

Things Working Together for Good

by Charles Spurgeon

"We know that all things work." Look around, above, beneath, and all things work. They work, in opposition to idleness. The idle man that folds his arms or lies upon the bed of sloth is an exception to God's rule for except himself all things work. There is not a star, though it seemeth to sleep in the deep blue firmament, which doth not travel its myriads of miles and work; there is not an ocean, or a river, which is not ever working, either clapping its thousand hands with storms, or bearing on its bosom the freight of nations. There is not a silent nook within the deepest forest glade where work is not going on. Nothing is idle. The world is a great machine, but it is never standing still: silently all through the watches of the night, and through the hours of day, the earth revolveth on its axis, and works out its predestinated course. Silently the forest groweth, anon it is felled; but all the while between its growing and felling it is at work. Everywhere the earth works; mountains work; nature in its inmost bowels is at work; even the centre of the great heart of the world is ever beating; sometimes we discover its working in the volcano and the earthquake, but even when most still all things are ever working.

They are ever working, too, in opposition to the word play. Not only are they ceaselessly active, but they are active for a purpose. We are apt to think that the motion of the world and the different evolutions of the stars are but like the turning round of a child's windmill; they produce nothing. That old preacher Solomon once said as much as that. He said: "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits." But Solomon did not add, that things are not what they seem. The world is not at play; it hath an object in its wildest movement. Avalanche, hurricane, earthquake, are but order in an unusual form; destruction and death are but progress in veiled attire. Everything that is and is done, worketh out some great end and purpose. The great machine of this world is not only in motion, but there is something weaving in it, which as yet mortal eye hath not fully seen, which our text hinteth at when it says, It is working out for God's people.

And once again, all things work in opposition to Sabbath. We morally speak of work, especially on this day, as being the opposite of sacred rest and worship. Now, at the present moment all things work. Since the day when Adam fell all things have had to toil and labour. Before Adam's fall the world kept high and perpetual holiday; but now the world has come to its work-days, now it hath to toil. When Adam was in the garden the world had its Sabbath; and it shall never have another Sabbath till the Millennium shall dawn, and then when all things have ceased to work, and the kingdoms shall be given up to God, even the Father, then shall the world have her Sabbath, and shall rest; but at present all things do work.

Let us not wonder if we have to work, too. If we have to toil, let us remember, this is the world's week of toil. The 6,000 years of continual labour, and toil, and travail, have happened not to us alone, but to the whole of God's great universe; the whole world is groaning, and travailling. Let us not be

backward in doing our work. If all things are working, let us work, too—"work while it is called to-day, for the night cometh when no man can work." And let the idle and slothful remember that they are a great anomaly; they are blots in the great work-writing of God; they mean nothing; in all the book of letters with which God has written out the great word "work," they are nothing at all. But let the man that worketh, though it be with the sweat of his brow and with aching hands, remember that he, if he is seeking to bless the Lord's people, is in sympathy with all things—not only in sympathy with their work, but in sympathy with their aim.

"All things work together." That is in opposition to their apparent confliction. Looking upon the world with the mere eye of sense and reason, we say, "Yes, all things work, but they work contrary to one another. There are opposite currents; the wind bloweth to the north, and to the south. The world's barque, it is true, is always tossed with waves, but these waves toss her first to the right and then to the left; they do not steadily bear her onward to her desired haven. It is true the world is always active, but it is with the activity of the battle-field, wherein hosts encounter hosts and the weaker are overcome." Be not deceived; it is not so; things are not what they seem; "all things work together." There is no opposition in God's providence; the raven wing of war is co-worker with the dove of peace. The tempest strives not with the peaceful calm—they are linked together and work together, although they seem to be in opposition. Look at our history. How many an event has seemed to be conflicting in its day, that has worked out good for us! The strifes of barons and kings for mastery might have been thought to be likely to tread out the last spark of British liberty; but they did rather kindle the pile. The various rebellions of nations, the heavings of society, the strife of anarchy, the tumults of war—all, all these things, overruled by God, have but made the chariot of the church progress more mightily; they have not failed of their predestinated purpose—"good for the people of God."

I know it is very hard to believe this. "What?" say you, "I have been sick for many a day, and wife and children, dependent on my daily labour, are crying for food: will this work together for my good?" So saith the Word, and so shalt thou find it ere long. "I have been in trade," says another, "and this commercial pressure has brought me exceedingly low, and distressed me: is it for my good?"

Thou art a Christian. I know thou dost not seriously ask the question, for thou knowest the answer of it. He who said, "All things work together," will soon prove to you that there is a harmony in the most discordant parts of your life. You shall find, when your biography is written, that the black page did but harmonize with the bright one—that the dark and cloudy day was but a glorious foil to set forth the brighter noon-tide of your joy. "All things work together." There is never a clash in the world: men think so, but it never is so. The charioteers of the Roman circus might with much cleverness and art, with glowing wheels, avoid each other; but God, with skill infinitely consummate, guides the fiery coursers of man's passion, yokes the storm, bits the tempest, and keeping each clear of the other, from seeming evil still enduceth good, and better still; and better still in infinite progression.

We must understand the word "together," also in another sense. "All things work together for good: "that is to say, none of them work separately. I remember an old divine using a very pithy and homely metaphor:—"All things work together for good; but perhaps, any one of those 'all things' might destroy us if taken alone. The physician, prescribes medicine; you go to the chemist, and he makes it up; there is something taken from this drawer, something from that phial, something from that shelf: any one of those ingredients, it is very possible, would be a deadly poison, and kill you outright, if you

should take it separately; but he puts one into the mortar, and then another, and then another, and when he has worked them all up with his pestle, and has made a compound, he gives them all to you as a whole, and together they work for your good, but any one of the ingredients might either have operated fatally, or in a manner detrimental to your health." Learn, then, that it is wrong to ask, concerning any particular act of providence, Is this for my good? Remember, it is not the one thing alone that is for your good; it is the one thing put with another thing, and that with a third, and that with a fourth, and all these mixed together, that work for your good. Your being sick very probably might not be for your good, only God has something to follow your sickness, some blessed deliverance to follow your poverty, and He knows that when He has mixed the different experiences of your life together, they shall produce good for your soul and eternal good for your spirit. We know right well that there are many things that happen to us in our lives that would be the ruin of us if we were always to continue in the same condition. Too much joy would intoxicate us, too much misery would drive us to despair: but the joy and the misery, the battle and the victory, the storm and the calm, all these compounded make that sacred elixir whereby God maketh all His people perfect through suffering, and leadeth them to ultimate happiness. "All things work together for good."

There are different senses to the word "good." There is the worldling's sense: "Who will show us any good?"—by which he means transient good, the good of the moment. "Who will put honey into my mouth? Who will feed my belly with hid treasures? Who will garnish my back with purple, and make my table groan with plenty?" That is "good,"—the vat bursting with wine, the barn full of corn! Now God has never promised that "all things shall work together" for such good as that to His people. Very likely all things will work together in a clean contrary way to that. Expect not, O Christian, that all things will work together to make thee rich; it is just possible they may all work to make thee poor. It may be that all the different providences that shall happen to thee will come wave upon wave, washing thy fortune upon the rocks, till it shall be wrecked, and then waves shall break o'er thee, till in that poor boat, the humble remnant of thy fortune, thou shalt be out on the wide sea, with none to help thee but God the Omnipotent. Expect not, then, that all things shall work together as for thy good.

The Christian understands the word "good" in another sense. By "good," he understands spiritual good. "Ah!" saith he, "I do not call gold good, but I call faith good! I do not think it always for my good to increase in treasure, but I know it is good to grow in grace. I do not know that it is for my good that I should be respectable and walk in good society; but I know that it is for my good that I should walk humbly with my God. I do not know that it is for my good that my children should be about me, like olive branches round my table, but I know that it is for my good that I should flourish in the courts of my God, and that I should be the means of winning souls from going down into the pit. I am not certain that it is altogether for my good to have kind and generous friends, with whom I may hold fellowship: but I know that it is for my good that I should hold fellowship with Christ, that I should have communion with him, even though it should be in his sufferings. I know it is good for me that my faith, my love, my every grace should grow and increase, and that I should be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ my blessed Lord and Master." To the Christian, however, the highest good he can receive on earth is to grow in grace. "There!" he says, "I had rather be a bankrupt in business than I would be a bankrupt in grace; let my fortune be decreased—better that, than that I should backslide; there! let thy waves and thy billows roll over me—better an ocean of trouble than a drop of sin; I would rather have thy rod a thousand times upon my shoulders, O my God, than I would once put out my hand to touch that which is forbidden, or allow my foot to run in the way of gainsayers." The

highest good a Christian has here, is good spiritual.

All things work together for a Christian's lasting good. They all work to bring him to the Saviour's feet. "So He bringeth them to their desired haven," said the Psalmist—by storm and tempest, flood and hurricane. All the troubles of a Christian do but wash him nearer heaven; the rough winds do but hurry his passage across the straits of this life to the port of eternal peace. All things work together for the Christian's eternal and spiritual good.

And yet sometimes all things work together for the Christian's temporal good. You know the story of old Jacob. "Joseph is not, Simeon is not, and now ye will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me," said the old Patriarch. But if he could have read God's secrets, he might have found that Simeon was not lost, for he was retained as a hostage—that Joseph was not lost, but gone before to smooth the passage of his grey hairs into the grave, and that even Benjamin was to be taken away by Joseph in love to his brother. So that what seemed to be against him, even in temporal matters, was for him.

You may have heard also the story of that eminent martyr who was wont always to say, "All things work together for good." When he was seized by the officers of Queen Mary, to be taken to the stake to be burned, he was treated so roughly on the road that he broke his leg, and they jeeringly said, "All things work together for good, do they? How will your broken leg work for your good? I don't know," said he, "how it will, but for my good I know it will work, and you shall see it so." Strange to say, it proved true that it was for his good; for being delayed a day or so on the road through his lameness, he just arrived in London in time enough to hear that Elizabeth was proclaimed queen, and so he escaped the stake by his broken leg. He turned round upon the men who carried him, as they thought, to his death, and said to them, "Now will you believe that all things work together for good?"

Though the drift of the text was spiritual good, yet sometimes in the main current there may be carried some rich and rare temporal benefits for God's children, as well as the richer spiritual blessings.

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