

A DISCOURSE OF AFFLICTIONS.

And ye have forgotten the exhortation, which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.—HEB. XII. 5–11.

THE apostle, after having drawn a catalogue of those illustrious souls that had manifested a choice faith upon several occasions, descends in this chapter to press the believing Hebrews to an exercise of patience and faith under those pressures they should meet with in their Christian course, where he proposeth first to them the example of Christ, ver. 2, 3; next, the exhortation of the Holy Ghost, drawn from Prov. iii. 11, 12, ‘My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth he corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth;’ which, being an instruction concerning the nature and use of afflictions God sends upon us, the apostle applies to the particular case of the Hebrews, but discourseth in general of the author, subjects, and ends of the afflictions God exerciseth his children with. ‘Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to children?’ Have you lost the remembrance of what God saith in that exhortation by his wisdom, Prov. iii., where he commends his goodness, and shews the obligation you have to listen to him, by vouchsafing you the name of children, the greatest glory and the highest comfort of a creature? Have you, saith he, forgot this? Have you not the intent of it in your minds and memories, in your hearts and considerations? The apostle discourses here of the necessity and advantages of afflictions. In ver. 5, he orders us not to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor to despond under it: ‘Faint not when thou art rebuked of him.’ This he backs with many

motives in the following verses. *Μὴ ὀλιγωρεῖς*, do not make a light account of afflictions.

1. One motive is in the word chastening (*παιδεία*), which signifies the instruction whereby a child is brought to the knowledge of things profitable for him, which being it is not effected in that age, subject to extravagancy, without stripes as well as words, the word is therefore used for the discipline which attends such instruction.

2. Another motive is from the author of afflictions, the Lord: despise not the chastening of the Lord.

Observations.

1. It must be our great care not to make slight of afflictions, nor to be too much dejected under them. The smart will keep us from despising an affliction in itself; but we make light of it when we are careless of improving it for the ends for which God inflicts it. We may be sensible of the pain, when we are not sensible of the profit which may accrue to us by it. God forbids here two extremities; the one an excess, the other a want of courage. Both dishonour God, the one in his sovereignty, the other in his goodness and love; and both are injurious to the sufferer, as he rebels against the one, and loseth the sweetness of the other. We should receive the afflictions God sends with a humility without despondency, with a reverence without distrust, and keep ourselves from either fearing too much, or not fearing God enough. Mix reverence with confidence, adore the hand which we feel, and rest in the goodness which he promiseth. This is the way to reap the fruit of afflictions.

2. All afflictions, let them be from what immediate causes soever, are from the hand of God. Whether they come from man, as loss of goods or other calamities; whether they be sicknesses, griefs, &c.; they are all dispensed by the order of God for one and the same design, viz., our instruction. Human reason doth not believe this. Some think they come by chance, or look only to second causes, and regard them not as wholesome instructions from God, and the orders of his providence.

1. This should stop any impatient motions. It is fit we should be of the psalmist's temper, 'hold our peace, because God hath done it,' Ps. xxxix. 9. Shall the clay formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou thus? We should rather say as Eli, 1 Sam. iii. 18, 'It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good.' Especially since an infinite wisdom is joined with the sovereign authority of God, and when we are not able to understand the reason of his conduct, we ought to acquiesce in his will and in his wisdom, and stop the motion of any passion, by a humiliation under his hand.

2. It teacheth us to whom to have recourse. That hand that strikes can only cease striking. When David had stilled impatience, he awakens his prayer: Ps. xxxix. 10, 'Remove thy strokes from me: I am consumed with the blows of thine hand.' If Shimei casts a stone at David, it is the Lord that bade him; if the humours of our bodies rise against us, it is God that arms them, and it is he must be sought to for redress. He only can disband what force he raises. It is our comfort there is a sovereign power to whom we can make our moan in our addresses, and that our sovereign that struck us is ready to heal us.

3. How sweet is God towards his children groaning under any affliction! 'My son, despise not,' &c. He calls them his sons, his children, sweetening in the name whatsoever is rigorous in the suffering. He gives them a title whereby he manifests that he doth share in their grief, hath a resentment of their trouble. What father is there on earth, unless he hath lost all natural affection, who doth not sympathise in the suffering of his children?

All the bowels of earth, met together in one combined tenderness, are not to be compared to the yearning bowels of heaven. Afflictions are not always sent by God in anger with his creatures, but sent by God as a Father.

(1.) Hence it is easy to conceive that neither the intentions of God, nor the issue of a suffering, can be any other than happy to those that are the children of God, since he gives the name of child, and son, to every one that he doth instruct as a Father by correction.

(2.) It will teach us to have a sense of the sufferings of others. The argument to press this exhortation is taken from the impulsive cause, the love of God; and the word translated *chasten*, signifies such a chastisement as a father gives his son, or a master his scholar.

Observation,

(1.) The afflictions of believers are effects of divine love. 'For whom the Lord loves he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth': Rev. iii. 19, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.' They are not acts of divine revenge, whereby God would satisfy his justice; but of divine affection, whereby he communicates his goodness, and draws the image of his Son with more beauty and glory. They are the acts of God, but not of a sleepy and careless God, but a wise and indulgent Father, who takes all the care, both of instruction and correction, to train you up to his will and likeness. God indeed afflicts other men who are not in the number of his beloved children. There are scarce any among the sons of men that pass their life in a continual prosperity, exempt from all kind of affliction; and all these evils are from God as the governor of the world. Yet though there be no difference between the sufferings of one and the other, and though the sufferings of believers are often more sharp than those of carnal men in outward appearance, yet there is a vast difference in the motives of them. Love makes him strike the believer, and fury makes him strike the unregenerate man. The design of the correction of the one is their profit, not their ruin; the strokes upon the other are often the first fruits of eternal punishment.

(1.) Then the world is much mistaken in judging the afflictions of believers to be testimonies of God's anger and hatred. God acts towards the world as a lawgiver and judge, but towards those that he hath renewed and adopted in the quality of a father. And who would judge of the hatred of a tender father by the corrections he inflicts upon a child that is so dear to him? Believers suffer by God not simply as he is a judge, but as he is *Paternalis Jdex*. There is a combination of judge and father. God doth not intend revenge on them; for though they are afflicted for sin, yet the principal aim is to prove them, reform them, that they may be worthy of a blessed inheritance. 'Lazarus whom thou lovest is sick,' was the speech of his sister to Christ. They were fearing, thinking that Christ's love was departed with Lazarus his health.

(2.) No man hath then any reason to fancy himself the object of God's love for an outward prosperity: Eccles. ix. 1, 'No man knows either love or hatred by all that is before him.' God doth not always love those whom his providence preserves in health and ease. Such a conceit proceeds from an ignorance of another life, and too great a valuation of the things of this world. Temporal goods, credit in the world, outward conveniences, and an uninterrupted health, are effects of God's patience and common goodness, but not of his affection and choicest love. They are the marks of his affection, when, by his grace, they are made means to conduct us to a better inheritance; but how often are they pernicious to us by reason of our corruption and ill usage of them! How often doth the health of the body destroy

that of the soul, and the prosperity of the flesh ruin that of the spirit ! How often do riches and honours link our hearts to the earth, and expel any thoughts of an heavenly paradise ! How often doth a portion in this world make many slack their endeavours for a portion in heaven ! How often do they hinder our sanctification, which is the only means to an happy vision of God !

(3.) How should this move us in our afflictions to a carriage pleasing to God ! This is the motive the apostle uses to press his exhortation in the former verse, neither to despise the chastening of God, nor despond of his care. Why should we despise that which is dispensed by love ? Who would not be willing to satisfy a friend in his desire, which they are assured love is the motive of, though their prudence is not so exact as that we can absolutely trust it ? Should we not with greater care consider the chastisements which the love of God, both good and wise, doth ordain by providence ? Is not the love, the motive of suffering, a sufficient ground to prevent distrust and discouragement ? Why should any distrust him by whom he knows he is afflicted ? That correction which frights us is a work of his love, not of his hatred. Should we not, therefore, wait with faith for an happy issue of that chastisement which we suffer ? If we be once thus affected, we shall receive afflictions with a temper answerable to God, and improve them for those holy ends for which God sends them. We should also bear them patiently, since they are not for the reparation of the holiness of the law and the satisfaction of his justice, but to prove the soul and fit it for heaven. It is not the love of the criminal, but the love of the laws, which causes a judge to condemn and punish him. No wise man ever said that a prince did punish malefactors because he loved them, or that God makes the wicked suffer eternal punishment in hell because he loves them. It necessarily follows that, therefore, the chastisements God doth inflict are not properly punishments of the same nature with those God doth ordain for unbelievers. We have reason, therefore, to bear them with patience. It is inexcusable to murmur at an act of love. Use, then, a religious reason in the consideration of this. When the father scourgeth, the child cries, and then he thinks his father hates him. It is but the error of his childhood, and when he comes to reason he will regard it as a false opinion. When a physician hath lanced you, and given you a bitter potion, you never had any suspicion that he hated you ; you have received all his charitable offices, and thought him more worthy of a reward than a rebuke. Why should not our carriage be so to God ?

2. Observation.

No righteous man in the world is, or ever was, free from sin. He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Sin is the cause of afflictions. Were we free from sin, we should be free from scourges. Afflictions cease not till sin be quite destroyed, which will not be in this world. Justice finds enough in every believer in the world to punish, and mercy finds enough to pardon.

(1.) It is against this, then, that we should turn our aim. What Satan would make us vent in impatience against God, let us manifest in a hatred of that which is the true cause of all the evils which in general or particular we suffer. Let us strike that as much as God strikes us ; and it is but grateful reason, since it is the best way whereby we can shew our love to God, who, in his strokes upon us, shews his love to us. Let us take no rest till we have put that to death which God only hates. It is the death of sin, and not the death of the soul, God designs in afflictions.

(2.) It is, upon this account, an argument for patience. While our dis-

ease remains, why should we think ill of the physician for using means for a cure? If he did not use the means, though sharp, we then should have most reason to accuse him of a want of pity. What father would not be counted very tender, that should lance his child himself when he saw there was need for it? Sin puts God upon a necessity of scourging; his goodness and wisdom will not suffer him to do anything but what is necessary and expedient. Now, ver. 7, the apostle exhorts them to a patient bearing the hand of God, because he deals with them as a father with his sons in a way of reward afterwards. As parents careess those children, they see quiet after punishment. If ye endure chastening, God deals with you as sons. God προσφέρειται, offers himself to you as a father to his sons. Or rather, the apostle doth render the comfort in the former verse more efficacious to the Hebrews, and makes application of what is contained in that truth which he hath cited out of the Proverbs, in the former verse: that yet, if they endure chastisement, God treats them as children; and, being men are apt to think that a troublesome affliction is inconsistent with the love of God, the apostle contradicts such a thought by the question, 'What son is there whom the father chasteneth not?' And he goes further, verse 8, and draws another conclusion: that we should be so far from thinking that to be afflicted is a sign of our not being the children of God, that on the contrary he affirms that not to be chastised is a sign that a man is not of God's family: verse 8, 'If you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.' For if the Lord scourgeth every son whom he receives, it is clear that he whom he leaves without chastisement is not a true and legitimate son, but a stranger, a bastard, *i. e.* one that is not of the family, but takes only the name and quality, without any right to it.

Observation 1. God, in chastening believers, treats them as children. *If*, here, is as much as *when*: 'if you endure chastening,' *i. e.* when you endure chastening; as Lev. xix. 5, *if* you offer a sacrifice of peace-offering, *i. e.* when you offer a sacrifice. So John xiv. 3, 'If I go and prepare a place for you,' *i. e.* when I go and prepare a place for you. Since God hath commanded men expressly in his word to chastise their children, and hath engraved such a disposition in the hearts of mankind, and authorised such a carriage by his law, we must not think it strange that God, who is wisdom, goodness, and love, should exercise in his family such a just, and holy, and wholesome discipline. And as none can say that a tender father, when he chastiseth his child, deals with him as with an enemy, so none can affirm the same of God; and though affliction be an evil in itself, and sharp to the child that suffers it, yet if you compare it with the good it procures, it is not an evil, but an experienced good. Compare the lives of those children that have not been without the correction of their parents or strangers to the lives of those that have been left to themselves without it, and the advantage of the one and miseries of the other will easily appear: Prov. xiii. 1, 'A wise son hears the instruction of his father.' *Hear* is not in the Hebrew. A wise son is the instruction or chastisement of his father. The Jews have a proverb, If you see a wise child, be sure that the father hath chastised him.* God deals in this manner with his children, and there is need of it, for though the regenerate are freed from the slavery of sin, yet while they are clothed with flesh, the flesh will lust against the Spirit; and God not only chastises us for our infirmities, but to prevent them; and since the love which he bears us, and the salvation which he procures by his chastisements, doth infinitely surpass the affections of the best and tenderest fathers, and the best fruit we can draw from their

* Drusius.

discipline, we may well confess that no father in the world can be said to deal as a father with his children so as God doth with the believer. He offers himself to do a father's office: he is the world's sovereign, but a believer's father. As he is the governor of the world, he treats men righteously in his judgments; as he is the Father of believers, he treats them graciously in his afflictions.

Here is a great comfort, if God deal with you as with children in his striking of you. His wisdom and his goodness is infinite; he doth nothing but what is just and reasonable, and is guided by a fatherly affection in all that he doth: his blows are healthful. If David would account it a kindness if the righteous would smite him, and count his rebukes as an excellent oil, Ps. xli. 5, how much more ought we to have the same sentiments of the chastisement of God. Good men may mistake in their rebukes, God cannot. He is too wise to be deceived, and too good not to make even his strokes become an excellent balsam. He doth not assault us as enemies, nor only as criminals, but as children; not to punish us in his fury, but to refine us, to make us fit for him to take pleasure in, to make us more like him in the the frame and temper of our souls. This is the end of a tender father's chastising his children, and this is the end of God. We should receive his corrections therefore, not so much as a punishment as a favour, since he strikes not as an enemy to destroy, but as a father to correct; not only as a God of righteousness, but as a God of tenderness.

Observation 2. No child of God but is one time or other under his correcting hand. The apostle makes a challenge to all to shew one in that relation privileged from it: 'What son is there whom the Father chasteneth not?' None of those mentioned among the believing Hebrews in the foregoing chapter were without this smart: Noah had an affliction in a child, Gen. xii. 10, Abraham and Jacob were afflicted with famine, Isaac by an Esau, Moses fain to fly for his life, Job suffered the loss of his goods, Hezekiah a dangerous sickness. To be under afflictions, then, is to travel in the road of all that have gone before. And the apostle goes further, ver. 8, and affirms that not to be chastised is a certain sign of no right to a membership of his family: 'But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons.' This is an argument from the antithesis, they are bastards, and not sons, who are not corrected. Bastards, not, saith Grotius, those whom the father of the family hath begot, but those that an adulterous mother would obtrude upon him as part of his family, which he rejects from any paternal care of instruction and discipline, as having no part in his inheritance, no right to his goods, not born of his seed, which is the word. By this the apostle signifies,

(1.) That all the true children of God are under his discipline. If they are not, they are no parts of his family. He that is left without it, is not in the number of those he owns for his children. Hereby he strengthens what he had spoken before, that God deals with those he afflicts as children; whence it follows, that there is no child of his but he doth at one time or another afflict. This is one of the clauses of the covenant God hath made with us in Jesus, which he doth peculiarly insert, when he owns himself our God and Father: Ps. lxxxix. 32, he would visit them with a rod, but not take away his loving-kindness. In the New Testament, God promiseth spiritual blessings. In the Old, when he promised most temporal blessings, his people were not exempt from his discipline. In the New Testament, it is more express, that through afflictions we must enter into the kingdom of heaven. His only Son must suffer, and so enter into glory.

(2.) That those that are not under his discipline are not his children.

Afflictions therefore are so far from being discouragements, that where there is an evidence of grace in the heart, they are rather marks of adoption. We might well doubt of a relation to him if he took no care of us; that we were not his sheep if he used not his crook to pull us unto him. Let us then receive his chastisements without regret, since he manifests his care of us in them, and regards us with the eyes and heart of a father. If we were wholly strangers, he would abandon us, and leave us as persons he knew not. His paternal rod is for his children, his rod of iron for his enemies. But now in the ninth verse, and the following verses, the apostle exhorts them to a reverence of God under his chastising hand. The argument is a *minori ad majus*: ver. 9, 'Furthermore, we have had fathers of the flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?' And he urgeth the exhortation, (1.) from the right of God: he is the Father of spirits; (2.) from his intention, which is our spiritual profit, ver. 10; (3.) from the issue: it is as much our advantage in the event as it was in his intention, ver. 11. The fathers of our flesh have corrected us, and we gave them reverence; how much rather ought we to be subject to the Father of spirits, who chasteneth us that we may live? The two persons which the apostle compares together, viz. God and man, have this in common: one and the other is a father, one and the other chasteneth, one and the other is carried out to it by love, one and the other designs advantage; but as there is this resemblance, so there is a great difference: man is but the father of the body, the more ignoble part of our natures, that which we have common with beasts; God is the Father of our spirits, the more noble part, and that which makes us properly men. More submission is therefore due to him, who confers more upon us, than to them who confer less. The love which fathers bear to their children is a passion, and many times is not regulated by reason; but the love of God is a true love, not mingled with any imperfection either of excess or defect, and therefore doth nothing but with the justest reason. Again, earthly fathers aim at the good of their children, but their ignorance is so great that often they mistake it; but the knowledge of God is as perfect as his love, who always chastiseth his people for their true good, and therefore a greater submission is due to him.

(1.) How glorious is the condition of a true believer! He is the child of God: 1 John iii. 1, 'What manner of love is this, that we should be called the sons of God!' It is an argument of great love to give his people so honourable and dear a title, to call himself their Father, as well as their God. It is not so strange that he should call all the pure spirits in heaven his children, as that he should call those that have defiled his image by that title; that he should own himself a Father to them that are by nature children of wrath, slaves to Satan, sold under sin, that have nothing in them to please him by nature, but are fit objects of his wrath and curse. Wonderful love, that God should not think it a dishonour to him to be called our Father! And hence it is reason we should carry ourselves to him in all his dispensations as children to a father, that we should comfort ourselves in this relation in all the sufferings we encounter. If he be our Father, what should we fear? Nothing passes in the world without his order; no evil arrives to us without his will. Every affliction is the rod of his hand. The very thought that God is our Father should sweeten any grief.

(2.) God is the creator of souls. By spirits are meant the souls of men; some understand it also of spiritual gifts, the graces God infuseth into the souls of his people. Both are good motives to that submission unto, and reverence of God, the apostle urgeth. Most interpreters run the first way.

The antithesis requires that we should understand by this expression that God is the creator of souls, because it is opposed to the fathers of the flesh. God is called the God of the spirits of all flesh, Num. xvi. 22. As by the flesh the apostle means the body, the material and visible part of our natures; so by the spirit he means the soul, the spiritual and invisible part of our being. As for the body, man engendered it; as for the soul, God only formed it; as in Eccles. xii. 7, 'Then shall the dust return to the earth, and the spirit shall return to God that gave it;' where by the dust is meant the body, and by the spirit the soul. The body was formed of the dust of the ground, Gen. ii. 7; but the soul was breathed in by God. It is the spirit that gives life and sense to the parts of the body, which otherwise are without sense and motion; and God is said to form the spirit of man, Zech. xii. 1, and challengeth to himself the particular forming of the soul: Isa. lvii. 16, 'The soul which I have made.' God, indeed, forms the body too by the hand of nature, by the intervention of second causes which he employs; but the soul he forms without any other cause but his own will. The first manner of acting by nature in the production of the body is not sufficient to demonstrate God the Father of it, no more than he can be called the Father of beasts and plants, which are produced by his powerful providence, as well as the bodies of men; but the second manner of acting in the production of an immortal and spiritual substance is sufficient to demonstrate God the Father of spirits, as they also are called the children of God, because God immediately created them, and clothed them with an immortal nature. The apostle, therefore, hath good reason to call men which have begot us the fathers of the flesh; because, though the wisdom and power of God in his providence acts in our conception and generation, yet it is also the work of man, who acts as a second cause; but the production of the soul is purely by the will and power of God, without the action of any creature. Hence it follows that the soul is immortal; for since it doth not depend in its original upon matter, it doth not in its subsistence, neither after death hath separated the body from it. It follows also that the reasonable soul is more excellent than the bodies which we receive from earthly fathers; and therefore we owe more submission and reverence to God and his chastisements than to those who have been only the fathers of our bodies, which the interrogation intimates, 'Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?'

(3.) 'And live;' or that we may live. This is an argument from the reward of a patient suffering. The apostle seems tacitly to refer to the promise of life to children that honour their parents. As a temporal life was promised to them, so a spiritual and eternal life is promised to those that are patiently obedient under the hand of God. As in Israel those that slighted the rebukes of their parents were stoned without pity, so will God handle those that kick against his discipline, and make no profit of his rod. Corrections cause life, not meritoriously, but instrumentally. If we, therefore, own God as a Father, we ought to carry ourselves to him as our Father. If we desire an happy and eternal life, we must subject ourselves to his hand, acknowledge the righteousness of his discipline, and, by how much the paternity of God is more excellent, our submission ought to be the more reverential. In ver. 10, the apostle urgeth the exhortation further, from the manner of God's proceedings with us, different from that of earthly fathers, and from his aim in it: 'For they for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.' This he doth by comparing of the heavenly Father and the earthly father with one another, and acquaints us that it is the aim of God, in those afflictions which seem most bitter, to reduce us to that holiness which we have lost in Adam.

1. They verily for a few days chastened us. Either death deprives them of their authority, or the growth of their children exempts them from suffering under it. Parents only take care to correct their children during the weakness of their childhood, when, by ignorance and inexperience, they are incapable to conduct themselves. They have, therefore, need of their parents to form their spirits, and make those impressions upon them whereby they may govern themselves the rest of their lives. But when they are arrived at years of discretion, they are left to govern themselves according to their own reasons, without using the rod to supply the defect of their understanding; so that the corrections of earthly parents are but for few years, a little time.

Observation.

1. Hereby appears the advantage of God's discipline above that of earthly parents. God continues his care to us all our lives upon the earth, as long as we have need; exercises a greater providence over us than earthly parents over their children.

2. Hereby the apostle comforts us. It is but a little time that God subjects us to chastisements; only that part of our life which we are to pass on earth, which is but a small time to that eternity wherein we shall be exempt from suffering; bears infinitely less proportion to eternity than the least instant doth to all the time from the creation to the end of the world; so that the time of a believer's chastisement is shorter than that of children under their parents. And herein is the kindness and love of God apparent, who deals more favourably with his children in regard of the time of their correction than the best father in the world can do.

2. The motive of, and rule that parents too often follow, in their chastising their children, 'after their own pleasure.' They have often a greater regard to their own passions than their children's advantage, correct oftener in humour than with reason. Having no other law but their own will, their judgment is apt to be deceived, whereby it happens that their corrections often injure their children instead of advantaging them, whatsoever their intention may be, and that either by mistake of the nature of things for which they chastise them, or the indiscreet measure and manner of their chastening.

(1.) Mistaking the nature of the things for which they chastise their children. Fathers endeavour to form their children to that which they judge best and most profitable for them in this life; but their judgments are often mistaken, as a covetous parent, that acknowledges no other happiness than wealth, will instill such instructions into his child to think nothing unjust that is profitable and enriching; an ambitious man will endeavour to imprint the sentiments of worldly honour upon his children; a superstitious parent will correct his child for not conforming himself to that mode of worship he is himself addicted to. Thus parents often use their power to extinguish good principles in their children, and discourage beginnings of virtue in them.

(2.) Mistaking the measure. How often are good parents transported with choler in the corrections they inflict? Others, through a fond indulgence, altogether neglect it, and give the reins to the follies of their children. But the chastisements God inflicts are otherwise; he hath a perfect knowledge of all things, is subject to no passion, never afflicts but when there is need, never chastiseth his own but for their good. God, being infinitely wise, cannot err in his judgment of what is convenient for us; he is not biassed by weak affections. David acknowledged this wisdom of God: Ps. cxix. 71, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.' He is wise, and foresees an evil we are apt to run into, and prevents it by

affliction; sends Paul a thorn in the flesh, not so much to correct a present default as to prevent it, 2 Cor. xii. 7, that he might not be lifted up above measure. Sometimes he afflicts to make their graces apparent. God afflicted Job in his goods, in his person, that the truth of his faith and patience might be seen in the midst of his sufferings, to the praise of God. He sends not temptations unless there be need, and that the trial of faith may be found to praise and honour, 1 Peter i. 6, 7. Other parents use their arbitrariness often, and not their wisdom. God's afflictions are sovereign acts, but not separated from wise and gracious intentions. But the apostle explains the particular profit which God aims at, 'That we might be partakers of his holiness;' to refine their dross, and purify them for himself, and render them fit for the place wherein dwells nothing that is unclean. Earthly parents correct their children that they may learn useful arts and manners in the world: an external profit chiefly they aim at; sometimes they correct that their vices may be imitated; God, that his holiness may be communicated here, and blessedness hereafter. This seems to be an exposition of what he meant by *live* in the former verse. This preserves us, and renders us partakers not only of holiness, but of *his* holiness; the holiness which he approves, which he commands, and hath some resemblance and conformity to his own. In the same sense we are said to be partakers of the divine nature, 2 Peter i. 4, whereby we have a portraiture of the nature and holiness of God drawn in our souls by the Spirit. It is not that we may possess the holiness of God, but partake of the holiness of God. The lineaments of his image, formed in us by the gospel and by afflictions, are as the beams and sparks of his holiness. The original is in God, the picture of it in the believer; as light is in the sun, but some splendour of it in the glass upon which it shines. This God works by afflictions, whereby he makes us exercise ourselves more in repentance; weans us from the flesh, that would alienate us from God; cleave faster to Christ by faith, who is the spring of holiness; more earnestly thirst to draw of the fountain, and pursue those things that are heavenly. Parents correct their children to bring them to an imitation of their manners; God corrects his to bring them to an imitation of his holiness. They chastise to make their children like them; and God, to make his children conform to him.

(1.) Then afflictions are not always punishments; they are not inflicted for satisfaction for sin. God aims at our profit. A judge regards not the profit of a criminal when he condemns him to punishment, but only the honour of the law; and to repair the offence done to the law by the violation of it, and satisfy that justice which hath been violated. But God aims at the advantage of the believing sufferers, and makes them smart to make them gracious and glorious, to impart to them the highest excellency a creature is capable of.

(2.) A great argument there is from hence to love God even for afflictions. 'In all things give thanks,' saith the apostle. In these there is great reason to give thanks, in regard of their fruit. An earthly father transmits his inheritance to his son, but not his internal endowments; but God communicates his holiness to his children by these means.

(3.) How patiently should we bear them! The majesty of God above earthly parents, and his gracious aim and wise conduct of them, doth oblige us to this duty. He never strikes but with reason, never strikes his children but for their good. Happy blows should be received without murmuring. It is a welcome weapon that hath more of balsam than smart, a blessed sword that breaks the imposthume. That which is not only profitable, but necessary, calls not only for our patience, but our willing embracing when God doth wisely inflict it; besides, they are short, they are of no longer duration than

this life. There might be reason to complain much if it were an eternal smart, but it is only for a little time.

(4.) We should endeavour to answer the intention of God. To form ourselves to that holiness he aims at, to embrace every motion of the Spirit in our afflictions. To that purpose the rod hath a voice, the Spirit hath a voice; both must be listened to.

And because it is a hard matter to be without complaints, the apostle still ureth it further, and prevents the ground of complaint, which is the sharpness of a rod, and sets the smart and fruit in opposition one to another: ver. 11, 'Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.' It is confessed they are grievous, but it is in appearance only. They seem so; but as a beautiful face under a frightful mask, as a bitter potion, that gripes, but purgeth. This is an argument taken from the fruit of correction, and amplified by concession of the objection; I confess suffering is grievous, but wholesome. The end and issue of it is to be considered. A rational creature in all things should mind the end as well as the means. The end makes a vast difference between things. Because the trouble and grief which is in every chastisement makes our flesh to apprehend it is an evil, the apostle distinguisheth between what is troublesome and what is desirable, between the pain and the fruit; and draws an argument of patience from the effect.

[1.] All afflictions are grievous to the flesh. God doth not expect we should be Stoics, to be without sense or grief. Christ himself hath set us a pattern of it; he shed tears for the death of his friend Lazarus, and shed drops of blood at the approaching of his sufferings: 'his soul was sorrowful, even to the death;' he was 'tempted in all things like to us, yet without sin.' It is no sin to grieve under, to complain of suffering, without murmuring. If we have not a sense of the grief, we can never be capable of the profit of affliction. Without some grief, affliction would leave us worse than it finds us. As we ought to hear God when he speaks, so we ought to fear God when he strikes. At first the trouble of a chastisement doth wholly possess our spirits, it makes us mistake the end of it, we cannot sometimes in our pressures imagine that a root so bitter should bear a joyful fruit; as the griping physic afflicts the patient so much sometimes, that he scarce thinks of the good which will issue from it. David often is full of complaints while he is under an affliction, and seems often to have no sense of anything but the present trouble, but afterwards he hath no sentiments but of the gracious fruit: 'In faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted.' 'Thy rod doth comfort me.' After experience manifests a truth which the present grief will not often give us leave to consider.

[2.] Though afflictions be grievous, the fruit is gracious to a believer. Experience corrects the false judgment we have while we are under a stroke. Indeed, afflictions of themselves are rather a means to cool our affections to holiness, to extinguish in our minds the sparks of godliness, and make us despond and distrust the grace of God; but God in his sovereign wisdom doth so dispose and manage them, that he makes them end in a happy fruit. By the grace of God they break off those inclinations we have to the world, quicken our prayers, awaken us out of our lethargies, put us upon a review of ourselves. The strings of an instrument yield a different sound when they are stretched, from what they did when they were slack. It is a fruit of righteousness, holiness, and sanctification, which he had spoken of in the former verse; also righteousness, which is a peaceable fruit; as when it is said, the 'incorruptible crown of glory,' 1 Peter v. 4. It is as much as to say, the

glory which is a crown incorruptible, so a righteousness which is the spring of peace and serenity of conscience: Isa. xxxiii. 17, 'And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.' It yields the fruit of righteousness, as being a means that brings us nearer to God, in communion with whom that peace doth consist. It brings us to seek in God and Christ the true remedy of all our evils; and by this means, the trouble of our souls is calmed, and an assurance of the grace of God promoted. The joy of the Holy Ghost is often strongest in us when afflictions are sharpest upon us: 1 Thes. i. 6, 'Having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost.' And though it be not always so with a believer, yet after the affliction hath wrought kindly, and done its work, God comes in with comfort and joy; as cheering cordials follow bitter physic. They bring forth the fruits of righteousness, not as the efficient cause, but the means.

1. Let us then make a right judgment of afflictions. Let us not think God intends to destroy when he begins to strike. We are often in the same error the apostles were in when they saw Christ walking upon the waves in the dead of the night, and terrors of a tempest, coming to succour them, they imagined he was a spirit coming to mischief them, Mark vi. 47-49. The flesh makes us think God often to be our enemy when he is our friend. But as Christ cried out to them, 'Fear not, it is I,' so the apostle doth to believers here. Fear not; though the smart be grievous, the fruit is peaceable; if the flesh suffer, it is for the good of the spirit. The issue will declare, that 'all things work together for the good of them that love God,' Rom. viii. 27.

2. Let patience and faith have their perfect work. Affliction makes the beginning sad, patience will make the success glorious. Had the Israelites believed God's promise of deliverance, they had not murmured at the Red Sea. God brought them to the Red Sea to deliver them from the Egyptians, and made all their fears end in joy and triumph. The more we trust God, the more he is concerned in our welfare; the more we trust ourselves, the more he doth to cross us. The committing our way to the Lord renders our minds calm and composed: Prov. xvi. 3, 'Commit thy way to the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.' God hath always 'an eye upon them that fear him,' Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19; not to keep distress and affliction from them, but to quicken them in it, and give them as it were a new life from the dead, new fruit from the rod. God brings us into straits, that we may have more lively experiments of his tenderness and wisdom. We should submit our way to the guidance of God's wisdom, with an obedience to his will and a reliance on his goodness; and then the success will be gracious in this life, and glorious in that which is to come,—a peaceable fruit of righteousness in earth and heaven. Wait upon God, being he is a God of judgment: Isa. xxx. 18, 'For the Lord is a God of judgment; blessed are all those that wait for him.' He goes judicially to work, and can best time the execution of his will. God hath as much wisdom to bring an affliction to a good issue, as he hath love at first to inflict it.