

A Divine Cordial Chapter III

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).

Why All Things Work For Good

1. The grand reason why all things work for good, is the near and dear interest which God has in His people. The Lord has made a covenant with them. "*They shall be my people, and I will be their God*" (Jer. xxxii. 38). By virtue of this compact, all things do, and must work, for good to them. "*I am God, even thy God*" (Psalm 1. 7). This word, "Thy God," is the sweetest word in the Bible, it implies the best relations; and it is impossible there should be these relations between God and His people, and everything not work for their good. This expression, "I am thy God," implies,

(1). The relation of a physician: "I am thy Physician." God is a skillful Physician. He knows what is best. God observes the different temperaments of men, and knows what will work most effectually. Some are of a more sweet disposition, and are drawn by mercy. Others are more rugged and knotty pieces; these God deals with in a more forcible way. Some things are kept in sugar, some in brine. God does not deal alike with all; He has trials for the strong and cordials for the weak. God is a faithful Physician, and therefore will turn all to the best. If God does not give you that which you like, He will give you that which you need. A physician does not so much study to please the taste of the patient, as to cure his disease. We complain that very sore trials lie upon us; let us remember God is our Physician, therefore He labours rather to heal us than humour us.

God's dealings with His children, though they are sharp, yet they are safe, and in order to cure; "*that he might do thee good in the latter end*" (Deut. viii. 16).

(2). This word, "thy God", implies the relation of a Father. A father loves his child; therefore whether it be a smile or a stroke, it is for the good of the child. I am thy God, thy Father, therefore all I do is for thy good. "*As a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee*" (Deut. viii. 5). God's chastening is not to destroy but to reform. God cannot hurt His children, for He is a tender-hearted Father, "*Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him*" (Psalm ciii. 13). Will a father seek the ruin of his child, the child that came from himself, that bears his image? All his care and contrivance is for his child: whom does he settle the inheritance upon, but his child? God is the tender-hearted "*Father of mercies*" (2 Cor. i. 3). He begets all the mercies and kindness in the creatures.

God is an everlasting Father (Isa. ix. 6). He was our Father from eternity; before we were children, God was our Father, and He will be our Father to eternity. A father provides for his child while he lives; but the father dies, and then the child may be exposed to injury. But God never ceases to be a Father. You who are a believer, have a Father that never dies; and if God be your father, you can never be undone. All things must needs work for your good.

(3). This word, "thy God," implies the relation of a Husband. This is a near and sweet relation. The husband seeks the good of his spouse; he were unnatural that should go about to destroy his wife. No man ever yet hated his own flesh?" (Ephes. v. 29). There is a marriage relation between God and His people. "*Thy Maker is thy Husband*" (Isa. liv. 5). God entirely loves His people. He engraves them upon the palms of His hands (Isa. xlix. 16). He sets them as a seal upon His breast (Cant. viii. 6). He will give kingdoms for their ransom (Isa. xliii. 3). This shows how near they lie to His heart. If He be a Husband whose heart is full of love, then He will seek the good of His spouse. Either He will shield off an injury, or will turn it to the best.

(4). This word, "thy God," implies the relation of a Friend. "*This is my friend*" (Cant. v. 16). A friend is, as Augustine says, half one's self. He is studious and desirous how he may do his friend good; he promotes his welfare as his own. Jonathan ventured the king's displeasure for his friend David (1 Sam. xix. 4). He is a faithful Friend. "*Knowest therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God*" (Deut. vii. 9). He is faithful in His love. He gave His very heart to us, when He gave the Son out of His bosom. Here was a pattern of love without a parallel. He is faithful in His promises. "*God, that cannot lie, hath promised*" (Titus i. 2). He may change His promise, but cannot break it. He is faithful in His dealings; when He is afflicting He is faithful. "*In faithfulness thou hast afflicted me*" (Psalm cxix. 75). He is sifting and refining us as silver (Psalm lxxvi. 10).

God is an immutable Friend. "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Heb. xiii. 5). Friends often fail at a pinch. Many deal with their friends as women do with flowers; while they are fresh they put them in their bosoms, but when they begin to wither they throw them away. Or as the traveller does with the sun-dial; if the sun shines upon the

dial, the traveller will step out of the road, and look upon the dial; but if the sun does not shine upon it, he will ride by, and never take any notice of it. So, if prosperity shine on men, then friends will look upon them; but if there be a cloud of adversity on them, they will not come near them. But God is a Friend for ever; He has said, "*I will never leave thee.*" Though David walked in the shadow of death, he knew he had a Friend by him. "*I will fear no evil, for thou art with me*" (Psalm xxiii. 4). God never takes off His love wholly from His people. "*He loved them unto the end*" (John xiii. 1). God being such a Friend, will make all things work for our good. There is no friend but will seek the good of his friend.

(5). This word, "thy God," implies yet a nearer relation, the relation between the Head and the members. There is a mystical union between Christ and the saints. He is called, "*the Head of the church*" (Eph. v. 23). Does not the head consult for the good of the body? The head guides the body, it sympathizes with it, it is the fountain of spirits, it sends forth influence and comfort into the body. All the parts of the head are placed for the good of the body. The eye is set as it were in the watch-tower, it stands sentinel to spy any danger that may come to the body, and prevent it. The tongue is both a taster and an orator. If the body be a microcosm, or little world, the head is the sun in this world, from which proceeds the light of reason. The head is placed for the good of the body. Christ and the saints make one body mystical. Our Head is in heaven, and surely He will not suffer His body to be hurt, but will consult for the safety of it, and make all things work for the good of the body mystical.

2. Inferences from the proposition that all things work for the good of the saints,

(1). If all things work for good, hence learn that there is a providence. Things do not work of themselves, but God sets them working for good. God is the great Disposer of all events and issues, He sets everything working. "*His kingdom ruleth over all*" (Psalm ciii. 19). It is meant of His providential kingdom. Things in the world are not governed by second causes, by the counsels of men, by the stars and planets, but by divine providence. Providence is the queen and governess of the world. There are three things in providence: God's foreknowing, God's determining, and God's directing all things to their periods and events. Whatever things do work in the world, God sets them a working. We read in the first of Ezekiel of wheels, and eyes in the wheels, and the moving of the wheels. The wheels are the whole universe, the eyes in the wheels are God's providence, the moving of the wheels is the hand of Providence, turning all things here below. That which is by some called chance is nothing else but the result of providence.

Learn to adore providence. Providence has an influence upon all things here below. It is this that mingles the ingredients, and makes up the whole compound.

(2). Observe the happy condition of every child of God. All things work for his good, the best and worst things. "*Unto the upright ariseth light in darkness*" (Psalm cxii. 4). The most dark cloudy providences of God have some sunshine in them. What a blessed

condition is a true believer in! When he dies, he goes to God; and while he lives, everything shall do him good. Affliction is for his good. What hurt does the fire to the gold? It only purifies it. What hurt does the fan to the corn? It only separates the chaff from it. What hurt do leeches to the body? They only suck out the bad blood. God never uses His staff, but to beat out the dust. Affliction does that which the Word many times will not, it "*opens the ear to discipline*" (Job xxxvi. 10). When God lays men upon their backs, then they look up to heaven. God's smiting His people is like the musician's striking upon the violin, which makes it put forth a melodious sound. How much good comes to the saints by affliction! when they are pounded and broken, they send forth their sweetest smell. Affliction is a bitter root, but it bears sweet fruit. "*It yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness*" (Heb. xii. 11). Affliction is the highway to heaven; though it be flinty and thorny, yet it is the best way. Poverty shall starve our sins: sickness shall make grace more helpful (2 Cor. iv. 16). Reproach shall cause "*the Spirit of God and of glory to rest upon us*" (1 Pet. iv. 14). Death shall stop the bottle of tears, and open the gate of Paradise. A believer's dying day is his ascension day to glory. Hence it is, the saints have put their afflictions in the inventory of their riches (Heb. xi. 26). Themistocles being banished from his own country, grew afterwards in favour with the king of Egypt, whereupon he said, "I had perished, if I had not perished." So may a child of God say, "If I had not been afflicted, I had been destroyed: if my health and estate had not been lost, my soul had been lost."

(3). See then what an encouragement here is to become godly. All things shall work for good. Oh, that this may induce the world to fall in love with religion! Can there be a greater loadstone to piety? Can anything more prevail with us to be good, than this; all things shall work for our good? Religion is the true philosopher's stone that turns everything into gold. Take the sourest part of religion, the suffering part, and there is comfort in it. God sweetens suffering with joy; He candies our wormwood with sugar. Oh, how may this bribe us to godliness! "*Acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee*" (Job xxii. 21). No man did ever come off a loser by his acquaintance with God. By this, good shall come unto you, abundance of good, the sweet distillations of grace, the hidden manna, yea, everything shall work for good. Oh, then get acquaintance with God, espouse His interest.

(4). Notice the miserable condition of wicked men. To them that are godly, evil things work for good: to them that are evil, good things work for hurt.

(i.) Temporal good things work for hurt to the wicked. Riches and prosperity are not benefits but snares, as Seneca speaks. Worldly things are given to the wicked, as Michal was given to David, for a snare (1 Sam. xviii. 21). The vulture is said to draw sickness from a perfume: so do the wicked from the sweet perfume of prosperity. Their mercies are like poisoned bread given to dogs; their tables are sumptuously spread, but there is a hook under the bait: "*Let their table become a snare*" (Psalm lxxix. 22). All their enjoyments are like Israel's quails, which were sauced with the wrath of God (Numb. xi. 33). Pride and luxury are the twins of prosperity. "*Thou art waxen fat*" (Deut. xxxii. 15). Then he forsook God. Riches are not only like the spider's web, unprofitable, but like the cockatrice's egg, pernicious. "*Riches kept for the hurt of the owner*" (Eccles. v. 13).

The common mercies wicked men have, are not loadstones to draw them nearer to God, but millstones to sink them deeper in hell (1 Tim. vi. 9). Their delicious dainties are like Haman's banquet; after all their lordly feasting, death will bring in the bill, and they must pay it in hell.

(ii.) Spiritual good things work for hurt to the wicked. From the flower of heavenly blessings they suck poison.

The ministers of God work for their hurt. The same wind that blows one ship to the haven, blows another ship upon a rock. The same breath in the ministry that blows a godly man to heaven, blows a profane sinner to hell. They who come with the word of life in their mouths, yet to many are a savour of death. "*Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy*" (Isa. vi. 10). The prophet was sent upon a sad message, to preach their funeral sermon. Wicked men are worse for preaching. "*They hate him that rebuketh in the gate*" (Amos v. 10). Sinners grow more resolved in sin; let God say what He will, they will do what they list. "*As for the word which thou hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee*" (Jer. xlv. 16). The word preached is not healing, but hardening. And how dreadful is this for men to be sunk to hell with sermons!

Prayer works for their hurt. "*The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*" (Prov. xv. 8). A wicked man is in a great strait: if he prays not, he sins; if he prays, he sins, "*Let his prayer become sin*" (Psalm cix. 7). It were a sad judgment if all the food a man did eat should turn to ill humours, and breed diseases in the body: so it is with a wicked man. That prayer which should do him good, works for his hurt; he prays against sin, and sins against his prayer; his duties are tainted with atheism, fly-blown with hypocrisy. God abhors them.

The Lord's Supper works for their hurt. "*Ye cannot eat of the Lord's table and the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?*" (1 Cor. x. 21, 22). Some professors kept their idol-feasts, yet would come to the Lord's table. The apostle says, "*Do you provoke the Lord to wrath?*" Profane persons feast with their sins; yet will come to feast at the Lord's table. This is to provoke God. To a sinner there is death in the cup, he "*eats and drinks his own damnation*" (1 Cor. xi. 29). Thus the Lord's Supper works for hurt to impenitent sinners. After the sop, the devil enters.

Christ Himself works for hurt to desperate sinners. He is "*a stone of stumbling, and rock of offence*" (1 Pet. ii. 8). He is so, through the depravity of men's hearts; for instead of believing in Him, they are offended at Him. The sun, though in its own nature pure and pleasant, yet it is hurtful to sore eyes. Jesus Christ is set for the fall, as the rising, of many (Luke ii. 34). Sinners stumble at a Saviour, and pluck death from the tree of life. As chemical oils recover some patients, but destroy others; so the blood of Christ, though to some it is medicine, to others it is condemnation. Here is the unparalleled misery of such as live and die in sin. The best things work for their hurt; cordials themselves, kill.

(5). See here the wisdom of God, who can make the worst things imaginable turn to the good of the saints. He can by a divine chemistry extract gold out of dross. "*Oh the depth of the wisdom of God!*" (Rom. xi. 33). It is God's great design to set forth the wonder of His wisdom. The Lord made Joseph's prison a step to preferment. There was no way for Jonah to be saved, but by being swallowed up. God suffered the Egyptians to hate Israel (Psalm cvi. 41), and this was the means of their deliverance. St. Paul was bound with a chain, and that chain which did bind him was the means of enlarging the gospel (Phil. i. 12). God enriches by impoverishing; He causes the augmentation of grace by the diminution of an estate. When the creature goes further from us, it is that Christ may come nearer to us. God works strangely. He brings order out of confusion, harmony out of discord. He frequently makes use of unjust men to do that which is just. "*He is wise in heart!*" (Job. ix. 4). He can reap His glory out of men's fury (Psalm lxxvi. 10). Either the wicked shall not do the hurt that they intend, or they shall do the good which they do not intend. God often helps when there is least hope, and saves His people in that way which they think will destroy. He made use of the high-priest's malice and Judas' treason to redeem the world. Through indiscreet passion, we are apt to find fault with things that happen; which is as if an illiterate man should censure philosophy, or a blind man find fault with the work in a landscape. "*Vain man would be wise!*" (Job xi. 12). Silly animals will be taxing Providence, and calling the wisdom of God to the bar of reason. God's ways are "*past finding out!*" (Rom. xi. 33). They are rather to be admired than fathomed. There is never a providence of God, but has either a mercy or a wonder in it. How stupendous and infinite is that wisdom, that makes the most adverse dispensations work for the good of His children!

(6). Learn how little cause we have then to be discontented at outward trials and emergencies! What! discontented at that which shall do us good! All things shall work for good. There are no sins God's people are more subject to than unbelief and impatience. They are ready either to faint through unbelief, or to fret through impatience. When men fly out against God by discontent and impatience it is a sign they do not believe this text. Discontent is an ungrateful sin, because we have more mercies than afflictions; and it is an irrational sin, because afflictions work for good. Discontent is a sin which puts us upon sin. "*Fret not thyself to do evil!*" (Psalm xxxvii. 8). He that frets will be ready to do evil: fretting Jonah was sinning Jonah (Jonah iv. 9). The devil blows the coals of passion and discontent, and then warms himself at the fire. Oh, let us not nourish this angry viper in our breast. Let this text produce patience, "*All things work for good to them that love God!*" (Rom. viii. 28). Shall we be discontented at that which works for our good? If one friend should throw a bag of money at another, and in throwing it, should graze his head, he would not be troubled much, seeing by this means he had got a bag of money. So the Lord may bruise us by afflictions, but it is to enrich us. These afflictions work for us a weight of glory, and shall we be discontented?

(7). See here that Scripture fulfilled, "*God is good to Israel!*" (Psalm lxxiii. 1). When we look upon adverse providences, and see the Lord covering His people with ashes, and "*making them drunk with wormwood!*" (Lam. iii. 15), we may be ready to call in question the love of God, and to say that He deals hardly with His people. But, oh no, yet God is good to Israel, because He makes all things work for good. Is not He a good God, who

turns all to good? He works out sin, and works in grace: is not this good? "*We are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*" (1 Cor. xi. 32). The depth of affliction is to save us from the depth of damnation. Let us always justify God; when our outward condition is ever so bad, let us say, "Yet God is good."

(8). See what cause the saints have to be frequent in the work of thanksgiving. In this Christians are defective; though they are much in supplication, yet little in gratulation. The apostle says, "*In everything giving thanks*" (Thess. v. 18). Why so? Because God makes everything work for our good. We thank the physician, though he gives us a bitter medicine which makes us sick, because it is to make us well; we thank any man that does us a good turn: and shall we not be thankful to God, who makes everything work for good to us? God loves a thankful Christian. Job thanked God when He took all away: "*The Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord*" (Job i. 21). Many will thank God when He gives; Job thanks Him when He takes away, because he knew God would work good out of it. We read of saints with harps in their hands (Rev. xiv. 2), an emblem of praise. We meet many Christians who have tears in their eyes, and complaints in their mouths but there are few with their harps in their hands, who praise God in affliction. To be thankful in affliction is a work peculiar to a saint. Every bird can sing in spring, but some birds will sing in the dead of winter. Everyone, almost, can be thankful in prosperity, but a true saint can be thankful in adversity. A good Christian will bless God, not only at sun-rise, but at sunset. Well may we, in the worst that befalls us, have a psalm of thankfulness, because all things work for good. Oh, be much in blessing of God: we will thank Him that doth befriend us.

(9). Think, if the worst things work for good to a believer, what shall the best things — Christ, and heaven! How much more shall these work for good! If the cross has so much good in it, what has the crown? If such precious clusters grow in Golgotha, how delicious is that fruit which grows in Canaan? If there be any sweetness in the waters of Marah, what is there in the wine of Paradise? If God's rod has honey at the end of it, what has His golden sceptre? If the bread of affliction tastes so savoury, what is manna? what is the heavenly ambrosia? If God's blow and stroke work for good, what shall the smiles of His face do? If temptations and sufferings have matter of joy in them, what shall glory have? If there be so much good out of evil, what then is that good where there shall be no evil? If God's chastening mercies are so great, what will His crowning mercies be? Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

(10). Consider, that if God makes all things to turn to our good, how right is it that we should make all things tend to His glory! "*Do all to the glory of God*" (1 Cor. x. 31). The angels glorify God, they sing divine anthems of praise. How then ought man to glorify Him, for whom God has done more than for angels! He has dignified us above them in uniting our nature with the Godhead. Christ has died for us. and not the angels. The Lord has given us, not only out of the common stock of His bounty, but He has enriched us with covenant blessings, He has bestowed upon us His Spirit. He studies our welfare, He makes everything work for our good; free-grace has laid a plan for our salvation. If God seeks our good, shall we not seek His glory?

Question. How can we be said properly to glorify God. He is infinite in His perfections, and can receive no augmentation from us?

Answer. It is true that in a strict sense we cannot bring glory to God, but in an evangelical sense we may. When we do what in us lies to lift up God's name in the world, and to cause others to have high reverential thoughts of God, this the Lord interprets a glorifying of Him; as a man is said to dishonour God, when he causes the name of God to be evil spoken of.

We are said to advance God's glory in three ways: (i.) When we aim at His glory; when we make Him the first in our thoughts, and the last in our end. As all the rivers run into the sea, and all the lines meet in the centre, so all our actions terminate and centre in God. (ii.) We advance God's glory by being fruitful in grace. "*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit*" (John xv. 8). Barrenness reflects dishonour upon God. We glorify God when we grow in fairness as the lily, in tallness as the cedar, in fruitfulness as the vine. (iii.) We glorify God when we give the praise and glory of all we do unto God. It was an excellent and humble speech of a king of Sweden; he feared lest the people's ascribing that glory to him which was due to God, should cause him to be removed before the work was done. When the silk-worm weaves her curious work, she hides herself under the silk, and is not seen. When we have done our best, we must vanish away in our own thoughts, and transfer the glory of all to God. The apostle Paul said, "*I laboured more abundantly than they all*" (1 Cor. xv. 10). One would think this speech savoured of pride; but the apostle pulls off the crown from his own head, and sets it upon the head of free-grace, "*Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*" Constantine used to write the name of Christ over the door; so should we over our duties. Thus let us endeavour to make the name of God glorious and renowned. If God seek our good, let us seek His glory. If He make all things tend to our edification, let us make all things tend to His exaltation. So much for the privilege mentioned in the text.

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