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## *The Overruling Providence of God*

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 8:28

*Reading:* ROMANS 8:26-30

**T**his sentence, interpreted in its context, can bring unlimited comfort and cheer to the Christian in time of testing. With Paul it was a matter of profound conviction: “And *we know* that all things work together for good.” No room for question here. He had unwavering confidence in the overruling providence of his God. He believed that “God makes everything turn out for the best” (Scholefield). For him this conviction rendered complaining unthinkable since every event of life was either planned or permitted by God. It made possible of achievement his counsel of perfection, “In everything give thanks.” It turned sighing into singing. It was a practical embracing of this truth which enabled him and his companion to sing at midnight even when plans

seemed to miscarry and they were immured in a dungeon with bleeding backs. To him it mattered little whether physical conditions were propitious so long as he knew he loved God and was called according to His purpose. Everything, whether seemingly adverse or advantageous, would certainly turn out for the best. The important question is, Do we share Paul's joyous assurance?

Paul couches his statement in such categorical terms that it is impossible to remain neutral in the face of its astounding claim. If it were somewhat qualified or expressed in less dogmatic fashion, it would be easier to accept. When faced with devastating sorrows or reverses, it sounds rather glib and divorced from the grim reality of experience to say that it is all working together for good. But is it really so? Must this assertion be viewed with secret skepticism, or can it be embraced with joyous realism? Interpreted in its context, with full value given to each word, there is no verse in the whole of Scripture which will give such poise and serenity in the midst of tragedy, trial, or disappointment.

The key to the interpretation of the central statement, "All things work together for good," is that it must be neither isolated from its context nor divorced from its two conditional clauses—"to them that love God" and "to them that are called according to his purpose." These two clauses determine and limit its application. The simple fact is that all things do not without qualification work together for good for everybody. Nor does this verse claim that they do. Two things are presupposed. First, there must be correct *relationship* to God. The beneficiary under the promise is a member of God's family, enjoying and manifesting the family affection. Such a person is persuaded that He who did not spare His own Son would never permit or ordain anything which was not for his ultimate good. Love trusts even when it cannot discern. Then there is *partnership*. He is

one of “the called” according to God’s eternal purpose, and his plans have given way to God’s plan. To him it is inconceivable that God’s perfect design could be thwarted by anything really adverse to him. God is intermingling all things for his good. With his God, “accidents are not accidental and adversity is not adverse.” The conclusion is that God’s purpose unfolds to those whom He has called and who love Him in return. The promise has nothing for the man in rebellion against God and out of sympathy with His purposes. It is to the cold heart that this verse becomes a stumbling block. It glows with comfort when the heart is warm with love to God. But to be entitled to the comfort of the verse we must come within the category laid down by Paul.

The question inevitably arises, Can tragedy be good? Is ill health good? Is bereavement good? Is frustration good? Why does God permit these to strike us? In Paul’s day there were four characteristic reactions to adversity. The attitude of the Epicurean was, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” The Cynic defied fate to do its worst. The Stoic set his teeth and steeled himself to accept the divine will. Epictetus wrote:

*Have courage to look up to God and say, “Deal with me as Thou wilt from now on. I am as one with Thee; I am Thine; I flinch from nothing so long as Thou dost think that it is good. Lead me where Thou wilt; put on me what raiment Thou wilt. Wouldst Thou have me hold office or eschew it, stay or flee, be rich or poor? For this I will defend Thee before all men.”*

But in the text Paul epitomized the Christian attitude, not defiance or indifference or even resigned acceptance. The Christian joyously embraces adversity or sorrow, knowing that all things, whether propitious or adverse, are working together for his highest good.

Four truths full of comfort and encouragement emerge from this verse.

### GOD'S PLAN IS BENEFICENT

*“All things work together **for good.**”*

The crux of the problem involved in the practical application of this verse lies in our interpretation of the two words “for good.” The “good” promised by God in His long-sighted love may not always seem good and acceptable to us. Indeed His providences sometimes appear disastrous when viewed from a materialistic, temporal viewpoint. The good promised by God is *spiritual* rather than temporal, and some time may elapse before we discern its true beneficence.

It took years before the strange providences in the life of Job had their vindication. His afflictions had their rise in the malicious mind of Satan, but Job did not attribute them to blind chance or even to Satanic agency. He expressed his philosophy in the noble words, “The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” When taunted by his wife he maintained his confidence in God. “What! Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?” His stand of faith was abundantly vindicated by subsequent events. He emerged from his trials enriched and not impoverished. Through Job’s cooperation, God took the evil acts of Satan and made them work out for good without in any way condoning the evil.

“We tend to interpret good in terms of animal comfort,” writes Vernon Grounds.

If we are exempt from disease, if our bodies are never stabbed by pain, if we always have money in our pockets or reserve in the bank, if we live in modern

homes and enjoy the latest luxuries, if we can dress well and take long vacations at the seashore . . . that we consider good. Unfortunately we find ourselves victimized by a materialistic civilization, and despite our Christian faith we subtly equate comfort and goodness. In the same way we tend to equate success with goodness. . . . Or yet again we tend to equate pleasure with goodness. . . . And yet such equations are a million miles removed from Paul's basic teaching. And because all of these are false equations, we have trouble with Romans 8:28. Our failure to grasp Paul's conception of the good, changes what ought to be a soft pillow for our hearts into a hard problem for our heads.

*Whate'er my God ordains is right;  
He taketh thought for me.  
The cup that my Physician gives  
No poisoned draught can be,  
But medicine due,  
For God is true.  
And on that changeless truth I build  
And all my heart with hope is filled.*

Few tragedies have highlighted this truth more than the fire at Serampore, India, on March 12, 1812. Within a few moments the sacrificial translation work of years of William Carey and his colleagues went up in smoke. The loss in paper for Bibles was immense. The newly cast Tamil type and Chinese metal type were a total loss. Portions of manuscripts, grammars, and dictionaries laboriously compiled perished. William Carey wrote, "Nothing was saved but the presses. This is a heavy blow,

as it will stop our printing the Scriptures for a long time. Twelve months' hard labor will not reinstate us; not to mention the loss of property, mss, etc., which we shall scarcely ever surmount."

The loss of manuscripts referred to included portions of nearly all his Indian Scripture versions, all his Kanarese New Testament, two large Old Testament books in Sanskrit, many pages of his Bengali dictionary, all of his Telugu Grammar and much of his Punjabi, and every vestige of his well-advanced Dictionary of Sanskrit, the *magnum opus* of his linguistic life.

But there follows his affirmation of faith in words akin to those of our text. "God will no doubt bring good out of this evil and make it promote our interests." Before the ashes were cold, Carey's colleague, Marshman, wrote that the calamity was "another leaf in the ways of Providence, calling for the exercise of faith in Him whose Word, firm as the pillars of heaven, has decreed that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. Be strong therefore in the Lord. He will never forsake the work of His own hands."

In the midst of this desolating reverse, God's servants' grasp of this truth kept their hearts at peace. "It stilled me into tranquil submission, enabling me to look up and *welcome* God's will," said Marshman. Carey told how he had been hushed by the verse, "Be still, and know that I am God." Ward, the third of the famous trio, was found while the fires were still smoldering, not just submissive, but jubilant.

But how could this possibly be working together for good? It did not take long for the strategy of God to appear. "The catastrophe unstopped the ears of British Christendom. In the blaze of the fire they saw the grandeur of the enterprise; the facts were flashed out. And thus the destruction proved a beacon, and multiplied the Mission's zealous friends." So loud a fame it



brought them as to reverse the nature of their risks. “The fire has given your undertaking a celebrity which nothing else could,” wrote Fuller in a faithful warning. “The public is now giving us their praises. Eight hundred guineas have been offered for Dr. Carey’s likeness! If we inhale this incense, will not God withhold His blessing, and then where are we?”

Then what is the nature of the good which Paul had in view? The answer is found in the context: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to *be conformed to the image of his Son*” (Romans 8:29). Paul’s conception was that anything which made him more like Christ was good, altogether irrespective of its reaction on his comfort or health or success or pleasure. Christlikeness does not always thrive in the midst of material comforts. Many of the most Christlike Christians have been plagued with ill health. Success in business has in many lives been the death knell of holiness. Seeking after pleasure often defeats its own ends.

### GOD’S PLAN IS ACTIVE

*“All things **work** together for good.”*

The heart that loves God discerns Him busily at work in even the most heartbreaking and unwelcome happenings of life. All things are turning out for the best because God is at work in them, transmuting bane into blessing and tragedy into triumph. His operation is not always clearly discernible. Indeed, it not infrequently seems that He is doing nothing. Carlyle, meditating on the enigmas of life, in the anguish of his heart said, “The worst of God is that He does nothing.” But God is often most active when all seems most still. The working of God in nature

## SPIRITUAL MATURITY

is unseen but nonetheless effective. Under His invisible control the stars maintain their predestined courses and the restless ocean keeps within its appointed limits. We should never, in impatience at the seeming inactivity of God, take things into our own hands and try to be our own Providence. The daily happenings, whether tragic or joyous, are the raw material from which God is weaving the design of life. “This dance of plastic circumstance, machinery just meant to give the soul its bent.” Introduce God into the events of life, and order emerges from chaos. “He is too kind to do anything cruel, too wise ever to make a mistake.” No conceivable circumstances could better prosper God’s plan or further our highest good.

## GOD’S PLAN IS INCLUSIVE

*“All things work together for good.”*

“All things” means exactly what it says. Everything in every sphere is under the beneficent control of God. It is the comprehensiveness of this statement which is so breathtaking. Bereavement, illness, disappointment, blighted hopes, nervous disorders, children who are giving concern, lack of fruit in service despite earnest endeavor to fulfill conditions of fruit-bearing—surely these are not working together for good. Paul quietly asserts that such is the case. We may be willing to admit that life as a whole is subject to the overruling providence of God, but often we hesitate to believe that every detail of life is the object of His loving concern. Yet our Lord asserted this to be the case. Even the sparrow did not fall to the ground without His Father’s knowledge. The circumstances of the Christian’s life are ordained of God. There is no such thing as chance. Love

refuses to believe that God is not interested in every detail of life. Everything is permitted and designed by Him for wise purposes. He will not cease His supervision for a moment.

Every adverse experience when rightly received can carry its quota of good. Bodily pain and weakness cause us to feel our frailty. Perplexity reveals our lack of wisdom. Financial reverses point up how limited are our resources. Mistakes and failure humble our pride. All these things can be included in the term “good.”

### GOD’S PLAN IS HARMONIOUS

*“All things **work together for good.**”*

They work into a preconceived pattern. The events of life are not related. The physician’s prescription is compounded of a number of drugs. Taken in isolation, some of them would be poisonous and would do only harm. But blended together under the direction of a skilled and experienced pharmacist they achieve only good. Barclay renders the verse: “We know that God intermingles all things for good for them that love Him.” The experiences of life when taken in isolation may seem anything but good, but blended together the result is only good.

In adverse circumstances unbelief queries, “How can this be working for good?” The answer is, “Wait until the Great Physician has finished writing the prescription.” Who cannot look back on life to see that things considered disastrous proved in the ultimate to be blessings in disguise? The artist blends colors which to the unskilled eye seem far removed from his objective. But wait until he has finished his mixing.

Life has been likened to an elaborate tapestry being woven on the loom. For the beauty of the pattern it is imperative that the colors must not be all of the same hue. Some must be bright

and beautiful, others dark and somber. It is as they are all worked together that they contribute to the beauty of the pattern.

*Not until each loom is silent  
 And the shuttles cease to fly  
 Will God unroll the pattern  
 And explain the reason why;  
 The dark threads are as needful  
 In the Weaver's skillful hand,  
 As the threads of gold and silver  
 For the pattern He has planned.*

In time of severe trial there is always the temptation, while assenting to the truth in general, to feel that our present circumstances are an exception. If that were so, the text is null and void, and the truth of the overruling providence of God in the affairs of men has no meaning. As tragedy upon tragedy overwhelmed Joseph—banishment from home, sale as a slave, unjust imprisonment—it was difficult for him to see these untoward events working together for his good. Yet in retrospect he said to his brothers, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but God meant it unto good*” (Genesis 50:20).

In the events of life, “God has an end in view which is worthy of Him, and will command our fullest approbation when we cease to know in part.” Even if called upon to face the wrath of man or devil we can confidently rest in the assurance that it will ultimately praise God, and that which cannot do so will be restrained.

*Whate'er my God ordains is right;  
 My Light, my Life is He,  
 Who cannot will me ought but good,*

*The Overruling Providence of God*

*I trust Him utterly:*

*For well I know*

*In joy or woe*

*We soon shall see, as sunlight clear,*

*How faithful was our Guardian here.*

**FOR REFLECTION**

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What are the differences between having a relationship with God and a partnership with God?

How would you explain and illustrate Sanders' phrase, "strange providences" (p. 14)?

Sanders describes God's plan (providence) as beneficent, active, inclusive, and harmonious. Which of these characteristics do you find most challenging to accept? Why?

# The Prostrating Vision of God

I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.

EXODUS 33:18

*Reading:* EXODUS 33:11-23

**T**his prayer of Moses has reechoed down the centuries. Successive generations of Christians have prayed for a vision of God, often without realizing the possible implications of such a petition. Not infrequently they have failed to recognize the answer when it was granted. John Newton, converted slave-trader, passionately longed for the transforming vision, but the answer to his urgent prayers came in a way which staggered and almost overwhelmed him. He has recorded this experience.

*I asked the Lord that I might grow  
 In faith and love and every grace,  
 Might more of His salvation know  
 And seek more earnestly His face.  
 'Twas He who taught me thus to pray,  
 And He, I trust, has answered prayer;*

*But it has been in such a way  
 As almost drove me to despair.  
 I thought that in some favored hour  
 At once He'd answer my request  
 And by His love's constraining power,  
 Subdue my sins and give me rest.  
 Instead of that, He made me feel  
 The hidden evils of my heart,  
 And bade the angry powers of hell  
 Assault my soul in every part.  
 Nay more, with His own hand He seemed  
 Intent to aggravate my woe.  
 Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,  
 Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.  
 "Lord, why is this?" I trembling cried.  
 "Wilt Thou pursue this worm to death?"  
 "This is the way," the Lord replied,  
 "I answer prayer for grace and faith.  
 "These inward trials I employ  
 From self and sin to set thee free,  
 And cross thy schemes of earthly joy  
 That thou might'st find thy all in Me."*

When we pray for a vision of God, what are we expecting? A glowing vision in the sky? A blinding flash of glory such as that which overwhelmed Saul of Tarsus? A thrilling, overpowering sense of spiritual exaltation? A study of the visions of God recorded in Scripture gives quite a different picture. In not one case did the vision immediately result in elation and ecstasy. With absolute consistency it produced in those to whom it came profound self-abasement. In every instance the experience was

awe-full, not ecstatic. And the more intense the vision, the more complete the prostration before God.

If this is true, before we ask of God a vision of Himself, we should be prepared for the certain result. In the dazzling whiteness of the snow the cleanest linen appears soiled. Before the spotless purity and holiness of God, everything earthly is seen stained and unclean. In the light of the presence of God, Joshua the holy high priest appeared “clothed with filthy garments” and therefore disqualified for office (Zechariah 3:1–3). We have no grounds for expecting to be exceptions to this rule.

If we ask in what form the vision will come, we are not left in doubt. “God . . . hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). On the canvas of Holy Scripture, with master strokes and in vivid colors, the Holy Spirit has painted the face of Jesus Christ, image of the invisible God. And it is the same Spirit who will illumine the canvas to the one who longs to see His glory. He has no greater delight than to take of the things of Christ as recorded in His Word and in them to reveal the glory of God.

Although *Job*, possibly a contemporary of Abraham, lived in spiritual twilight he had an amazing concept of God and a lofty standard of life. His character was blameless in his own eyes. Conscious of inner integrity he claimed, “I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me” (33:9). This was not pious cant but the sincere expression of his inner probity. And not only was his character stainless in his own eyes, it was uniquely worthy in God’s eyes. Addressing Satan, God asked, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” (1:8). Few people have



enjoyed to such a degree the approval of their own consciences and the commendation of their God.

Job was one of the very few whom God has called “perfect,” thus affirming his blamelessness and integrity. How did this perfect man fare when in the crisis of his mounting trials there came to him the vision of God? He records it in a few pregnant words: “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (42:5–6). *When confronted with the vision of God, the perfect man is reduced to abject self-abhorrence.*

The vision of God was granted to *Jacob* when, alone at the ford Jabbok, “there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.” In naming the spot Peniel, Jacob said with obvious awe: “I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved” (Genesis 32:24, 30). How did the vision affect Jacob? He was compelled to spell out in terms of his own name, the shame of his character. “And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob”—supplanter, cheat, swindler. Before he could qualify for the blessing God would bestow on him, he had to confess his true nature. To his dying day he bore the marks of this encounter. *Confronted by the vision of God, the man who had succeeded in deceiving everyone else is compelled to acknowledge his own secret shame.*

*Moses* could boast of massive learning. He enjoyed the prestige of being called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. His ardent patriotism led him in fleshly impatience to attempt the deliverance of Israel. He would not wait for God to unfold His plan of campaign, and in consequence he had to hide from the wrath of the king. In the desert his impetuosity turned to passivity, until he was arrested by the divine vision. “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked,

and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. . . . God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, . . . Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. . . . And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Exodus 3:2–6). *In the man to whom was to be entrusted the deliverance of God’s chosen people, the vision resulted in reverential awe and averted face.*

*Elijah* has been described as the grandest and most romantic character Israel ever produced. He is abruptly projected onto the stage of history in the Carmel drama. And what a man he was! So great was his power with God that he could lock the heavens at will. So little did he fear man that he dared to defy the king and indeed the whole nation. With Enoch he enjoyed the distinction of entering heaven without passing through the portals of death. How does this dauntless, rugged man of God survive the vision? “And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains . . . and after the wind an earthquake . . . and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle” (1 Kings 19:11–13). *He could remain defiant and petulant in the face of a majestic display of God’s power, but he was broken and subdued by His voice of gentle stillness and hid his face.*

*Isaiah* the seer, to whom came the clearest foreshadowing of gospel truth, was haunted by no sense of inferiority. Lofty prophecy was mixed with scathing denunciation in his messages to the nation. He felt perfectly competent to call down woes on his contemporaries (3:9, 11; 5:8, 11, 20) until he saw the vision of God. “I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphim: . . . And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy,

holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke” (Isaiah 6:1–5). On whom does he pronounce the next woe after this radiant vision? “Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.” *Lips which had mediated the Divine message were foul and unclean in the light of the holiness of God.*

The vision of God came to *Ezekiel* when he identified with his people in their distress and captivity in Babylon. “As I was among the captives by the river of Chebar . . . the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (1:1)—visions of God’s majesty and omnipresence, of His ceaseless activity and the glory of His rainbow-circled throne. “And above the firmament . . . was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone: and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it. . . . And from the appearance of his loins downward, I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and it had brightness round about. As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face” (1:26–28). *The fearless and faithful seer cannot bear the awful light of the throne on which sits the God of glory.*

Among the saintly men of Scripture, *Daniel* is in the front rank. He had held with distinction the post of Prime Minister through the reigns of five successive Oriental despots. That his head remained on his shoulders was remarkable tribute to his wisdom and integrity. His enemies could find no fault in him except that he prayed too much. Of Daniel alone is it recorded that an angelic messenger was sent to tell him how greatly he was

beloved by God. Does he emerge unscathed from the beatific vision? Hear his confession: “I, Daniel, alone saw the vision: . . . I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength . . . and when I heard the voice of his words, then was I in a deep sleep on my face, and my face toward the ground” (10:7–9). *One of the most blameless of saints when confronted with the divine glory is prostrated at the corruption, not of his vices but of his virtues!*

In the midst of an experience of shattering self-revelation a young man wrote: “If I really thought that what I counted to be my prime virtue, my mental honesty, had been so complete a sham as this, I wouldn’t be able to go on. And I want to go on. The lesson however is plain. I can’t trust myself an inch. Whenever I am most pious, I am probably nursing the most vicious pride. I think it is better to stand at the mouth of the tunnel of personal evil and say, It is infinite. . . .”

After a fruitless night’s fishing the vision came to *Peter*, and obedience to Christ’s command resulted in a catch which broke the nets. Confronted with this miracle, Peter realized that Christ must either be omniscient in directing them to the shoal of fish, or omnipotent in directing the shoal of fish to them. When he glimpsed the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, he was overcome with his own defilement and unworthiness. “Depart from me,” he cried, falling down at Jesus’ feet, “for I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8). Actually this was the very last thing he wanted, but *when the man whom God would use to open the kingdom to Jew and Gentile saw the vision of God, he could think of no alternative to banishment from His presence.*

*Saul of Tarsus*, filled with mistaken zeal for God and lust for the blood of the hated Christians, was making his way toward

Damascus. He was proud of the fact that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, the strictest of the Pharisees, and he was well satisfied with his ardor in the service of God. “Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus . . .” (Acts 9:3–5). *The glory of God shining in the face of the ascended Christ blinded and prostrated the man who probably came nearer than any other to justification by works.*

*John* the beloved was without doubt the sweetest and ripest saint of his day. He was the object of the special love of Christ, not on the grounds of favoritism but because he, more than any of the other disciples, appropriated it for himself. He alone was faithful in the judgment hall. Tradition bears abundant testimony to the charm of his personality and the purity of his devotion to Christ. In the ripe maturity of his old age he is granted the supreme vision of Christ: “one like unto the Son of man. . . . His head and his hairs were white like wool . . . his eyes were as a flame of fire . . . his voice as the sound of many waters . . . and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:13–17). Surely if anyone is qualified to see the vision of God without being prostrated it will be this man who repeatedly pillowed his head on the bosom of incarnate deity. Not so. “And when I saw him,” John wrote, “I fell at his feet as dead.” *Earth’s sweetest and most gracious saint falls as though lifeless in the presence of the transcendent majesty and holiness of God.*

A consistent pattern appears throughout these visions. First the vision, then self-abhorrence, self-abasement, the averted face, the sense of uncleanness, blindness, prostration, comeliness turned into corruption, self-banishment, falling as dead. Do we still desire to pray for a vision of God?

But there is still another side to the picture. God takes no pleasure in seeing His children lie in the dust. If He abases and humbles them, it is only that He may exalt them in due season. Humiliation is not an end in itself, it merely prepares the way for blessing. The open lesson of these visions surely is that God cannot entrust a man with any deep blessing, any important spiritual ministry, until there has come a complete collapse of self.

The collapse of Job's self-righteousness was quickly followed by the bestowal of double what he had lost, and the turning of his captivity through his intercessions for his friends. Jacob's vision resulted in a change of character which gave him new power with God and man. The rebuke of Moses' fleshly energy and apathy, with consequent loss of self-confidence, prepared him for the enormous task of delivering God's people. After Elijah's deflation he was encouraged by God and recommissioned for further service. Not only were Isaiah's unclean lips purged and his iniquity removed, but he received an enlarged commission. To Daniel, the sense of corruption gave place to joy in the privilege of being the vehicle of Divine revelation. Peter's deep conviction of unworthiness was a most important element in preparing him to become the mighty Pentecostal preacher. The vision marked Paul out as a chosen vessel to carry God's name before kings and Gentiles. The One who raised John from the ground entrusted him with writing the Apocalypse, the book which for two millennia has been the stay of a church in persecution. Each vision was the prelude to increased personal holiness and an enlarged sphere of service.

True, the vision of God inevitably leads to self-revelation, but always with a beneficent end in view. God does not aim merely to humiliate us. There is no need to fear being brought to an end of ourselves for "the end of self is the beginning of God." Indeed,

we may welcome the vision of God if our deepest desire is to advance in holiness and to be of the greatest use to Him.

We may have the vision of God whenever we truly desire it, whenever we are willing for what it involves. And when it has been granted, there is no need to remain groveling in the dust abhorring ourselves. If we heartily repent of all that is amiss as it is revealed in the light of God's presence, we too will hear the words which came to Isaiah: "Thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged. . . . Go, and tell this people. . . ."

#### FOR REFLECTION

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Job, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and John—what single, common, compelling thread does Sanders find in each person's response to God's revelation of Himself?

What has been your most memorable experience of God's presence up to this point in your life?

How has this chapter altered your expectations regarding what would happen to you as a result of greater exposure to God?