

A Divine Cordial Chapter I

Thomas Watson

Thomas Watson was of the group known as Non-conformist. His date of birth is unknown but it is known that he died at Barnston in 1686. He was educated at Emanuel College, Cambridge, and in 1646 was appointed to preach at St Stephen's, Walbrook. He showed strong Presbyterian views during the civil war, with, however, an attachment for the king; because of his share in Love's plot to recall Charles II. He was imprisoned in 1651, but was released and reinstated vicar of St. Stephen's in 1652. He acquired fame as a preacher, but in 1662 was ejected at the Restoration. He continued to exercise his ministry privately. In 1672 after the declaration of indulgence he obtained a licence for Crosby Hall, where he preached for several years, until his retirement to Barnston upon the failure of his health. Watson was a man of learning, and acquired fame by his quaint devotional and expository writings. Of his many works may be mentioned, *The Art of Divine Contentment* (London, 1653); *The Saint's Delight* (1657); *Jerusalem's Glory* (1661); *Divine Cordial* (1663); *The Godly Man's Picture* (1666); *The Holy Eucharist* (1668); *Heaven Taken by Storm* (1669); and *A Body of Practical Divinity; . . . One Hundred Seventy Six Sermons on the Lesser Catechism* (1692).

Extract From the Preface

Christian Reader,

There are two things, which I have always looked upon as difficult. The one is, to make the wicked sad; the other is, to make the godly joyful. Dejection in the godly arises from a double spring; either because their inward comforts are darkened, or their outward comforts are disturbed. To cure both these troubles, I have put forth this ensuing piece, hoping, by the blessing of God, it will buoy up their desponding hearts, and make them look with a more pleasant aspect. I would prescribe them to take, now and then, a little of this Cordial; ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD. To know that nothing hurts the godly, is a matter of comfort; but to be assured that ALL things which fall out shall co-operate for their good, that their crosses shall be turned into blessings, that showers of affliction water the withering root of their grace and make it flourish more; this may fill their hearts with joy till they run over.

"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.

Introduction

IF the whole Scripture be the feast of the soul, as Ambrose said, then Romans 8 may be a dish at that feast, and with its sweet variety may very much refresh and animate the hearts of God's people. In the preceding verses the apostle had been wading through the great doctrines of justification and adoption, mysteries so arduous and profound, that without the help and conduct of the Spirit, he might soon have waded beyond his depth. In this verse the apostle touches upon that pleasant string of consolation, "WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD, TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD." Not a word but is weighty; therefore I shall gather up every filing of this gold, that nothing be lost.

In the text there are three general branches.

First, a glorious privilege. All things work for good.

Second, the persons interested in this privilege. They are doubly specified. They are lovers of God, they are called.

Third, the origin and spring of this effectual calling, set down in these words, "*according to his purpose.*"

First, the glorious privilege. Here are two things to be considered. 1. The certainty of the privilege — "*We know.*" 2. The excellency of the privilege — "*All things work together for good.*"

1. The certainty of the privilege: "*We know.*" It is not a matter wavering or doubtful. The apostle does not say, We hope, or conjecture, but it is like an article in our creed, We KNOW that all things work for good. Hence observe that the truths of the gospel are evident and infallible.

A Christian may come not merely to a vague opinion, but to a certainty of what he holds. As axioms and aphorisms are evident to reason, so the truths of religion are evident to faith. "*We know,*" says the apostle. Though a Christian has not a perfect knowledge of the mysteries of the gospel, yet he has a certain knowledge. "*We see through a glass darkly*" (1 Cor. xiii. 12), therefore we have not perfection of knowledge; but "*we behold with open face*" (2 Cor. iii. 18), therefore we have certainty. The Spirit of God imprints heavenly truths upon the heart, as with the point of a diamond. A Christian may know infallibly that there is an evil in sin, and a beauty in holiness. He may know that he is in the state of grace. "*We know that we have passed from death to life*" (1 John iii. 14).

He may know that he shall go to heaven. "*We know that if our earthly tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*" (2 Cor. v. 1). The Lord does not leave His people at uncertainties in matters of

salvation. The apostle says, We know. We have arrived at a holy confidence. We have both the Spirit of God, and our own experience, setting seal to it.

Let us then not rest in scepticism or doubts, but labour to come to a certainty in the things of religion. As that martyr-woman said. "I cannot dispute for Christ, but I can burn for Christ." God knows whether we may be called forth to be witnesses to His truth; therefore it concerns us to be well grounded and confirmed in it. If we are doubting Christians, we shall be wavering Christians. Whence is apostacy, but from incredulity? Men first question the truth, and then fall from the truth. Oh, beg the Spirit of God, not only to anoint you, but to seal you (2 Cor. i. 22).

2. The excellency of the privilege, "*All things work together for good.*"

This is as Jacob's staff in the hand of faith, with which we may walk cheerfully to the mount of God. What will satisfy or make us content, if this will not? All things work together for good. This expression "*work together*" refers to medicine. Several poisonous ingredients put together, being tempered by the skill of the apothecary, make a sovereign medicine, and work together for the good of the patient. So all God's providences being divinely tempered and sanctified, do work together for the best to the saints. He who loves God and is called according to His purpose, may rest assured that every thing in the world shall be for his good. This is a Christian's cordial, which may warm him — make him like Jonathan who, when he had tasted the honey at the end of the rod, "*his eyes were enlightened*" (1 Sam. xiv. 27). Why should a Christian destroy himself? Why should he kill himself with care, when all things shall sweetly concur, yea, conspire for his good? The result of the text is this. ALL THE VARIOUS DEALINGS OF GOD WITH HIS CHILDREN, DO BY A SPECIAL PROVIDENCE TURN TO THEIR GOOD. "*All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant*" (Psalm xxv. 10). If every path has mercy in it, then it works for good.

The Best Things Work for Good to the Godly

WE shall consider, first, what things work for good to the godly; and here we shall show that both the best things and the worst things work for their good. We begin with the best things.

1. God's attributes work for good to the godly.

(1). God's power works for good. It is a glorious power (Col. i. 11), and it is engaged for the good of the elect.

God's power works for good, in supporting us in trouble. "*Underneath are the everlasting arms*" (Deut. xxxiii. 27). What upheld Daniel in the lion's den? Jonah in the whale's belly? The three Hebrews in the furnace? Only the power of God. Is it not

strange to see a bruised reed grow and flourish? How is a weak Christian able, not only to endure affliction, but to rejoice in it? He is upheld by the arms of the Almighty. *"My strength is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Cor. xii. 9).

The power of God works for us by supplying our wants. God creates comforts when means fail. He that brought food to the prophet Elijah by ravens, will bring sustenance to His people. God can preserve the *"oil in the cruse"* (1 Kings xvii. 14). The Lord made the sun on Ahaz's dial go ten degrees backward: so when our outward comforts are declining, and the sun is almost setting, God often causes a revival, and brings the sun many degrees backward.

The power of God subdues our corruptions. *"He will subdue our iniquities"* (Micah vii. 19). Is your sin strong? God is powerful, He will break the head of this leviathan. Is your heart hard? God will dissolve that stone in Christ's blood. *"The Almighty maketh my heart soft"* (Job xxiii. 16). When we say as Jehoshaphat, *"We have no might against this great army"*; the Lord goes up with us, and helps us to fight our battles. He strikes off the heads of those goliath-lusts which are too strong for us.

The power of God conquers our enemies. He stains the pride, and breaks the confidence of adversaries. *"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron"* (Psalm ii. 9). There is rage in the enemy, malice in the devil, but power in God. How easily can He rout all the forces of the wicked! *"It is nothing for thee, Lord, to help"* (2 Chr. xiv. 11). God's power is on the side of His church. *"Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord, who is the shield of thy help, and the sword of thy excellency"* (Deut. xxxiii. 29).

(2). The wisdom of God works for good. God's wisdom is our oracle to instruct us. As He is the mighty God, so also the Counsellor (Isa. ix. 6). We are oftentimes in the dark, and, in matters intricate and doubtful know not which way to take; here God comes in with light. *"I will guide thee with mine eye"* (Psa. xxxii. 8). "Eye," there, is put for God's wisdom. Why is it the saints can see further than the most quick-sighted politicians? They foresee the evil, and hide themselves; they see Satan's sophisms. God's wisdom is the pillar of fire to go before, and guide them.

(3). The goodness of God works for good to the godly. God's goodness is a means to make us good. *"The goodness of God leadeth to repentance"* (Rom. ii. 4). The goodness of God is a spiritual sunbeam to melt the heart into tears. Oh, says the soul, has God been so good to me? Has He reprieved me so long from hell, and shall I grieve His Spirit any more? Shall I sin against goodness?

The goodness of God works for good, as it ushers in all blessings. The favours we receive, are the silver streams which flow from the fountain of God's goodness. This divine attribute of goodness brings in two sorts of blessings. Common blessings: all partake of these, the bad as well as the good; this sweet dew falls upon the thistle as well as the rose. Crowning blessings: these only the godly partake of. *"Who crowneth us*

with loving-kindness" (Psalm ciii. 4). Thus the blessed attributes of God work for good to the saints.

2. The promises of God work for good to the godly.

The promises are notes of God's hand; is it not good to have security? The promises are the milk of the gospel; and is not the milk for the good of the infant? They are called "*precious promises*" (2 Pet. i. 4). They are as cordials to a soul that is ready to faint. The promises are full of virtue.

Are we under the guilt of sin? There is a promise, "*The Lord merciful and gracious*" (Exod. xxiv. 6), where God as it were puts on His glorious embroidery, and holds out the golden sceptre, to encourage poor trembling sinners to come to Him. "*The Lord, merciful.*" God is more willing to pardon than to punish. Mercy does more multiply in Him than sin in us. Mercy is His nature. The bee naturally gives honey; it stings only when it is provoked. "But," says the guilty sinner, "I cannot deserve mercy." Yet He is gracious; He shows mercy, not because we deserve mercy, but because He delights in mercy. But what is that to me? Perhaps my name is not in the pardon. "*He keeps mercy for thousands*"; the exchequer of mercy is not exhausted. God has treasures lying by, and why should not you come in for a child's part?

Are we under the defilement of sin? There is a promise working for good. "*I will heal their backslidings*" (Hos. xiv. 4). God will not only bestow mercy, but grace. And He has made a promise of sending His Spirit (Isa. xlv. 3), which for its sanctifying nature, is in Scripture compared sometimes to water, which cleanses the vessel; sometimes to the fan, which winnows corn, and purifies the air; sometimes to fire, which refines metals. Thus the Spirit of God shall cleanse and consecrate the soul, making it partake of the divine nature.

Are we in great trouble? There is a promise works for our good, "*I will be with him in trouble*" (Psalm xci. 15). God does not bring His people into troubles, and leave them there. He will stand by them; He will hold their heads and hearts when they are fainting. And there is another promise, "*He is their strength in the time of trouble*" (Psalm xxxvii. 39). "Oh," says the soul, "I shall faint in the day of trial." But God will be the strength of our hearts; He will join His forces with us. Either He will make His hand lighter, or our faith stronger.

Do we fear outward wants? There is a promise. "*They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing*" (Psalm xxxiv. 10). If it is good for us, we shall have it; if it is not good for us, then the withholding of it is good. "*I will bless thy bread and thy water*" (Exod. xxiii. 25). This blessing falls as the honey-dew upon the leaf; it sweetens that little we possess. Let me want the venison, so I may have the blessing. But I fear I shall not get a livelihood? Peruse that Scripture. "*I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*" (Psalm xxxvii. 25). How must we understand this? David speaks it as his own observation; he never beheld such an

eclipse, he never saw a godly man brought so low that he had not a bit of bread to put in his mouth. David never saw the righteous and their seed lacking. Though the Lord might try godly parents a while by want, yet not their seed too; the seed of the godly shall be provided for. David never saw the righteous begging bread, and forsaken. Though he might be reduced to great straits, yet not forsaken; still he is an heir of heaven, and God loves him.

Quest. How do the promises work for good?

Ans. They are food for faith; and that which strengthens faith works for good. The promises are the milk of faith; faith sucks nourishment from them, as the child from the breast. "*Jacob feared exceedingly*" (Gen. xxxii. 7). His spirits were ready to faint; now he goes to the promise, "*Lord, thou hast said thou wilt do me good*" (Gen. xxxii. 12). This promise was his food. He got so much strength from this promise, that he was able to wrestle with the Lord all night in prayer, and would not let Him go till He had blessed him.

The promises also are springs of joy. There is more in the promises to comfort than in the world to perplex. Ursin was comforted by that promise: "*No man shall pluck them out of my Father's hands*" (John x. 29). The promises are cordials in a fainting-fit. "*Unless thy word had been my delight, I had perished in my affliction*" (Psalm cxix. 92). The promises are as cork to the net, to bear up the heart from sinking in the deep waters of distress.

3. The mercies of God work for good to the godly.

The mercies of God humble. "*Then went king David, and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my father's house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?*" (2 Sam. vii. 18). Lord, why is such honour conferred upon me, that I should be king? That I who followed the sheep, should go in and out before Thy people? So says a gracious heart, "Lord, what am I, that it should be better with me than others? That I should drink of the fruit of the vine, when others drink, not only a cup of wormwood, but a cup of blood (or suffering to death). What am I, that I should have those mercies which others want, who are better than I? Lord, why is it, that notwithstanding all my unworthiness, a fresh tide of mercy comes in every day? " The mercies of God make a sinner proud, but a saint humble.

The mercies of God have a melting influence upon the soul; they dissolve it in love to God. God's judgments make us fear Him, His mercies make us love Him. How was Saul wrought upon by kindness! David had him at the advantage, and might have cut off, not only the skirt of his robe, but his head; yet he spares his life. This kindness melted Saul's heart. "*Is this thy voice, my son David? and Saul lift up his voice, and wept*" (1 Sam. xxiv. 16). Such a melting influence has God's mercy; it makes the eyes drop with tears of love.

The mercies of God make the heart fruitful. When you lay out more cost upon a field, it bears a better crop. A gracious soul honours the Lord with his substance. He does not do with his mercies, as Israel with their jewels and ear-rings, make a golden calf; but, as Solomon did with the money thrown into the treasury, build a temple for the Lord. The golden showers of mercy cause fertility.

The mercies of God make the heart thankful. *"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation"* (Psalm cxvi. 12, 13). David alludes to the people of Israel, who at their peace-offerings used to take a cup in their hands, and give thanks to God for deliverances. Every mercy is an alms of free grace; and this enlarges the soul in gratitude. A good Christian is not a grave to bury God's mercies, but a temple to sing His praises. If every bird in its kind, as Ambrose says, chirps forth thankfulness to its Maker, much more will an ingenuous Christian, whose life is enriched and perfumed with mercy.

The mercies of God quicken. As they are loadstones to love, so they are whetstones to obedience. *"I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living"* (Psalm cxvi. 9). He that takes a review of his blessings, looks upon himself as a person engaged for God. He argues from the sweetness of mercy to the swiftness of duty. He spends and is spent for Christ; he dedicates himself to God. Among the Romans, when one had redeemed another, he was afterwards to serve him. A soul encompassed with mercy is zealously active in God's service.

The mercies of God work compassion to others. A Christian is a temporal saviour. He feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, and visits the widow and orphan in their distress; among them he sows the golden seeds of his charity. *"A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth"* (Psalm cxii. 5). Charity drops from him freely, as myrrh from the tree. Thus to the godly, the mercies of God work for good; they are wings to lift them up to heaven.

Spiritual mercies also work for good.

The word preached works for good. It is a savour of life, it is a soul-transforming word, it assimilates the heart into Christ's likeness; it produces assurance. *"Our gospel came to you not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance"* (1 Thess. i. 5). It is the chariot of salvation.

Prayer works for good. Prayer is the bellows of the affection; it blows up holy desires and ardours of soul. Prayer has power with God. *"Command ye me"* (Isa. xlv. 11). It is a key that unlocks the treasury of God's mercy. Prayer keeps the heart open to God, and shut to sin; it assuages the intemperate hearts and swellings of lust. It was Luther's counsel to a friend, when he perceived a temptation begin to arise, to betake himself to prayer. Prayer is the Christian's gun, which he discharges against his enemies. Prayer is the sovereign medicine of the soul. Prayer sanctifies every mercy (1 Tim. iv. 5). It is the dispeller of sorrow: by venting the grief it eases the heart. When Hannah had prayed, *"she went away, and was no more sad"* (1 Sam. i. 18). And if it has these rare effects, then it works for good.

The Lord's Supper works for good. It is an emblem of the marriage-supper of the Lamb (Rev. xix. 9), and an earnest of that communion we shall have with Christ in glory. It is a feast of fat things; it gives us bread from Heaven, such as preserves life, and prevents death. It has glorious effects in the hearts of the godly. It quickens their affections, strengthens their graces, mortifies their corruptions, revives their hopes, and increases their joy. Luther says, "It is as great a work to comfort a dejected soul, as to raise the dead to life"; yet this may and sometimes is done to the souls of the godly in the blessed supper.

4. The graces of the Spirit work for good.

Grace is to the soul, as light to the eye, as health to the body. Grace does to the soul, as a virtuous wife to her husband, "*She will do him good all the days of her life*" (Prov. xxxi. 12). How incomparably useful are the graces! Faith and fear go hand in hand. Faith keeps the heart cheerful, fear keeps the heart serious. Faith keeps the heart from sinking in despair, fear keeps it from floating in presumption. All the graces display themselves in their beauty: hope is "*the helmet*" (1 Thess. v. 8), meekness "*the ornament*" (1 Pet. iii. 4), love "*the bond of perfectness*" (Col. iii. 14). The saints' graces are weapons to defend them, wings to elevate them, jewels to enrich them, spices to perfume them, stars to adorn them, cordials to refresh them. And does not all this work for good? The graces are our evidences for heaven. Is it not good to have our evidences at the hour of death?

5. The Angels work for the good of the Saints.

The good angels are ready to do all offices of love to the people of God. "*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*" (Heb. i. 14). Some of the fathers were of opinion that every believer has his guardian angel. This subject needs no hot debate. It may suffice us to know the whole hierarchy of angels is employed for the good of the saints.

The good angels do service to the saints in life. The angel did comfort the virgin Mary (Luke i. 28). The angels stopped the mouths of the lions, that they could not hurt Daniel (Dan. vi. 22). A Christian has an invisible guard of angels about him. "*He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways*" (Psalm xci. 11). The angels are of the saints' life-guard, yea, the chief of the angels: "*Are they not all ministering spirits?*" The highest angels take care of the lowest saints.

The good angels do service at death. The angels are about the saints' sick-beds to comfort them. As God comforts by His Spirit, so by His angels. Christ in His agony was refreshed by an angel (Luke xxii. 43); so are believers in the agony of death: and when the saints' breath expires, their souls are carried up to heaven by a convoy of angels (Luke xvi. 22).

The good angels also do service at the day of judgment. The angels shall open the saints' graves, and shall conduct them into the presence of Christ, when they shall be made like His glorious body. *"He shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other"* (Matt. xxiv. 31). The angels at the day of judgment shall rid the godly of all their enemies. Here the saints are plagued with enemies. *"They are mine adversaries, because I follow the thing that is good"* (Psalm xxxviii. 20). Well, the angels will shortly give God's people a writ of ease, and set them free from all their enemies: "The tares are the children of the wicked one, the harvest is the end of the world, the reapers are the angels; as therefore the tares are gathered and burnt in the fire, so shall it be in the end of the world: the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things which offend, and them which do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire" (Matt. xiii. 38-42). At the day of judgment the angels of God will take the wicked, which are the tares, and will bundle them up, and throw them into hell-furnace, and then the godly will not be troubled with enemies any more: thus the good angels work for good. See here the honour and dignity of a believer. He has God's name written upon him (Rev. iii. 12), the Holy Ghost dwelling in him (2 Tim. i. 14), and a guard of angels attending him.

6. The Communion of Saints works for good.

"We are helpers of your joy" (2 Cor. i. 24). One Christian conversing with another is a means to confirm him. As the stones in an arch help to strengthen one another, one Christian by imparting his experience, heats and quickens another. *"Let us provoke one another to love, and to good works"* (Heb. x. 24). How does grace flourish by holy conference! A Christian by good discourse drops that oil upon another, which makes the lamp of his faith burn the brighter.

7. Christ's intercession works for good.

Christ is in heaven, as Aaron with his golden plate upon his forehead, and his precious incense; and He prays for all believers as well as He did for the apostles. *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for all them that shall believe in me"* (John xvii. 20). When a Christian is weak, and can hardly pray for himself, Jesus Christ is praying for him; and He prays for three things. First, that the saints may be kept from sin (John xvii. 15). *"I pray that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."* We live in the world as in a pest-house; Christ prays that His saints may not be infected with the contagious evil of the times. Second, for His people's progress in holiness. *"Sanctify them"* (John xvii. 17). Let them have constant supplies of the Spirit, and be anointed with fresh oil. Third, for their glorification *"Father, I will that those which thou hast given me, be with me where I am"* (John xvii. 24). Christ is not content till the saints are in His arms. This prayer, which He made on earth, is the copy and pattern of His prayer in heaven. What a comfort is this; when Satan is tempting, Christ is praying! This works for good.

Christ's prayer takes away the sins of our prayers. As a child, says Ambrose, that is willing to present his father with a posy, goes into the garden, and there gathers some flowers and some weeds together, but coming to his mother, she picks out the weeds and binds the flowers, and so it is presented to the father: thus when we have put up our prayers, Christ comes, and picks away the weeds, the sin of our prayer, and presents nothing but flowers to His Father, which are a sweet-smelling savour.

8. The prayers of Saints work for good to the godly,

The saints pray for all the members of the body mystical, their prayers prevail much. They prevail for recovery from sickness "*Thy prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up*" (James v. 15). They prevail for victory over enemies. *Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left* (Isa. xxxvii. 4). "*Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote, in the camp of the Assyrians, an hundred and fourscore and five thousand*" (Isa. xxxvii. 36). They prevail for deliverance out of prison. "*Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And behold the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison, and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, and his chains fell off*" (Acts xii. 5-7). The angel fetched Peter out of prison, but it was prayer fetched the angel. They prevail for forgiveness of sin. *My servant Job shall pray for you, for him will I accept*" (Job xlii. 8). Thus the prayers of the saints work for good to the body mystical. And this is no small privilege to a child of God, that he has a constant trade of prayer driven for him. When he comes into any place, he may say, "I have some prayer here, nay, all the world over I have a stock of prayer going for me. When I am indisposed, and out of tune, others are praying for me, who are quick and lively." Thus the best things work for good to the people of God.

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