prayer, for Christ's sake.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now, and remain with you forever. Amen. [385]

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