



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

<http://www.puritansermons.com/>

True Lovers of God Highly Privileged: or, The Great Comfort of Believers in the Co-Operation of All Things for Their Good.

by Ralph Erskine¹

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

¹ This Sermon was preached at Glasgow, on Monday, October 4th, 1747, being a thanksgiving day, after the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper there.

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.

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

1st, 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,

2dly, 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 fulness 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 fulness, 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 fulness 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 con-firmed 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.

1st, 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;

2dly, 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 Christ Jesus,” 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 suffer-ings abound, makes their consolation abound, 2 Cor. 1:4, 5.

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 hinderance but a furtherance to it; as appears from the apostle’s triumphant language in the following context, towards the close of the chapter, ver. 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?”

1st, 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,

2dly, 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.

1st, 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 fulness dwells in Christ, Col. 1:19; and where God's fulness 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,

2dly, 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.

3dly, 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.

4thly, 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."

V. The next thing proposed in the general method is, to shew whence it is that all things shall work together for good to such lovers of God; and so to point out the evidence the apostle had for saying, we know that it shall be so; and here also observe the suitableness and connection between the character of being lovers of God, and this privilege, of all things working together for good.

If you ask then, Why all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them that are called according to his purpose?

There is a general answer in the bosom of the test, and that is drawn from the divine purpose, the determination of God. There is a stated law in heaven from eternity for it; they are predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things according to the counsel of his will, Eph. 1:11. There is not anything that

falls out in this world but was resolved upon and decreed from eternity, that things should be so and so. Men and devils may as well go up to the court rolls of heaven, and there cross and cancel the eternal statutes and decrees of God, as hinder our good, who love God, and are the called according to his purpose. “The foundation of God standeth sure.” More particularly,

1. The first reason and argument, upon which we know that all things shall work together for good to them who love God, and are the called according to his purpose, is drawn from the nature of God; why, he is the Lord of hosts, the God of armies, who hath all the hosts of men, and angels, and creatures, in his hand; and all the legions of devils at his back. He can command the stars in their courses to fight for his people, and against their enemies. He can create an army of frogs, and lice, and locusts; they require only a commission from him, and so they execute his purpose.

Again, he is a God of infinite wisdom, who knows what will work best for his people’s good. Let God be doing with thee, O believer; whatever thy condition be, he knows when to send affliction, and when prosperity; he knows what afflictions to send; and by what hands and means, and how long to continue them. He knows also how to deliver the godly out of temptation and trouble. Prescribe not to infinite wisdom.

Again, he is a God of infinite power; he can do what he will; nothing is too hard for him to do. As he knows all things, so he can do all things, and make all things do what he pleases, and work what he has a mind. And he has made over himself to you, believer; and, with himself, his infinite power, to make all things work for thy good.

Again, he is a God of infinite love and compassion to them that love him; “As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them;” and his everlasting love makes him carry on his loving design by all means whatsoever.

Again, as this is the nature of God, so this is the way of God to act for his people, in a suitableness to his nature; his usual way is even by contrary means to bring about great things for his people, as you see in God’s way with David, Daniel, Joseph, Mordecai, and others.

In a word, his providential government of the world is extended to all creatures, and more especially to his people. It extends to the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, and the hairs of the head; and much more to them, Matt. 6:28-34. Whatever men and devils design all shall come to nothing, and go no farther than

God gives leave. Ezekiel's vision was a wheel within a wheel: though in a watch the wheels seem to go cross, yet the wise builder knows what they mean. But,

2. Another reason and argument, upon which we know that all things shall work together for good to them who love God, is drawn from the Mediator, Christ Jesus. Why, he is entrusted with them by the Father, from whom he had a special charge of them given him from all eternity: "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world, thine they were, and thou gavest them me," John 17:6. Now, Christ will be faithful to his trust; yea, he hath received all fulness of the Spirit, and that not for himself, but for them, that he may improve it for their souls, Col. 1:19; yea, as Mediator, he hath the whole world given him; and, "All power in heaven and earth," Matt. 28:18. And, as he upholds all things by the word of his power," Heb. 1:2; so, all things are put under his feet; and "He is given to be head over all things, to the church," Eph. 1:22, that he may rule and over-rule kingdoms and nations as he will; and make use of all the creatures to promote the good design the Father sent him upon.

Again, by virtue of this great power and commission, he is pleased to give a special commission and charge to millions of excellent spirits in heaven to look to his people; "He has given his angels charge over them; and, are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation?" Heb. 1:14. And so they are compassed about with this invisible guard— "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him." Yea, the Lord JEHOVAH himself is their life guard: "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round them. The place of their defence is the munition of rocks."

Again, by virtue of the power of Christ, he has qualified several men with gifts and graces, and has given them a charge of his people, saying, as to Peter, Feed my lambs. When Christ ascended up on high, he received gifts for men, and gave gifts to men; what to do? It was for the perfecting of the saints. Christ going out of the world, to be crowned with glory and honour at the Father's right hand, he leaves coronation gifts behind him; and he is distributing some of these amongst you at this occasion.

Again, Christ has removed all things out of the way, that might obstruct the good of his people: that sin might not do it, he has condemned sin in the flesh, by giving himself a sacrifice for sin; that the devil might not do it, he has destroyed the works of the devil, and conquered principalities and powers, so as the gates of hell cannot prevail; that men in the world might not do it, he has overcome the world; and, that death may not do it, he has removed the sting of death. Why, then, what remains to obstruct their good, and hinder their eternal salvation?

Again, as he has removed all things that might obstruct their good, so he has purchased all things that can contribute to their good: “All spiritual blessings, in heavenly places,” Eph. 1:3. The men of the world may deprive them of their riches, honour, liberty, and good name, and outward peace; but they cannot hinder them from peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost; nor deprive them of their right and title to glory. Christ hath purchased all these things, Luke 1:74, 75. Men cannot lay a restraint upon our spirit, nor hinder us to go to God.

In a word, Christ, by his Spirit, is always with them; he has promised that “He will never leave them, nor forsake them;” therefore, whatever way the wind blows, all weathers will contribute to their prosperous voyage heavenward. And, as Christ’s own sufferings did work for his glory; so shall the sufferings of the saints in Christ. If physic be good for the head, it is good for the members of the body; but his love is mixed with the bitterest physic that he orders, and his love makes it work for their good; and nothing in the world can turn the tide of his love from them. And therefore, all things shall work together for good to them.

3. A third reason or argument, upon which we know that all things shall work together for good to them, is drawn from the covenant of grace and promise; there is a solemn vow and oath, on God’s part, that he will’ do so and so for his people. All the believing children of Abraham have the same security with him: “God swears by himself, because he could swear by no greater, that in blessing he would bless them,” Heb. 6:14. And why does he confirm his promise by his oath; but to show more abundantly the immutability of his counsel? “That by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for him to lie, we might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us.” As “All the promises are Yea and Amen, in Christ,” so the grand comprehensive promise is, “I will be thy God:” and, “Happy is the people whose God is the Lord!” This everlasting God, is the everlasting good of his people: he is the God that was, and is to come; and he is a good in the past, present, and future tense; therefore, all things past, present, and to come, must work for their good, to whom he is a God by covenant and promise.

4. The fourth reason or argument, whereby we know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, is drawn from the people themselves, to whom the promise is made; why, they are his relations and his lovers.

(1.) They are his relations: they are the birth of his everlasting purpose; being, in time, called according to his purpose; and so brought under a special relation to him. He is their everlasting Father; before they were children, he was

their Father. He is their Husband: and what will he not do for his spouse, the bride, the Lamb's wife. He is their Head; and what will he not do for his members? He is their Physician, and what will he not take care of his patients? "I am the Lord that healeth thee:" yea, he will heal and help them in wonderful ways, by making all things work together for their good.

(2.) They are his lovers; and this leads me to another branch of this head that I proposed, namely,

To observe the suitableness and connection between this character of being lovers of God, and this privilege, That all things work together for their good. This love to God has a subserviency for making all things work together for good to such lovers; for,

1. Love to God in Christ makes them count all things loss and dung for the excellency of this glorious One, whom they love. Why, says God, do you count all things loss for me? Then I will make all things gain to you. You shall lose nothing; all things shall work together for good to you.

2. Love to God makes them suffer the loss of all things, and deny themselves of all things for his sake; why then, says God, I will make all things contribute to repair your loss; so that, if you lose all things one way, you shall gain all things another; you shall be co-heirs with him who is the heir of all things, Rev. 21:7. "He that overcometh shall inherit all things."

3. Love to God inclines them to rely upon him, and to depend upon him for all things they need, and to put all things in his hand; they put their wants and weaknesses in his hand, in order to be supplied and helped; they put their diseases in his hand, in order to be healed; they put their sin and guilt in his hand, in order that he may pardon them; they put their enemies in his hand, that he may rebuke them; they put their strong corruptions in his hand, that he may subdue them; they put their burdens in his hand, that he may bear them; they put their heart and soul in his hand, that he may keep them. What! Dost thou put all things in my hand, and that by warrant from my own call! "Cast thy burden on the Lord!" All things shall work together for good to thee.

4. Love makes them desire to do all they do for the glory of God; he hath created them for himself, to show forth his praise; and as he has given them a disposition to do all that they do, to his glory; so he has a mind to make all that he doth and orders, contribute for their good. As the desire, whether they eat or drink; or whatsoever they do to do all to the glory of God; so I will not be behind

with them: as they would have all things contributing to his glory, so he will make all things contribute for their good.

5. Love to God keeps in the soul good thoughts of God, do what he will; knowing that he is most wise, holy, gracious, and loving; and therefore doth nothing but what is best, and knows best what is good for his people. The apostle says, "Love (or charity) thinketh no evil," and surely true love to God can think no evil of him, and bode no evil at his hand: such a soul cannot be disappointed; all things must work together for good. Indeed, unbelief works by enmity, and expects no good at God's hand; but "Faith works by love," and expects no evil at his hand, and shall find none; because, whatever heavy trials such a loving soul meets with, love makes it take all patiently and pleasantly out of the hand of God; for, as love thinks no evil, so it suffers long, doth not behave itself unseemly, is not easily provoked, but beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things, 1 Cor. 13:4,5,7. Therefore, all things work together for good to the lovers of God.

6. Love to God takes the heart off from the world, and all things in it, and especially such things as would hurt it, namely, all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; the more perfect love is, the more it casts out fear, and casts off harm, as Paul did the viper off his hand into the fire. All things must work for good to the loving soul that overcomes all things that would work for evil.

7. Love draws the heart to God, the chief good. Trials and afflictions set the soul in motion; and love draws it near to God and what is the consequence of this; "It is good for me to draw near unto God," Psalm 73:28. Therefore, all things must work for good to the lovers of God.

8. As love draws the soul to God, so it makes the soul to abide with God, when brought unto him; for "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him," 1 John 4:14. And he that thus dwells on high, no evil can reach him "He dwells in the secret place of the Most High, and abides under the shadow of the Almighty," Psalm 91:1,10. Nothing can work for hurt to him, but all must work for good. And whatever seems to hurt him; yet this love is such a healing thing, and such a strengthening thing, love being stronger than death, and a powerful restorative, that by its healing energy it quickly makes all well again. Hence the more that the believer is in the exercise of love to God, kindled by a view of God's everlasting love to him, the more will he have of the sensible and comfortable relish of this privilege, and see all things working together for good to him; whereas the less love to God, by the faith of God's love to him; the less will he see

and feel this truth to his advantage; but rather fear the contrary, with Jacob, saying, “All these things are against me.”

Thus you see the influence and subserviency of this love unto this privilege; or the connection between the character of being lovers of God, and the privilege of all things working together for good; and so upon what solid reason and good evidence the apostle did, and all believers may assert and say, “We know that all things shall work together for good to them that love God, and that are the called according to his purpose.”

VI. The sixth thing proposed was, To make application of the subject.

Here is a foundation laid for a very large application; but I must confine myself within as narrow bounds as possible.

The first use I make of this doctrine is, of information. Is it so, That all things work together for good to them that love God?

1. Hence see and admire the infinite wisdom of God, and the depth of divine providence, even when he suffers all things seemingly to work for hurt to his church and people, that even then he is making all things work together for good to them. O believer! Do not believe sense; it is a fool and a knave, when it speaks contrary to God: whatever appearance things have, and be as they will, all things shall work for good to the lovers of God. It shall be so toward every lover of God in particular, and much more will it be so towards the whole community of lovers, and of Christ’s friends.

Perhaps there was never greater evils of one sort and another taking place in the world, and even in the midst of the visible church, than now-a-days; yet I dare assert, that out of all the evils of our day, God shall bring forth much good to his friends and lovers. But if you cannot see to the bottom of his ways, which are unsearchable, believe upon trust, saying, as it is, Isaiah 8:17. “I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.” (See Micah 7:6-9.) “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God. The Lord’s voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall know thy name; hear ye the rod, and him that hath appointed it.” What! Will a flood of errors, heresies, and scandals, ruining the church work for good? Yea, “There

must be heresies, that they that are approved may be made manifest,” 1 Cor. 11:19. Storms shall manifest who are built upon the rock. Will blasphemies vented against the glorious Godhead of Christ, work for any good? Yea, his glory shall shine the more brightly, through the dark cloud; his friends shall be the more stirred up to put the crown upon his head, when enemies would trample on it. O the wisdom of God! that can make divisions, discords, and confusions in a church, to work for the good of a hidden remnant; even as he made the treason of Judas, the rage of the Jews and Gentiles, and the malice of the devil, to work for the redemption of the world, and salvation of sinners.

2. See the cause why God many times denies the outward blessing of peace to these on whom he has conferred the inward blessing of grace; and why he orders adversity instead of prosperity; why he designs their good. And it is upon necessity, in some cases, that they must be given up to the hand of their enemies, because, when he gives them rest, they do evil again before him, Neh. 11:28. He designs to convince the wicked that God’s children do not serve him for outward things, as the devil reproached Job, when he said, “Doth Job serve God for nought?” He designs his servants should not bear a mercenary mind, in making gain of his service, and turning Christian patience into carnal covetousness, making gain of godliness. He designs his people should see need of more faith, and more wisdom; for, in fair weather, little skill in the mariner is required; but when storms arise, and the sea swells and grows troublesome, then he is put to it. He designs to convince them that this is their inn, and not their home; the wilderness, and not Canaan, a place of refining; whereof yet he says, “I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction,” Isa. 48:10. They are chastened of the Lord, that they may not be condemned with the world, 1 Cor. 11:31. Outward and bodily prosperity is not always attended with inward soul-prosperity; no, no; many have fat bodies and lean souls.

3. See hence the misery of the wicked, who are enemies and haters of God, and live and die in that enmity. Ah! Dreadful case; all things work together for evil unto such. To the godly, evil things work for good; but to the wicked, good things work for evil “Their prosperity destroys them; their table is a snare to them.” The ministry of the word, which is a savour of life to some, is a savour of death to them. O sirs, what is this, that the same word, the same breath, the same wind that blows some to heaven doth blow them to hell! The sacramental supper, which is an ordinance that works for the believer’s consolation, works for the unbeliever’s damnation; “He eats and drinks damnation to himself!” Yea, Christ himself, the greatest good that ever was sent to the world, works for their hurt; for he is to them a stumbling block, and rock of offence, Rom. 9:33. 1 Peter 2:7. Oh! May not

this make a wicked soul to tremble! O mocker of God and godliness! Is it nothing to you to understand that God is angry at you, as he is angry with the wicked every day; and every day you are treasuring up wrath to yourself against the day of wrath! O man, woman, if you put not in to be among those that love God, and are the called according to his purpose; and if the gospel call never work in you an effectual purpose of turning from sin to God, through Christ by faith; if it never work in you an effectual purpose to come out of yourself, and in to Christ; to die unto sin, and live unto God: then, O tremble at it; it is a sign that God hath a purpose to destroy you. Alas? “Will you not tremble at the presence of God?” Jer. 5:22. The half of this dreadful news hath made some of God’s children to be distracted with the terrors of God, Psalm 88:15. If your stout conscience doth not tremble now, yet the day of wrath and trembling is a coming.

4. Hence, on the other hand, see the happiness of God’s friends and lovers; and what comfort this carries to them, that all things, the worst as well as the best, will work together for their good, whatever be their suffering lot, or afflicted condition: even when you seem to be lost, yet you are in your Father’s eye: when in the dark night of affliction, temptation, desertion, you can see nothing, yet, if you look up to heaven, you will see thousands of stars looking on you; so is God’s eye ever on you. The child may lose the Father, but the Father will not lose the child; you are in the hand of Christ, and none can pluck you out of God’s hand: and you are in that very hand that works for you, and makes all things work for your good. What though the policy of hell be against you, when the wisdom of heaven is working for you; “The Lord brings the counsel of the heathen to nought; he makes the devices of the people of none effect; but the counsel of the Lord that shall stand, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations, Psalm 33:10,11. Blessed then is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people, whom he hath chosen for his inheritance.” What are multitudes of oppositions from men and devils? Millions of hosts of men are millions of hosts of vanities and nothings to this infinite wisdom; “All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted unto him less than nothing and vanity, Isaiah 4:17. I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of man that shall die? and of the son of man, that shall be made as grass?” chap. 51:12. You have a wonder-working friend who cannot die, and that will never fail you: riches and worldly honours deal not plainly with us; we know not when we have them, and when we lack them; but, amidst all changes, God is your unchangeable friend, in whom you are to rejoice. A certain prince, when he heard of the death of many friends in war; yet comforted himself with this, *Vivit imperator, sat habeo*; “It is enough to me that the emperor lives.” O believer! Should it not be enough to you that the Lord lives? “As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me. The Lord liveth, and blessed

be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted, Psalm 18:44,46. “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thy hands; they shall perish, but thou shalt endure; yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee,” Psalm 102:25-28. What though your trials be very long, God’s delays are the seed of greater mercies. The goldsmith holds his metal in the fire till it be melted and refined; “But the needy shall not always be forgotten; nor the expectation of the poor perish for ever,” Psalm 9:18. God’s time is better than ours; and he knows when you are ripe for deliverance; he will let the fire burn till the dross come away from the metal; “The vision is for an appointed time.” O believer, bless God for this pillar of hope and consolation, that all things shall work together for your good. And whatever state you are brought into, in providence, be content, be cheerful; all things are working together to bring you to that state, wherein you shall be no more tossed and troubled; wherein you will be above these regions that make changes of weather, and have no more any thick foggy days. Many times all your felicity here is to know that your misery shall end, and sin, the root of all misery, be plucked up. If he make all things work together for good to his people, then we may well say, “Truly, God is good to Israel;” whatever befalls them, YET he is good, as the word may be read.

OBJECTION. “If it was only trouble and affliction that I was trysted with, perhaps I might take the comfort of this doctrine, that all things shall work together for good; but, alas! sin lies at the door; corruption prevails over me; and my spiritual enemies tread me under foot; and this makes me think all will work for my RUIN.”

ANSWER. This may be the case, and yet the dominion is on the children of God’s side; because victory is not measured by one blow, but by the issue of the battle; “A bruised reed shall he not break, a smoking flax will he not quench, till he bring forth judgment unto victory,” Mat. 12:20. You may, with Paul, be led captive by the law of sin, Rom. 7:23; and yet the gospel at length be victorious in the heart. Consider that the Spirit keeps the field, even in that same soul wherein the flesh hath a great power; “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these two are contrary,” Gal. 3:17. In a carnal man the Spirit is not on the field at all, and therefore he is a servant to sin, and not a captive; but when God’s children sin, they are captives to it, and not servants; and when they sin, it is but with half of the will, and so the flesh hath but half a vote; and there is a protestation made on the contrary, by that supernatural instinct of the Spirit, that is

given them. Again, the falls and foils of God's children are the seed of humility; and watchfulness, the seed of hunger and thirst after a fuller measure of grace, and of a more strict and circumspect walk; and thus sin, by the grace of God, helps to mortify itself. We read of David, 2 Sam. 23:15,16,17, that he longed for a drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, that was in the midst of the Philistine's host; and when three valiant men brought it to him at the peril of their lives, he would not drink it, saying, "Is not this the blood of these men that went in jeopardy of their lives?" Hence we may learn, he that before shed innocent blood, is now troubled in conscience for hazarding the blood of these men in this rash enterprise; and he that before defiled another man's wife, does now repent for desiring to drink of the water of another man's well. But, passing other Inferences, go on to an Use of Examination.

Try, therefore, O man, woman, whether you be the subjects to whom this privilege belongs, of having all things working for your good. Try it, for it is no trivial affair, no matter of moonshine; it is no trifle that you have no concern with, and need not trouble your head about; no, it is a matter of the highest moment, and most important concern; an affair wherein your everlasting welfare is concerned. Whether all things shall work together for your good Because, if they do not so, they will all work for your hurt and perdition; for, the affirmative of the text strongly imports and includes a negative. Well, but say you, "I am persuaded this is one of the most glorious privileges that can be; How shall I know t, that all things shall work together for good to me?" You may try it two ways. 1. By the marks the text offers you. 2. By the begun experience of the thing itself.

1st, Try it by the marks the text gives of those to whom all things shall work together for good; namely, that they are such as love God, and are the called according to his purpose. These are the persons to whom all things shall work for good. And here four things are offered to you for trial. If you would reach to the bottom of this question, whether you be a true lover, you are to try it. 1. By the object of your love, if it be GOD himself that you love, the true God. 2. By the qualities of the act, if it be true love to this God. 3. By the immediate spring of this love, if it be such as hath issued from effectual calling. 4. By the original root of it, if it be a love that results from the everlasting love of God to you, and his purpose of grace concerning you. I would therefore endeavour to help you a little into this search, wherein you and I both need to be sure what we are saying and doing; for, there is much false pretended love to God in the world.

[1.] Then examine your love by the object of it, if it be GOD, and him indeed that you love. See that it be not a God of your own imagination, and not the true God.

But here, perhaps, it may be enquired, How shall I know if it is God himself that is the object of my love? For answering this, I would ask you two questions.

1. What conviction have you ever got of your natural Atheism, and of your being without God, or Atheists, as all by nature are? Eph. 2:12. If you never thought yourself an Atheist, nor saw that you were without God, it seems that you are without God to this day, and without love to him; for, since all by nature are without God, and have lost God, how can they love him till they have found him out whom they have lost? And surely they never found him who never saw that they lost him. The true God is the God whom we have lost; whose knowledge we have lost, whose image we have lost, whose favour we have lost; and therefore, if the God whom you pretend to love be a God you think you never lost, and so never saw yourself to be without him, it is not the true God that you love; you are but an Atheist still, having never seen yourself to be so, and to be without God.

2. What knowledge and apprehension have you got of GOD; for, love to God supposes knowledge of him; *Ignoti nulla cupido*. There may be, indeed, a great deal of knowledge without love; but there can be no love without knowledge. Now, has God shewed you his being and glorious excellencies, as infinitely above all creatures; and all the creatures to be insignificant nothings, compared with his all-sufficiency? And has he manifested himself to you, in Christ, in whom alone he is always well pleased; in whom alone he is reconciled; in whom alone his fulness dwells; and in whom alone his excellencies shine most brightly and savingly.

No sinner can love God who hath not seen him in Christ; "He that hath seen me, says Christ, hath seen the Father." He that hath not seen Christ hath not seen God; and so hath not seen the true object of love. For a sinner to pretend that he loves God, and yet hath not got a view of him in Christ, is the grossest ignorance imaginable; because, out of Christ, he is a consuming fire to sinners, a sin-revenging God. If you know the God whom you think you love, you would love him no otherwise, out of Christ, than as you do the fire that would consume you to ashes. But God in Christ is a God of love; for, in him his law is magnified, his justice satisfied, his wrath appeased; and therefore, if you truly love God, or love the true God, your mind has been enlightened to apprehend him in his glory in Christ. Has then the God that commanded light to shine out of darkness, shined in your heart, to give you the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ? 2 Cor. 4:6. Have you discerned him in the light of the gospel, wherein Christ is held forth? Have you discerned him in the light of the Spirit, accompanying the word powerfully? For, it is a light of God's commanding and

creating. Have you discerned him in a light that shined into your heart, and not into your head only? Have you discerned him in a light that gave you the knowledge of his glory; the glory of his wisdom and power, the glory of his holiness, and justice, and truth, as well as, at the same time, the glory of his mercy, love, and pity; the glory of all his excellencies? And have you discerned this glory in the face of Christ, or in the person of Christ, as the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person? Heb. 1:3. Have you discerned this glory of God shining in him as a JESUS, and as a CHRIST; that is, as he is a Saviour, and anointed of God to be so; sent and sealed of God to save by his blood and righteousness, meritoriously; and by his Spirit and grace, efficaciously? In this wonderful work of redemption and salvation through Christ, have you seen such marvellous devices, as become the infinite wisdom of God, and answer all the ends of the glory of God's perfections, as well as of the salvation of the sinner? In this case, your love is a true love, terminating on the right object; if, at the same time, your view of God this way has been attended with so much application of faith, and persuasion of the love of God to you in particular, as at least to create in you kindly thoughts of God. Though you see him infinitely just and holy, and yourself a sinful guilty creature; yet apprehending the atonement and propitiation in the blood of Jesus, all harsh thoughts of God, as an enemy, have been removed, and kindly thoughts of him, as a friend, declaring his good-will, through Christ, in the word of grace. The persuasion of faith is here included, whether you have seen it or not.

[2.] Examine your love to God, by the nature and qualities of the act, if it be true love to this God. How shall I know this? Why, enquire how your love acts upon this glorious object. It is the nature of love, to make one desire fellowship with the object beloved: so, if you have true love to God, you will have a desire of more intimate union and communion with him. What then is thy great desire and request? Is it as Psalm 27:4, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; that I may behold the beauty of the Lord, and enquire in his temple?" It is the nature of love to make one impatient at the absence of the beloved object: so, if you have true love to God in Christ, his absence will be grievous to thee; and all other comforts will signify nothing to thee without him. "O that I knew where I might find him?" O how long, how long! It is the nature of love to delight in the presence of the object beloved; even so, if you truly love God, his presence will be thy delight: welcome, O beloved! well's me! that now I have got thee in my arms; "I will not let thee go. I held him, says the spouse, and would not let him go, till I had brought him into my mother's house, to the chambers of her that conceived me. O! stir him not up. I charge you, by the roes and hinds of the field, that you stir not up nor awake my love till he please." It is the nature of love to bear affection to

everything that is like unto the beloved object; even so, if you love God, you will love all that bear his image; you will be a companion of them that fear his name: and delight in the saints, the excellent ones of the earth. How can they love God, that care not for those that bear his image? It is of the nature of love to hate whatsoever is disagreeable to the beloved object; so, where there is true love to God, there will be true hatred of sin; the love of God, and the love of sin are contradictory things. A believer may be overcome by sin; but he has no love to the overcomer: and this appears, because his sin costs him many a prayer, and tear, and cry, and sigh, and watching, and application to the throne of grace, and to the blood of Christ for cleansing and healing. The love of God destroys the love of sin, and the love of the world. It is the nature of love to think much of the beloved object; so, where love to God takes place, it carries the thoughts towards him, and the mediation of him is sweet. Love may be known by our thoughts and meditations; many think they love God, and yet God is not in all their thoughts. They think of nothing but the world, and the things thereof; they cannot dwell upon this glorious object, nor are their wandering thoughts any grief to them. It is the nature of love to speak much of the beloved object; we may know by the speech of some, that they have no love to God, never a word of God, from morning to evening in their mouths, unless it be to profane his name. True love will make you speak of him in conversation, and speak to him in prayer, and speak for him, in defence of his truth and cause. In a word, it is the nature of love, to make a man serve where he loves. O! What service has God from you? Does the love of Christ constrain you to judge, "That if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died, that henceforth they that live, should not live unto themselves, but unto him that died and rose again?"

[3.] Examine your love by the immediate spring of it: or the means whereby it is wrought in the soul, namely, Effectual calling. None are lovers of God, till they be effectually called. Here it may be inquired How shall I know if my love to God be such as is the fruit of effectual calling? To this it may be replied, If your love be the fruit of effectual calling, then you will be convinced that it never grew in your heart naturally; and that it is not the fruit of your natural power, or free will; and that, by nature, you are haters of God, Rom. 1:30, 8:7. If you never saw your enmity against God, and never suspected your love to him, nor never had any love to him, but what you had naturally all your days, I must tell you, your love to him is nothing but enmity against him; for true love grows in the garden of grace, and not of nature. Again, if your fruit be the fruit of effectual calling, then your affections have been drawn to Christ sweetly and irresistibly, as with a cord of love; for this drawing power is put forth in effectual calling; "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee, Jer.

31:3. We love him, because he first loved us,” 1 John 4:16. Again, if your love be the fruit of effectual calling, then the gospel of free grace will be very precious to you; for, that is the outward means of effectual calling; and that which is the means of the new spiritual birth, 1 Pet. 1:23, is still the means also of spiritual growth: and therefore, they that are effectually called and regenerate, have still an earnest desire after, and delight in it; “As new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word; that they may grow thereby,” 1 Pet. 2:2. If your love to God be not attended with a love to the doctrine of the gospel, it is but a spurious brood, and not of the right kind. Further, if your love to God be the fruit of effectual calling, then the Spirit of .God will be very precious to you: because, it is by the power and efficacy of the Spirit that the call is made effectual; for then the gospel comes not in word only, hut in power, and in the Holy Ghost, 1 Thes. 1:5. You will desire more and more of that free Spirit, for carrying on the work of faith with power, and for exciting any grace that ever wrought; your prayer will be, “Awake, O north wind; and come thou south; blow upon my garden, and the spices shall send forth the smell thereof.” You will always find the Spirit when he comes by his gracious motions, running only in the channel of gospel doctrine, that tends to lead men out to Christ and his righteousness; and not in the channel of legal doctrine, that has a tendency to lead men in to themselves, and their own works; for, thus the Spirit came to you at first in effectual calling: “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” Gal. 3:2. Surely your love is not the fruit of effectual calling, if the Spirit, that calls effectually, be not precious to you: if you can hear sermons from day to day, and never care whether the Spirit powerfully accompany them or not, your love is to be suspected; but, if he hath begun the good work in you, then you will find a need of the same power to carry on the work that began it; and your cry will he, “O for more of the Spirit! Oh! dead preaching and hearing, without the Spirit! O to see the power and glory of God, as I have seen it in the sanctuary!”

[4.] Examine your love by the original root of it, the everlasting love of God and his purpose of grace; for; it is a love that issues from a being called according to his purpose. Here an exercised person may say, “How shall I know, if my love to God be the fruit of God’s everlasting love and purpose, in Christ, from all eternity concerning me? Is it possible to know, that my love to him in time is such as will evidence his love to me from eternity? O how shall I understand that?” Why, this may not only be known by the marks already delivered, but further, in these four particulars.

1. If your love to God be such as flows from, and evidences his everlasting love to you, and purpose of grace concerning you, then this loving purpose

towards you, has produced in you a loving purpose towards him. What for a purpose is it? It is a purpose of marriage with the Son of God. His purpose of marriage with you from eternity hath produced in you a purpose of marriage with him in time. Can you tell me, if ever such a purpose was wrought in your heart? It is true, there are purposes that come to no effect; but this is an effectual purpose, that hath taken effect; insomuch that you could find no rest till the match was made up, as Naomi said of Boaz, when purposing to match with Ruth, chap. 3:18, "The man will not rest till he hath finished the thing;" even so, Christ Jesus, when betrothing a sinner to himself, as he will not rest till he hath finished this thing, so he works in the soul that purpose also, that he cannot rest till that thing be finished. Now, can you say thee was a time when the Lord wrought such a purpose of marriage with him in your heart, that you could not rest till it was some way finished, by a joining hands with the Son of God? Insomuch that when he offered his heart and hand to you, you were made to offer your heart and hand to him, saying, "Lord, take thou me to thyself; take thou me for such is the deceitfulness of my heart, that I know not if I dare say, Even so, I take thee: that is, indeed, what I would be at: but seeing it is thou, even thou only that canst make it sure work, and a sure bargain; therefore I put the making of the marriage in thy own hand. O take me to be thine for ever: I offer myself, with a thousand good-wills; O take me, take me: take me and my blessings to eternity. I put my heart into thy hand, and leave it with thee." Tell me, man, woman, were you brought to such a purpose as this? O poor soul, it is a fruit of his purpose from eternity of marrying you: it is a fruit of your being given to Christ in the council of peace: for Christ says, John 6:37, "All that the Father hath given me shall come to me." Again, if his loving purpose towards you, has produced a loving purpose in you towards him, then it is not only a purpose of marriage with him, but also a purpose of cleaving unto him; a purpose never to leave him; a purpose to abide with him as his purpose is to abide with them for ever, John 14:19; so it produces a purpose in them to abide with him for ever; saying with Ruth, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for where thou goest I will go; where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people; and thy God my God," Ruth 1:16. It is a purpose to bed and board with him, if I may be allowed the expression; to live and die with him; and to live upon him, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Again, another part of the loving purpose in them that his purpose doth produce, is a purpose, through grace, to glorify him: they purpose to glorify him in time, and to glorify him through eternity. However little they reach of their purpose while here below, yet this is a particular disposition wrought in all that love God, by virtue of their being called according to his purpose, that they have a great inclination, a strong purpose to glorify him with their hearts, their lips, and lives.

They are a chosen generation, a particular people, that they should shew forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness, to his marvellous light, 1 Pet. 2:9. These are they who love him, and whose love to him flows from, and evidences, his everlasting love and gospel of grace to them.

2. If your love to God be such as is a fruit of his everlasting purpose towards you, then it will produce in you an everlasting purpose towards him: thus to cleave to him, and serve him and glorify him. There are some fleeting purposes which many have, which last but for a moment; but the believer's purpose, to glorify God, and enjoy him for ever, is an everlasting purpose; it is a firm, permanent, fixed, habitual constant purpose. Whatever winds may drive him from the thing he purposes: yet, no wind can drive him from his purpose, when once it is wrought of God in his heart. Temptation may drive him from seeking and serving his God sometime: but yet the temptation cannot drive him from his purpose of seeking and serving the Lord. He may be drawn to sin; but he can never be drawn to a purpose of sinning, or a purpose of living in sin; nay, if some strong corruptions prevail against him, and lead him captive, yet he can confidently appeal to heaven it was never his stated purpose; and it was against his purpose, and against his prayers, and against his tears, and against his hope, that such and such an iniquity prevailed against him. It is with him as it is with a mariner that sets out for such a distant haven, with a full purpose to sail straight to it; but, against his purpose he is carried to this port and that port, which he never designed; and, perhaps, with cross-winds, carried hither and thither; yet still his purpose remains: and he never rests till he come to the place he designed.

3. If your love to God be the fruit of his eternal purpose and decree, then your heart will be reconciled to these eternal counsels of God, concerning the choosing of some and passing by others. The doctrine of predestination, which the apostle here speaks of in the context, will not be a terrible and harsh doctrine to you: you are brought to such a view of the absolute sovereignty of God, that you dare not quarrel with his decrees; nay, your heart will justify God and acquiesce in his wise and sovereign disposals, saying, "O! Is it not fit and right that the potter make of the clay what he pleases? and that God have mercy on whom he will have mercy?" &c. "Is there then unrighteousness with God? God forbid," Rom. 9:14,15,19,20. Hence, by the bye, we cannot think that any Arminian can have a love to God: for, in principle, he pulls God down, in effect, from the throne of his absolute sovereignty and dominion.

4. If your love to God be the fruit of his everlasting love and purpose of grace towards you, then your love to him will be accompanied with the admiration and adoration of free and sovereign grace; you will not only stoop to sovereignty,

without quarrelling his decrees, but you will admire and adore the freedom of his distinguishing love, and ascribe all the glory and praise of every part of your salvation to this free and sovereign mercy of God. You will desire to say with the apostle, “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!” Rom. 11:33, and to acknowledge with the same apostle, “He hath found us, and called us with a 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,” 2 Tim. 1:6. You will desire to admire the beauty and glory of all the links of the golden chain here: “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.

2dly, Try whether all things shall work for your good, by the begun experience of the thing itself, whether you have found already the footsteps of this truth in your hearts, God’s making all things work together for good. Try if he hath begun to make some things work already for your good; for, if he has begun to make some or many things already work for good to you, hence you may conclude, he will go on to make all things work together for good to you. I shall reduce this to four heads.

1. Have ever any of you been brought under sickness and distress of body? Rub up your experience a little, and reflect upon it, whether or not has this done you good? Did it humble you to the dust that you were dwelling in the house of dust? And did it bring your sin and guilt before you, and make you fly for refuge to a Saviour? Did it bear in the apprehensions of mortality upon thy heart, and excite thee to seek after a happy immortality? Was it a praying time, a wrestling time, a mourning time, and a turning time? Some are the worse of affliction; but, are you the better? Can you say, “It was good for me that I was afflicted?”

2. Hath ever any here sustained some great temporal losses, so as you are brought low, in outward respects? Well, consider if ever it wrought for any good to you; was you made to search the cause, and see your sin lying at the door? And what particular sins provoked the Lord? And dost thou now see that these things are not the best things, and that vanity is written upon them, and upon all things under the sun? And, by this, thy heart hath been more set a pursuing after the one thing necessary. Do you see your loss made up in God, and in communion with him? and, thereupon, art satisfied in the last God you have got? For, the first gods you set your heart upon, were vain and perishing objects of love; but now you are where you should be, and where you would be; only you would still have more and

more nearness to this true and everlasting, ever-living God? Or, have you learned to live a little more upon the providence of God, and upon the promises of God in the use of lawful means? Are you brought to prize a little from God, and receive it with thankfulness? whereas before, you could turn your nose up at a feast: “The full soul loatheth the honey-comb.” Or, are you brought unto this disposition, to see more evil in thy heart, than thou wouldst believe was in it? That it is a murmuring, covetous, and impatient heart, as well as a hard, wicked, and wandering heart? And art thou humbled before God for the pride of thy heart? This is some good.

3. Has God left you to yourself to commit such and such sins, whereby God is provoked, and your peace is disturbed? Now, what good have you got of this dispensation? Hath it cost you many tears in secret? Many a long look to the fountain opened for sin, and for uncleanness? Or, has the Lord thereby given you a sight of your nature? “I was conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity.” Has it bred in you a holy watchfulness against every sin? Or, hath it occasioned your admiring the free, absolutely free grace of God in Christ, and the long-suffering patience of God? Hath it made you pity others under the same temptation? and to lay out thyself more for honouring God than ever you did? Surely then it has wrought for good to thee.

4. Have you been brought under the hidings of God’s face? And hath this been for good to you? Is sin embittered, because it is the cause of it? Hath it endeared the presence of God more to you? Hath it awakened you to more frequency and fervency in holy duties? Hath it made you more useful and helpful to poor tempted and deserted ones than before, when they are saying, Alas! there was never any like me! I am a reprobate! It is in vain for me to wait on the means of grace? Well, you may tell such, If it be so with you, it was so with me: and this may give some relief. See what experience you have of God’s beginning to make all things work together for your good. Hath he begun to do so? Well, “He is a rock, and his work is perfect.” He will make all things work for good.

We shall now shut up the subject with an use of exhortation, both to saints and sinners. There are a few duties I would exhort believers unto.

1. Admire the wonderful goodness of this God, who makes all things work together for good to you. Well may you say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none in all the earth whom I desire besides thee. Who is a God like to thee? How great is his goodness?”

2. I would charge every soul here, not to make use of this truth to indulge the commission of one sin, or to go on in the way of sin: “What! shall we continue

in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. Shall we do evil that good may come of it?" Rom. 6:1. What God can do, in his infinite power and wisdom, is one thing: and what we, in faith, may expect, is another. Is any soul here engaged in love to any particular lust? Then, if ever you expect good at the hand of God, O bid adieu to your lusts, saying, "What have I to do any more with idols?" For, as all things work together for good to them that love God: so all things work together for hurt to them that love sin; and, therefore, away with sin.

3. Entertain good thoughts of God in all the ways of his providence, and whenever the dark side casts up, look over to the bright side of it by faith, and you will see all his ways of mercy and; truth to them who fear his name. Beware of harsh thoughts of God Be restless till you have the persuasion of two things, viz., that God loves you, and that you love God. If you could live in the view of this always, believers, then you would always have this persuasion too, that all things shall work together for your good.

4. Whatsoever providence may expose you to, yet resolve to live by faith, and to live in love: and then whatever come to pass, you may be satisfied all is well still, and all will be well still. By a life of faith you will feel all things working together for good.

5. Beware of practically contradicting the design of providence in working for your good, or of having any hand in making them work for your hurt, so as to be the worse of them, which people may do many ways: as when, in affliction, they betake themselves: unto unlawful means of relief; when they use unlawful means without dependence upon God; when they reckon God's former favours to be snares and entanglements; when they refuse the comforts of the word under their affliction, Exod. 6:9; and when they weary of their life, with Rachel.

6. Beware of censuring and challenging providence, when yet it is working for your good. Men are guilty of censuring the providence of God, not only through atheism, in denying providence but also through unbelief, in questioning the love of God; through sensuality, in misconstruing all providences, which do not gratify their lusts and carnal desires.. Sometimes through hastiness, in passing sentence upon providence, before these signal periods of it come, that would manifest its meaning. Sometimes from ignorance and want of consideration, not knowing that God may send lesser crosses to prevent a greater, Jer. 24:5.

7. Put a remark upon all the good that you get by the providence of God. Remember how often the cross hath borne down your pride, restrained your predominant, sent you to your prayers, and to a God in Christ, the hearer of prayer. It is necessary to make this remark upon the good of providence, because,

when it is made, and well improved, the crosses that you are ready to make arguments of your unbelief, would rather prove confirmations for your faith.

8. Join issue with providence, in endeavouring to get all the good you can out of every dispensation, and particularly out of affliction: and that by prayer, Job 27:10, James 5:13; and by being suitably exercised by them, not despising the chastening of the Lord, nor fainting when he rebukes, Heb. 12:13; nor despairing of a happy issue; but expecting, according to the promise, that all things shall work together for good.

On the other hand, I would speak a word to the wicked and ungodly, who are enemies to, and haters of God. To you I would offer, 1st, A word of terror and conviction: but I have prevented myself in the third inference as to this, and so I shall conclude,

2dly, With a word of counsel. And the advice I offer is that which you have, Job 22:21. If you would have all things working for your good, then acquaint now thyself with God, and be at peace, and thereby good shall come unto thee. Be restless till you get saving acquaintance with God in Christ, as he is revealed in the gospel, whereby you are called outwardly to acquaintance, and to peace and reconciliation with him; and wherein God prays you to be reconciled to him, 2 Cor. 5:19,20. In this gospel-dispensation he is calling and inviting you to come to him: and though the call will not be effectual without the efficacy of his grace; yet how doth he make the call effectual, but by charming the heart with the out-ward call: therefore hearken to the voice of the charmer in the outward call; wait for the Spirit to come, and draw out your heart towards him, in faith and love. Put not the gospel-call from you, under any temptation drawn from the secret purpose of God; for, though all whom he calls effectually, are called according to his purpose; yet that purpose is not the rule of their faith, nor the first object of the faith of any man. As you cannot know a man's thoughts, but by his words: so, you cannot know God's purpose, but by his promise. Do not first pore upon God's thoughts and designs, for that is not the first object of your faith; but first hear and give ear to his word: and if you believe his word, with application to yourself, then you may be sure of his purpose and thoughts toward you, that they are thoughts of good, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. It is the faith of his promise you are called to, and not the faith of his purpose; but, whenever you have the faith of his promise, then you may have the faith of his purpose: whenever you believe in Christ, as given to you in the word, then you may believe that you are given to him in the decree of God. You are to make first pour calling, and then your election sure; for, whenever you hear his call, and believe in him, according to his word, then you may conclude that you are called according to his purpose.

QUESTION. What is he saying to me, in the outward call of the word that may engage me to hear him?

ANSWER. He is saying, man, woman, will you enlist with me as a Captain, to fight all your battles for you? Will you match with me as your Husband, to protect and provide for you? Poor sinner will you have me to be your portion? O diseased sinner, will you have me to be your Physician? O ignorant sinner, will you have me to be your Prophet to teach you? O guilty sinner, will you have me to be your Priest, to pardon you? O enslaved sinner, will you have me to be your King, to subdue your iniquity, to conquer your enemies, to break your rebellion and enmity? Poor bankrupt, will you have a Surety, to pay all your debt? Poor oppressed sinner, will you have a helper, to bear all your burdens? Will you have one that can supply all your wants, and heal all your wounds? Will you have one that can portion you for eternity? Poor mortal worm, that art to crumble into dust in a little, will you have one that can jointure you for eternity, and make you happy in death, and happy in judgment, and happy through eternity? Will you have eternal life? "He that hath the Son hath life:" and his complaint is, "Ye will not come to me that ye might have life." He himself is the true God, and eternal life. What say you? either are you content or not. If you be not content, and will not have salvation that is come so near to you, then, "How shall you escape, if you neglect so great salvation?" Is not your ruin of yourself, when you will not have salvation from the guilt of sin, and from the power of sin? Must not your hell be the hottest? "Wo to thee Chorazin and Bethsaida! It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for you: and thou Capernaum, that art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell." Turks and Pagans, that never heard the gospel, will be, may I say, set upon the surface of hell, while you must be thrust down to the centre of damnation. Christ says, "I would have gathered you, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but ye would not." But, are you satisfied? You are called outwardly by the word; but are you made content to have Christ for yours in all respects, as a Prophet, Priest, and King, to save you from sin, as well as to save you from hell. Can you say it before God, men, and angels, that your heart is made content? Then you are not only called outwardly, according to his word; but inwardly, and effectually called, according to his purpose. The decree is open; and the everlasting love of God, that runs under ground from all eternity, is broken up above ground in drawing you with loving-kindness, and making your heart content with Christ, and close with him in all his offices. And now, has his love manifested to you in the gospel, drawn out your heart's love towards him? Then you may apply all the comforts that the text bears; "All things shall work together for good to them that love God, and are the called according to his purpose."

Visit *Fire and Ice: Puritan and Reformed Sermons* at
<http://www.puritansermons.com/>