

# A Divine Cordial

By Todd Pruitt

I know the title of this article sounds a bit odd to modern American ears. A cordial refers to a sweet after dinner drink or a variety of chocolates that have a sweet liquid center. It was not unusual for the Puritans to refer to certain passages of Scripture as cordials from God or Divine cordials. This was the original title that Thomas Watson gave to a book that was later renamed All Things for Good.

Thomas Watson was pastor of St. Stephen's Walbrook during the 17<sup>th</sup> century and a giant among the Puritans. Among his most important works are A Body of Divinity, The Lord's Prayer, and The Ten Commandments which deserve a place in every Christian's library. Watson believed that his work as a pastor involved two great goals. The first was to help unbelievers to be saddened by the reality of their sin so that they would recognize their need for Christ. The second was to help the believer respond joyfully to God's grace. The second challenge he believed was found in the "cordial" of Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." His book is an extended and glorious meditation on that single verse.

The book was published in 1663. This was a hard time to be a Puritan. It was usually hard to be a Puritan in England. The previous year was the time of The Great Expulsion. Some two thousand Puritan ministers, Watson among them, were removed from their churches. Along with the loss of income, many of them faced the confiscating of their homes and even imprisonment. Imagine a time when preachers and pastors were forbidden to preach, chased from their homes, and even thrown in jail for simply refusing to conform to the state-run church. The Church of England at that time was filled with clergy who were biblically illiterate and in many cases unregenerate. The Puritans were perceived as a threat to the status quo and indeed they were. For that they suffered greatly.

It was out of the fresh and brutal persecutions of 1662 that Thomas Watson's heart overflowed into the pages of All Things for Good. It is the fruit of what happens when a man clings to the promises of God's Word in the midst of troubled times. Indeed, it is in the midst of bitter trials when God's promises taste most sweet. They truly become, as it were, a cordial from God. So Watson writes, "There is more in the promises to comfort than in the world to perplex."

We can learn from men like Thomas Watson that our hearts and minds must be tethered to the Word of God. Without this tethering we should not be dismayed when our faith fails. Why is it that we walk so often through the desert of the soul and forsake the water of the Scriptures?

"Are we in great trouble? There is a promise that works for our good, 'I will be with him in trouble' (Ps. 91:15). God does not bring His people into troubles, and leave them there. He

will stand by them; He will hold their heads and hearts when they are fainting. And there is another promise, 'He is their strength in the time of trouble' (Ps 37:39). 'Oh,' says the soul, 'I shall faint in the day of trial.' But God will be the strength of our hearts; He will join His forces with us. Either He will make His hand lighter, or our faith stronger" (p.16).

Ever the pastor, Watson strives for simplicity and clarity in his exposition of Scripture. He also writes in such a way that passion seems to drip from the pages. One other characteristic in Watson's writing that was common among the Puritans is practicality. He works to apply well the Scriptures to the hearts of his hearers. So it is with his exposition of Romans 8:28. He takes each clause in the verse and magnifies it. He exposes us to every contour of the verse; every place where application might be derived. To every beam of light proceeding from the promise he seeks to direct our eyes. His explanation of how God uses even the worst experiences to further our good is deeply moving. He goes on to explain what it means to love God and to be among those "who are called according to His purpose."

The heart soars with the reading of such sound and inspiring meditation upon the Scriptures. My friends, they don't write 'em like this any longer. I encourage you to take it up and read.