

**The
Great Comfort
of Believers in
the Co-Operation
of All Things
for Their Good
Part One**



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“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose” Romans 8:28.

This chapter is like a string of pearls, every one of them more precious than another; if we might loose the string, and single out this one from among the rest, to take a particular view thereof, we may find an immense worth and preciousness in it. The whole of this chapter is consolatory; and holds forth some special grounds of consolation for supporting justified and sanctified ones against all evil whatsoever. We may take up the substance of the chapter in four heads.

1. We have comfort against the condemning sentence of the law, in the beginning of the chapter, to the fifth verse. Such as have union with Christ, have no reason to fear the dreadful sentence of the threatening part of the law.

2. We have comfort against indwelling sin that adheres even to them that are justified and sanctified; for, it shall never hinder the indwelling of the Spirit here, nor the glorious resurrection of the body at the last day, nor the eternal happiness of both soul and body; from the fifth to the seventeenth verse.

3. There is comfort against all afflictions, crosses, and tribulations in this world; from verse seventeenth to the thirty-third.

4. Not only comfort against all adversity, but against all adversaries whatsoever, and against all charges and challenges, insomuch that believers are brought in triumphing in the God that justifies, so as none can lay anything to their charge.

The chapter begins with no condemnation to the believer; and it ends with no separation from Christ; and, to be sure, the top stone has a solid foundation, for nothing can be more certain than this. That there is no condemnation to them, as to whom there is no

separation from Christ.

This text is one of the pearls of the third part of this chapter; and it contains a sum of the believer's comforts. There are two things especially that hinder the comfort and consolation of a Christian; the one is sin, the head of the serpent; and the other is affliction, the tail of the serpent: against which the apostle brings a sovereign remedy, taken from the providence of God, which is the daily executor of his purpose, "Working all things according to the counsel of his will," and making them the means to help forward the happy end; nothing shall hinder, but rather everything shall promote their spiritual good and eternal happiness, "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose."

The words contain two general parts. We have, 1. A divine consolation, encouragement, and privilege; "We know that all things work together for good." 2. A due limitation or restriction, specifying the objects to whom this comfort pertains; it is to them that love God and are the called according to his purpose.

1. We have a divine consolation, or great privilege asserted: wherein you may observe four things most comfortable and remarkable. (1). A blessed end proposed, namely, Good; spiritual and eternal good. (2). The plentiful means for accomplishing this end, namely, all things. Here is a general including all particulars. (3). The harmonious influence that these means have for reaching this end, they work; and they work together in a wonderful harmony. (4). The certain evidence hereof, "We know it," says the apostle, both by faith and experience, "that all things work together for good to them that love God." The operation of the Spirit, in helping the infirmities of the saints, of which the apostle was just now speaking, is not more certain than this wonderful dispensation of providence; for it is emphatically asserted, in connection with that and the other great truths here delivered; and "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

2. We have a due limitation, or restriction; or, if you will, a specification of the objects to whom this comfort pertains, to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose. And here also four things may be observed. (1). The cardinal grace by

which the believing child of God is described, namely *love*. (2). The glorious object on whom this love is directed, namely *God*. Every believer is a lover; and the principal object of his love, is a God in Christ. (3). The immediate root and spring of this love, and that is calling; they are called, and indeed effectually, and so have Christ formed in them, and are new creatures. (4). The eternal foundation of this call, and that is the divine purpose; they are called according to his purpose, and this purpose of God, as the foundation of effectual calling, is more clearly explained in the following verses, 29, 30. “Whom he did foreknow, them also he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” There is, therefore, here a remarkable chain in answering this question, Who they are to whom all things shall work together for good? Why, it is the elect. But how shall we know who are elect? Why, they are effectually called in time. But how shall we know who are effectually called? Why, even by their love to God; we may know eternal election by their being called; and effectual calling by our internal affection toward God in Christ.

Observe in general, “That God’s free love and gracious purpose is fertile and productive of many precious fruits.” Why, on this root grows the blessing of effectual calling, wherein the seed of all grace is sown, whence love particularly springs; insomuch, that our love to God, if it be true and genuine, is the fruit of God’s everlasting love to us. On this root also grows the co-operation of all things for our good; insomuch, that it may well be said of believers in Christ, and lovers of God, ALL things are yours. The God that made all things had no other design in doing so, but his own glory, and the good of his friends and lovers. O! how fruitful is his free love and gracious purpose? I might here relate to you some of the special fruits of his love; but I proceed to the doctrine I mainly intend.

OBSERVE. That it is the consoling privilege of all God’s loving children, that “All things shall work together for their good.”

The method we propose for handling this important subject, as

the Lord shall be pleased to assist, is the following:—

I. To inquire what we are to understand by this note of universality, ALL THINGS?

II. What is this GOOD that all things shall work? That God's lovers may know what they are to look for?

III. What is the meaning of their working, and working together for good.

IV. Inquire a little into the character of these who are thus privileged, namely, as they are lovers of God, being called according to his purpose.

V. Show whence it is, that all things shall thus work together for good to them; and so point out the evidences the apostle hath for saying, We know that it shall be so; and here also observe the suitableness and connexion between this character of loving God, and this privilege of all things working together for good.

VI. Deduce some inferences for the application of the whole.

I. We are first to open up this note of universality, ALL THINGS. This we shall endeavour both negatively and positively.

First, View it negatively. And, in general, we are not to understand it simply or absolutely, but relatively or respectively: that is to say, we are not so to view it, as if all things indefinitely, even these that the believer has no concern in, or notice of; such as all things that fall out in China or Japan were to work for his good who lives here: but we are to understand it relatively, of all things that relate to him, and wherein he is immediately concerned, and whereby he is troubled, such as all afflictive things, whereof the apostle had been speaking. Therefore,

Secondly, Let us view it positively, and more particularly; all things that he hath to do with, whether good or bad. *I shall offer a short catalogue of good things and evil things that shall work for the believer's good and advantage:* here is a little word ALL, but it is great in signification: and all that can be said of all things must be but a few things; for *all things* is a subject that would never be exhausted.

1. *I offer a catalogue of good things, that shall work for their advantage.*

(1). To begin with the best, GOD himself, who is the chief good, he works for their good. He that made all things, and orders all things, and governs all things, and to whom all things are nothing, and by whom all things subsist and move; if he work for their good, all things must do so, according as he orders them: but so it is, that God, and all things in God work for their good.

All the attributes of God work for their good; his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, faithfulness: his infinity, eternity, unchangeableness. I might particularly instance in every one of them, but I only consider them altogether working for their good, Gen. 17:1, 2, “I am God all sufficient; walk before me, and be thou perfect. I will make my covenant between me and thee;” intimating, his all sufficiency was to be forthcoming by way of free covenant promise; “My grace shall be sufficient for thee;” my wisdom shall be sufficient for thy direction: my power, for thy protection; my holiness, for thy sanctification; my justification, upon the footing of a justice-satisfying sacrifice; my mercy, for thy commiseration; my truth and faithfulness, for thy consolation; my unchangeableness, for thy security and confirmation; and my eternal being for thy eternal blessedness.

Again, as all the attributes of God, so all the works of God that ever he made, work for his people’s good: his great end in making the world, was for the glory of his name and the good of his elect. Wherefore made he heaven and earth? Why, he made the heaven for their habitation, in the end; and earth, for their accommodation by the way; and hence not only are they heirs of heaven but of the earth also; “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth,” Mat. 5:3.

Again, not only all his works, but all his words work for their good; both law and gospel: the law is their schoolmaster to lead them to Christ, by shewing them their sin and misery; the gospel is the glass wherein they see the glory of Christ, and of God in him to their transformation, 2 Cor. 3:18. In short, all the threatenings of the word, are for their motivation; all the promises, for their consolation; all the precepts, for their direction; all the doctrines of it for their information; and all the parts of it, even every thing in it, for their edification.

Again, not only all the words and actions of God, but all the thoughts and purposes of God work for their good; “I know the thoughts which I think towards you, thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give you an expected end,” Jer. 29:11. As they are called according to his purpose: so they are justified, sanctified, and saved according to his purpose, and will be glorified to eternity, according to his purpose.

(2). CHRIST, and all that pertains to him, work for their good; for, “He is made of God to them, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,” 1 Cor. 1:30. All that Christ did in the flesh; all that he suffered; all that he has done from eternity, and in time; all that he is doing in heaven; and all that he will do at the great day, work for their good. All his appearances are for their good he lived for their sakes, and died for their sins, and rose for their justification. See how the apostle triumphs in the good that comes by Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession in the context here, ver. 33, 34. All his offices work for their good: as a Prophet, he is the wisdom of God, for their illumination; as a Priest, the righteousness of God, for their justification; and as a King, the power of God, for their sanctification. O! what matter is here, were we to speak of all things that belong to his person and his redemption; his authority and ability to save; his fullness to supply; his fitness to redeem; his sweetness to endear, and his brightness to display all the glorious perfections of God! See Col. 2:9; John 1:14, 16.

(3). The SPIRIT, and all his fullness, work for their good; and his operations and influences, John 16:8; all his fruits and graces spoken of, Gal. 5:22: all his various motions; whether as water, for cleansing them: as wind, for refreshing them; as fire, for warming their hearts: or as oil, for anointing the wheels of their souls all the sanctifying operations of the Spirit: all his comforting operations; all his enlightening, quickening, strengthening, enlarging, and sealing operations: I must here but mention the fields that I might go through. The Spirit works for their good as he is a Spirit of faith, a Spirit of repentance, a Spirit of love, and power, and of a sound mind; as he is a Spirit of prayer, grace, and supplication: helping our infirmities, and teaching us to pray with groanings

which cannot be uttered, as you see in the verses immediately preceding the text.

(4). The everlasting Covenant, and all the blessings of it, work for their good; yea, This is their salvation, and all their pleasure, 2 Sam. 23:5. This covenant of promise is a bundle or heap of good things laid up for them. The fullness of the covenant brings good news of supply to them, however poor and empty they are. The freeness of the covenant brings good news of salvation to them, however guilty and unworthy they are in themselves. The stability of the covenant brings good news of perseverance to them, however fickle, and changeable, and unstable they are in themselves. The blood of the covenant, which is the condition thereof, the everlasting righteousness of Christ, brings the good news of all spiritual blessings bought with his blood, "In whom all the promises are Yea and Amen."

(5). All divine providences work for their good; "His eyes run to and fro, throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in their behalf," 2 Chron. 16:9. All the special acts of providence; all that befell Adam before the fall, in the fall, and after the fall. He was in a state of innocency; yet he sinned: and what need have I to be watchful, may the believer say, though I be in a state of grace? Thus his innocency works for good. In Adam's fall he sees how sin was brought into the world, and that he hath sinned. What happened to Adam after the fall, gives a view both of the misery of a natural state, and of the remedy that God hath provided in Christ, the promised seed. All that befell the good angels, is a part of merciful providence that works for their good: they received their confirmation in their happy state by the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ; and how much more may believers expect to be confirmed in a state of grace by the Lord Jesus, who took not on him the nature of angels, to be their Redeemer, but the seed of Abraham? All the great deliverances wrought for the church and people of God, in all ages, work for their good. What he did for Israel in Egypt at the Red Sea, in the wilderness; what he did for them at Jordan; what he did for them in Canaan; how he drove out the heathen, and rebuked kings for their sakes: what he has done for his church in general, and his children in particular, all work

for the good of his people, to encourage their faith, and forward their confidence in the Lord.

(6). All divine Ordinances work for their good; such as a gospel-ministry, and all the ministerial gifts; they are designed for perfecting the saints, and edifying of the body of Christ, Eph. 4:12. Gospel sacraments, that is to say, baptism and the Lord's supper; the one a seal of their incorporation into Christ, and the other a seal of their confirmation. If the sacramental solemnity work any saving good to you, it is a fruit of this promise. All the gifts and graces, not only of ministers, but of private Christians, work for their good, as well as their own gifts and graces; for, not only Paul and Apollos, and Cephas, is theirs, but the communion of saints contributes for their good, Heb. 10:24, 25. All the prayers of the saints work for their good; as their prayers, their fervent prayers avail much; so it is a great comfort to have a stock, or numerous conjunction of prayers going up for them, when they themselves are in distress, or out of tune, or unfit for this exercise. All divine ordinances, word and sacraments, thus work for good. The word is the savour of life to them; and the sacraments, the medicine of life; and no wonder; for, in the word, there is the breath of God; and in the sacraments, the blood of God.

(7). In a word, all the mercies of God, temporal and spiritual, work for their good; for, the goodness of God leads them to repentance: and all the works of the godly work for the good of believers, their good works, and good example, serving for their motivation and imitation. I might,

2. Offer a catalogue of evil things that work for their good.

(1). To begin with the worst; Sin itself, the evil of all evils, though, in its own nature, it works death and damnation; yet, if we look to it as over-ruled by infinite wisdom, and tempered by Christ, who is the wisdom of God, and the power of God, it works for good; even as a skilful physician tempers poison, and makes it medicinal and operative for good. Thus the sin of the first Adam made way for the righteousness of the second Adam; in this respect, the greatest evil wrought for the greatest good. It is part of the wisdom of God in a mystery, that he can bring good out of evil, light out of darkness, and life out of death. Indeed, sin, of itself,

works no spiritual good, it works shame and sorrow, terror, and torment; and they that can encourage themselves in sin by this argument, "Sin as we will, it will work for our good," they never shared of the good promised in this text; for the principal good that all things work for them that love God, is to make them hate sin and to do evil that good may come, is to make our damnation just, Rom. 3:8. It is only corrupt nature that can abuse this doctrine thus; for, wherever true grace is, it will make the sweetest use, to the encouragement of holiness, and the discouragement of sin? Because when God so wisely orders that his people get good occasionally of their sins and falls, as when thereby sin becomes more bitter to them, and Christ more precious, and themselves more humble and watchful, nothing in the world puts a sharper edge upon their hatred and opposition to sin than this doth. In this respect we may say, better is the sin that makes us humble and watchful, than the duty that makes us proud and secure: but, to go on in sin, because God can bring good out of it, is as wicked and atheistical, as if one should go to the devil, because God can bring good out of his temptations.

Sin itself will work for good to them that love God: observe what I say; I would not for all the world say, that sin would work for good to them that love sin, and live in sin; but I can say, before all the world, that it will work for good to them that love God, and hate sin. It will work for good to them that hate it, and hate themselves because of it: it will work for good to them that love God, and loath themselves for sin; it will work for good to them that are humbled for it, and to them that fly to Christ to be saved from it, and that dare not, for a world, allow themselves in the least sin; it will work for good to them that fight against it, and pray against it, and who, though they must own, with David, That iniquities prevail against them, yet they are in arms against it; and, because they know their own weakness, therefore they set the word of God, the sword of the Spirit against it; they set the blood of Christ against it, and the power of God against it; they call in the help of Heaven against it. Why, they love God, and hate sin; and therefore, "All things shall work together for their good." "He that hath ears to hear let him hear:" if a wicked, reprobate world

will stumble, there is no help for it. It is matter of comfort that his elect ones shall obtain; and the text speaks of these: "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, and are the CALLED according to his purpose."

(2). Satan, and all his temptations and suggestions, work together for good to God's children; for, "God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation," 2 Pet. 2:9. God would never have let the serpent bite their heel, if he had not designed to break his head, and to bruise him under their feet. All that the devil and his instruments can do, will work for their good. They may plot, contrive, reproach, persecute, imprison, banish, yea, and take away our lives, and yet all shall work for good; because "The Son of God is manifested to destroy the works of the devil;" both his inward works of deceit, and his outward works of violence.

(3). All their lacks and weaknesses work for their good, 2 Cor. 12:9. From their lacks, he takes occasion to magnify his sufficiency; and from their weakness to magnify his power; "My grace shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be perfected in thy weakness. Most gladly therefore, says the apostle, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

(4). All their inward trials work for their good, even those that result from the Lord's hiding and withdrawing himself; whether in point of grace, withholding the influence of his Spirit: or in point of comfort denying the light of his countenance, Isa. 54:7,8. He frowns a little that his after-smiles may do them the more good when they get them. He orders their momentary, short-lasting desertion, for heightening the price of his everlasting comforts: his design of leaving Zion to say, "The Lord hath forsaken me, my God hath forgotten me," is that he may take occasion to hug and caress them the more kindly in his bosom, as a mother doth her child; "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee," Isa. 49:15. Again,

(5). All their outward trials and afflictions work for their good; whether those that are punitive for correcting their faults; or those that are probative, for trying their graces; in the issue they will still

have occasion to say with David, Psal. 119:71, "It is good for 'me that I have been afflicted." Why, physic is sometimes as good as food; yea, and more necessary many times, however uneasy it may be: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities." It is as good for a child of God to be punished, as it is for a young tree to be pruned, John 15:2; yea, the pressure of affliction may press out the fragrant smell of their graces.

(6). All their sufferings, for the cause of Christ, work for good, Phil. 1:12,19. This turns to the furtherance of the gospel, and to their salvation. They need not grudge any reproach or persecution they meet with for the truths of the gospel, and for their love to Christ; nor any loss they sustain, of name, credit, or profit, in this cause, for it is to be repaid; even here a hundred fold, and hereafter a thousand thousand-fold. This is the particular the apostle seems especially to point at in the context, ver. 17, 18. "If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together." And, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." However, this particular is so included, as that nothing else is excluded; for "All things shall work together for their good." All things in the world, good or bad, shall work for their good; all things past, present, or to come; the past decrees of God, the present dispensations of God, and the future accomplishment of the purposes of God. All things in heaven, earth, and hell; all the mercies of heaven, all the malignities of earth, and all the malice of hell, shall work for their good. Let Joseph's brethren, moved with envy, cast him into a pit, or sell him into Egypt; let Potiphar thrust him into a filthy prison; yet the wisdom of God comes into the game, and turns all about to a glorious and beautiful result, to the exaltation of Joseph, and the preservation of thousands alive in famine. What though Mordecai suffer, and Haman reign and insult for a while? Infinite Wisdom holds the balance of providence in her hand, and will soon turn the scale. Thus I have hinted at a few of these *All things* that shall work together for good. But now the question is,

II. What is that Good that all things shall work for? That they who love God may know what they are to look for. Here, as on the

preceding head, we shall take both a negative and positive view of the matter.

First, Let us view it negatively. They are not to expect that all things that befall them, shall work for their temporal good and prosperity in the world. Sometimes, indeed, this good takes place, as Joseph said to his brethren, Gen. 1:20, “Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.” And as it was with the Israelites, Exod. 1:12, “The more the Egyptians afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.” Of this good the text may be understood; but it is not always to be expected; because, external prosperity is not always good for the people of God. Neither are they to expect that all things should work to this good of absolute exemption from the inbeing of sin, while they are here. God sees it good and fit that they live by faith, in the daily improvement of Christ, for purging away their sin. Nor are they to expect that all things shall work for their absolute freedom from losses and crosses in the world; because it is not good for us to be without them, and they are part of these things that work for their good. Nor are, they to expect that every thing should work for the good that they have in view; but for the good that God hath in view, whose thoughts are infinitely higher than our thoughts. But then;

Secondly, Let us consider the point positively. They may expect that all things shall work together for their spiritual good and eternal welfare. We would incline to branch this out in a few particulars.

1. All things shall work together for furthering their knowledge of, and acquaintance with God in Christ: and surely this is a notable good! “This is life eternal, to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ; whom thou hast sent,” John 17:3. Now, all things shall contribute to make the saints know more and more of the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory; “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world to our glory,” 1 Cor. 2:7. “And to make all men see, what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent that now, unto the principalities

and powers, in heavenly places, might be known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God,” Eph. 3:9,10. That, with the apostle, Rom. 11:33, they may stand at the side of this ocean, and cry out, “O! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” And that, by all things, they may come to know more of the power, holiness, justice, truth, goodness, and glory of God in Christ. We often say, “Experience teaches fools.” Surely there is not an experienced saint, but will find, that by all the good things and bad things he hath met with, by all the various vicissitudes and changes of providence, he hath come to see more of God than he saw before.

2. All things shall work together for their participation of the image of God, in a greater degree; and surely this is good; and it is brought about by the promises of God, 2 Pet. 1:4. By those we are said to be partakers of the divine nature: and also, by the providences of God, particularly trying ones; “He chastens us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness,” Heb. 12:10.

3. All things shall work for their further purification: they shall purge out some particular lust and corruption; “By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin;” Isa. 27:9. This is a desirable good, whatever be the dispensation that contributes to that end.

4. All things shall work together for furthering their communion and fellowship with him; whatever they have heard, or seen, or felt of the word of God, or of the rod of God, contributes to this good end— “Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ,” 1 John 1:3. We can go to God boldly by the blood of Jesus; and communicate the very secret of our souls to him, and find him communicating the secrets of his covenant to us.

5. All things work together for their further humiliation; and this is good indeed; “He led thee through the great and terrible wilderness, wherein there were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought; wherein there was no water;” there is a sum of the evil things that befell them; but it follows, “He brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; he fed you in the wilderness with manna,

that your fathers knew not:” there is a sum of the good things that befell them; well, but what was the end and design of all these things? Why, it follows, “That he might humble thee, and prove thee, to do thee good in thy latter end,” Deut. 8:15, 16. It is good to be humbled and have low thoughts of ourselves; we are apt to say in prosperity, Our mountain stands strong, and we shall never be moved; we think, with Peter, that we are able to suffer with Christ, and to do great things for him: or with Zebedee’s children, that we are able to reign with Christ: but we need to be humbled and proved, that we may know what we are.

6. All things work together for their further consolation; and this is a desirable good; God doth, with all that befalls them, convey some joys and comforts of his Spirit, whether he bring them to the mountain or to the wilderness: this good end shall be reached in the Lord’s time. When he brings them to his holy mountain, then he makes them joyful in his house of prayer, Isa. 56:7. When he brings them to the wilderness, then he speaks comfortably to them, Hosea 2:4. Yea, he even gives them the valley of Achor for a door of hope, and makes them sing there; and as their sufferings abound, makes their consolation abound, 2 Cor. 1:4, 5.

7. All things work together for their good, even for furthering their life of faith, that they may know more what it is to live by faith on the Son of God, Gal. 2:20. If sensible enjoyment were always allowed to believers here, in their present circumstances, they would be ready to surfeit on their provision; therefore, with their sweet meals, the Lord orders some sour sauce for helping their digestion, in order that they may live, not by sense, but by faith; in prosperity we talk of living by faith, and darken counsel many times with words without knowledge; but in adversity, we come to have the practical knowledge of what it is to live by faith. And indeed that is a happy and blessed dispensation that tends to the rooting of a soul further in a crucified Christ, and to a living upon a promise, when there is no visible prop in all the world to lean to; this is clearly believing.

8. All things work together for furthering their submission to the will of God, and holy contentment in every case, that they may,

learn with Paul, Phil. 4:11, 12, in every state to be content; and know how to be abased, and how to abound; and to say, “I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.” I can welcome reproach, as well as honour and esteem; a prison as well as a palace; a hard stone for my bolster-piece, as well as a soft pillow; though I praise, as well as others, and bless the Lord for comfortable accommodations and favourable dispensations, when God allows them; yet, if he deny them, I am content: “Shall we receive good things at the hand of the Lord, and not receive evil?” O sirs, how good is it to get this disposition wrought?

9. All things work together for furthering their spirituality, for weaning their hearts from the world, and elevating their affections heavenwards, so as they may have less of the spirit of the world, and more of the Spirit of Christ dwelling in their hearts: 1 Pet. 4:14, “Think not strange concerning the fiery trial, which shall try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.” Even the glorious Spirit of God, comforting and supporting you with the hope of the glory to be revealed. O! what a good thing is this to have the good Spirit of God, the glorious Spirit of God? Though a spirit of reproach be without you; yet the Spirit of glory and triumph within will make amends. And, O what a good work is it, when all things work for putting out a base, carnal, worldly spirit, and for bringing in more of a glorious and heavenly Spirit?

10. All things work together for furthering their preparation for heaven; nothing shall hinder, but rather further their course towards heaven. As all trying dispensations of providence work for their having more of the Spirit, of which our apostle speaks in the preceding context; so, they work for hastening their progress towards heaven, and can be no hindrance but a furtherance to it; as appears from the apostle’s triumphant language in the following context, towards the close of the chapter, Romans 8:35-39, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we

are more than conquerors, through him that loved us; for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angel, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Man’s frowns may occasion God’s smiles; losses of worldly goods may make up your heavenly treasures; “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” 2 Cor. 4:17.

In a word, as there would be no end of speaking of all things that work together for good to them; so, there is no end of speaking of all the good which all things work in their behalf. The God that hath all things at his command sets all things a-working for them; and makes even the worst things contribute to the best advantage. Herod and Pilate, Jews and Gentiles, combined to crucify Christ, “The Lord of glory,” Acts 2:23. Here is the worst thing that ever was done; but, behold the act of free grace and deep wisdom in God! That made this work to be the greatest good that ever was. We have a sample of all other things working for good to God’s people, even the rage and fury of men and devils, contrary to their designs, working for their happiness; and death itself, contrary to its nature, working for their eternal life.

III. The third thing proposed in the general method, was, To shew what we are to understand by their working and working together for good. This points out the harmonious influence that all things have upon the production of this good. How can all things, even the worst of things work for good? “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?”

First, In general, all things are in GOD’S hand, who is the powerful agent, who works by these means; they cannot work of themselves without God. They seem rather to work the ruin of God’s people than their happiness and good; but God’s infinite and omnipotent arm can bring light out of darkness, life out of death, and good out of evil. Even as the word and ordinances themselves do not save by any intrinsic virtue, or power of their own; but yet there is a passive fitness in them to serve the hand of Omnipotence for accomplishing saving ends; a fitness of instrumentality, as there

is an axe, or hammer for a workman's hand. As a sword cannot cut, or a pen cannot write, but in a hand ready for it; so neither could all things work for good to God's children, but as these are in the hand of God. It is God that by these doth advance the spiritual and eternal good of his people. Therefore,

Secondly, Their working together may have a fourfold reference.

1. To the God of providence. 2. To the particular acts of providence. 3. To the whole series of providence. 4. To the manner of their co-operation, wherein they are subservient for this good.

1. Their working together may have a respect to GOD, and his co-operation with providence, seeing, as I was just now saying, not one of these things of itself can do any good: but they work together with God, and in his hand. Though such a thing of itself be really a great evil, a crushing dispensation; yet, let God alone, and wait upon him; he can bring the greatest good out of that thing to thee. Though there be no natural or physical tendency in such an act of providence towards thy good, but rather towards thy hurt yet there shall be such hyper-physical or supernatural virtue and efficacy attending them, as to make them work for good: for, they work with God, whose counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.

2. Their working together may have a respect to the particular acts of providence themselves; not separately but conjunctly viewed. If we take one providence with another, we may find them working for good; but if we take them separately, we cannot see their co-operation. Perhaps one act of providence smiles upon you, another act of providence frowns upon you, and speaks ruin to you: well, if you put them together, you may see them working together for good, but if you separate them, and take them asunder, then you cannot see either the beauty or good, nor yet advantage of the frowning providence. One providence seems white and pleasant; another seems ruddy and bloody, coloured and terrible; but let the red and white together, and then the beautiful complexion of providence appears: they work together for good.

3. Their working together may have a respect to the whole series and greater sphere of providence, from the beginning to the end. A

hard beginning cannot still be discerned to be a good beginning, till we compare the beginning and end together. The dark side of the cloud of providence may contribute to illustrate and set forth the splendour of the bright side of it; and, when we view both the one side and the other, there will appear a harmony in all the acts of providence. The godly man may be plagued all day long, and chastened every morning, Psal. 73:14; here is a dark side: but go to the other side and see the fair end of providence: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the latter end of that man is peace,” whereas, the end of the wicked shall be cut off, though he flourish and prosper for a while.

4. Their working together way have a respect to the manner of their subserviency in working for good. All things work together; and so work not only harmoniously, but efficaciously. When God, and all things with him, work together for the good of a creature, then there is nothing to hinder its being made effectual. When all things work, what is there behind to let or impede the work? Again, when all things work together, it says they work marvellously and wonderfully. Good things and bad things have, in themselves, a quite contrary nature and tendency; but as the wheels of a clock, or watch, move, some of them forward, some of them back-ward; yet all these contrary motions tend to the regular motion of the hand that points at the hour: so, the wheels of providence, some with a direct, and others with a retrograde motion: yet all contribute to work for good to God’s children. This is owing to him who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working, to make these things that work against each other, yet to work together for this end.

IV. The fourth thing in the text is, To enquire into the character of those who are thus privileged, and to whom all things work together for good.

Why it is to them who love God, and are the called according to his purpose. In this character there are purposes that would fill many volumes; and therefore none will suppose that I can here treat them at any length. I shall therefore take a short view of this character given to God’s privileged people, namely that they are lovers of him, and that by considering these four things concerning

this love that the text carries. 1. The object of it, namely, God. 2. The act of it, namely, love to this God. 3. The immediate branch on which it grows, namely, effectual calling. 4. The head and original root from whence it springs, namely, the divine purpose, being called according to his purpose.

1. The object of their love to whom all things work together for good, is God, who is to be loved above all things, and loved exclusively for himself; he will suffer no companion, or competitor, Matt. 10:37. Now, this love of God necessarily includes the love of Christ, or of God in Christ; for, as in Christ only he is well pleased and reconciled with sinners; so, out of Christ we cannot love him as a friend, but fear him as a foe, God is in Christ, and all his fullness dwells in Christ, Col. 1:19; and where God's fullness dwells, there doth the true believer love to dwell. This love to God includes in it also a regular love to ourselves. It is manifest, when it is said in God's law, that we should love our neighbour as ourselves, that it is presupposed we ought to love ourselves: this is so much included in the love of God, that, as he that loves not himself, cannot love God; so, he that loves not God, cannot love himself. As a madman, in his fury, wounds his own body, and is pitied of all but not of himself: so wicked men, or natural men, destroy themselves, and are pitied of God, angels, and good men; but have no pity on themselves, no true love to themselves. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not, Mat. 23:37. Again, this love to God includes love to our neighbour for love to God and man is the fulfilling of the law of God: and, "He that loves not his brother, whom he hath seen, cannot truly love God, whom he hath not seen," 1 John 4:20. And this love to our neighbour implies a rejoicing at, and desiring his good; and a grieving at, and relieving his misery. The unworthiness of no person whatsoever, must quench our love; but it should burn when the water of men's injuries would quench the same. See Matt. 5:44, 45, where we are called to love our enemies; to bless them that curse us; to do good to them that hate us; and to pray for them that despitefully use us; that we may be the children of our Father which is in heaven; for,

“He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” True love to God carries in it benevolence towards all, and especially delight in the godly, Psalm 16:3. And even with respect to those that are overtaken in a fault, we are to express our love to them by restoring them in the spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted, Gal. 6:1. In a word, this love to God, with reference to the object of it; includes a love to every thing that God loves, and that bears the stamp of his image and authority; such as this gospel, and ordinances thereof, wherein his love shines. But,

2. Consider the act that terminates on this object, love. What is it to love God? and, how do his people love him? As this act supposes the knowledge of God in Christ, without which we cannot love him, no more than we can worship an unknown God; and faith in him, and his love and mercy through Christ; for this faith works by love: so it implies the powerful work of the Spirit of God in subduing the natural enmity against God, and drawing out the affections towards him. The Spirit of all grace having first come into the soul, and brought love with him among the rest, he blows upon this fire that he hath kindled, and the flame of it ascends towards God, in heavenly desires and spiritual delights.

As to the manner how the believer loves God, we cannot describe it better, than by considering the rule that shows how he should love him. Love to ourselves and our neighbour must be limited; but there is no measure set to our love to God. See the rule, Luke 10:27, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.”

(1). With all the heart; that is, cordially and affectionately with the heart, and with all the heart. If the world have our heart, God cannot have it: “Love not the world, neither the things of the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him,” 1 John 2:15. As one nail drives out another, so the love of Christ will force out the love of the world.

(2). With all the soul; that is, intensely and most entirely: as all the heart takes in all the affections of it; so, I think, all the soul takes in all the faculties of it; and to love God with heart and soul,

imports a loving him most intensely and most entirely, so as to allow no faculty of the soul to swerve from this object, but to fix and terminate wholly upon him. It seems to be like that, Isaiah 26:8, 9, “The desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my whole soul have I desired thee in the night, and with my spirit within me will I seek thee early.”

(3). With all the strength; that is, universally and zealously; employing whatever gifts, parts, powers, and talents God hath bestowed upon us in his service, and returning them all to his glory; yielding ourselves to the Lord, and our members instruments of righteousness unto God, Rom. 6:13.

(4). With all the mind; that is, wisely and judiciously: people may love Christ with a hearty affection, and yet not with knowledge and understanding; for it was so with the apostles themselves, John 14:28, “If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I said, I go to the Father;” but they did not rejoice in this, nor knew the import of it; and, therefore, though they loved him with the heart and soul, yet not with all the mind and judgment, or with knowledge and understanding. Now this is the manner wherein all God’s children love him, or at least aim at loving him, whatever enmity and corruption remain. Thus of the act of love.

3. Consider the immediate branch on which this love grows, namely, effectual calling; they are CALLED. I speak of this as visible; in regard that it is the first evident effect of God’s everlasting love breaks up above ground, which before this did run hidden under ground from all eternity; and because, though effectual calling be indeed internal and invisible to the world, yet it is a sensible turn of affairs within, making a visible change upon him without. Now, none love God but those that are called effectually, Rom. 9:11. All men are haters of God naturally; and love to him grows not in the garden of nature, but of grace; and the first working of grace in the soul is an effectual calling. And if you ask what that is, you cannot have a better description of it than that in our Shorter Catechism? “It is the work of God’s free Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, as he is freely

offered to us in the gospel.” Where you see, that as the outward means of it is the gospel, and the dispensation thereof; and the inward means and powerful efficient is the free Spirit of God, accompanying the preached word; so, the parts of it are four, relating to the several faculties of the soul.

(1). Effectual conviction of sin and misery, whereby the conscience is touched and awakened, and made to cry out, “What shall I do to be saved?” Acts 2:37.

(2). Effectual illumination; whereby the mind is enlightened in the knowledge of Christ, Acts 26:18. It is an opening of the eye of the soul, and turning it from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ,” 2 Cor. 4:6.

(3). Effectual renovation, whereby the will is renewed, according to that word, Psalm 110:3, “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.” The new heart and the new Spirit promised, Ezek. 36:26, is given.

(4). The effectual out-drawing of the soul towards Christ, persuading and enabling the heart to embrace Christ Jesus, as he is offered and exhibited in the gospel promise, John 6:44, 45, “No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him. It is written in the prophet, They shall be all taught of God; every man, therefore, that hath heard and learned of the Father cometh unto me.” And thus the Spirit comes, with internal power, to make the soul, by the external call working in it, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure, Phil. 2:13; and so he is called internally and efficaciously, and united to Christ. This is the immediate branch that love grows on.

4. Consider the origin and hidden root from which it springs, and that is the *purpose* of God; “called according to his PURPOSE.” This is both the root of effectual calling, and the root of that love to God that issues from it; “We love him, because he first loved us.” True love to God issues from his everlasting love to us. But this divine purpose relates here to effectual calling. I shall view it in relation thereto; and it seems to point out four things with reference to this call.

(1). It points out the particular nature of this call, not only that it is a special, internal call, limited by the special purpose of God, in contradistinction from the external, that many have, who yet come short of conversion; but it is a call particular to the elect, such as is mentioned, 2 Pet. 1:10, "Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure." It is such a calling as is joined with election; insomuch, that they that are thus called, may be as sure of election from eternity, as they are sure of their vocation in time. O sirs, let us admire the sovereignty of grace in dispensing this internal call to some, and not to others. Surely they that are thus inwardly and effectually called can never enough love and praise that God that has granted this special mercy to them. And let those who are yet only outwardly called, as all to whom the gospel comes are, let them hearken diligently to that external call, and be restless till they get grace to answer it, by coming to Christ; for, this outward call is the means of the effectual one, and let them not meddle with the purpose of God till once they are brought to answer the gospel call; for this is the rule you are to follow; whereas the divine purpose is a hidden secret, not to be revealed till you have followed the outward rule. The gospel offer is to all; "Whosoever will, let him come;" and, if you do not exclude yourselves by your unbelief from this open call and invitation, you shall never find yourselves excluded from any secret decree; for, whenever your heart opens to Christ, then the decree opens in your favours. Therefore, be diligent in the use of gospel means that tend to the opening of the heart to Christ. Why, say you, but if God did not decree my salvation, my heart will never open to Christ; and, therefore, what need I use the means? Why, indeed, the antecedent is true; but the consequent absurd. You may as well say, if God decree that I should live no longer, then I will die; and, therefore, what need I take any more meat or drink, or use the means of life? I imagine you will not argue so foolishly about the life of your body; and why will you suffer the devil to cheat you into such a trifling about the life of your souls to all eternity?

(2). To be called according to his purpose, points out the freeness of the call, that it flows out from more grace; for, if it be a call, according to his purpose, it is not a call according to our

works, 2 Timothy 1:9, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling; not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus, before the world began.” It must be free; for the worst of sinners and the chief of sinners have been and are called effectually. Let the greatest of sinners be persuaded to look out after this sovereign grace of God, and plead that he would glorify his free grace in saving them.

(3). It points out the efficacy and energy of the call; for, God’s purpose is a standing purpose, “His counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure.” Hence his call is irresistible, and yet without force and violence. It is irresistibly sweet, and sweetly irresistible; here there is no compulsion, but that of love, sweet cords of love.

(4). It points out the perpetuity of the call, because it is the fruit of an unalterable purpose; his purpose is irrevocable, “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance,” Rom. 11:29. Thus you see this love in the object, the act, the immediate spring, and the original root of it. Here then is the character of those to whom “All things shall work together for good, they are lovers of God by virtue of his call and purpose.”

The first of two booklets.

