

ness of mind, submission to God, contentation in every condition, might come-in into the soul? My brethren, will you fall upon the studying of this excellent lesson of contentment? You have learned nothing in Christianity till you have learned this: you are no better than abecedarians in religion, if you have not mastered this great piece of practical knowledge. You have heard much, read much, of contentment; but have you learned it, so as to live in the daily practice of it? Pray take-up with nothing short of that.

The design of this sermon hath been to help you herein, to direct you what you are to do in order to contentment. Now will you make use of the directions that have been given? namely, to be considerative, godly, praying persons. These are the best remedies that I could think of against that spiritual choler that doth so much trouble you. Use them, and, I hope, you will find the virtue and efficacy of them to this end. Look to your state and course, that you be godly; when any thing troubles you, retire for consideration and prayer. Hold on in this way, and in time you also will be able to speak these great words as to yourselves, that you "have learned in" every "state to be content."

* * The variations in this excellent sermon, as well as in the succeeding one, between the first and second editions are considerable, but the readings of the second are generally preferable, being manifest improvements.

SERMON XXVII.

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HOW TO BEAR AFFLICTIONS.

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.—Hebrews xii. 5.

THE words are an excellent passage from the Book of the Proverbs; (Prov. iii. 11, 12;) wherein the Supreme Eternal Wisdom is represented giving instruction to the afflicted, how to behave themselves under troubles, so as they may prove beneficial to them. The counsel is, that they should preserve a temperament of spirit between the excess and defect of patience and courage, and neither despising the chastenings of the Lord by a sinful neglect of them, as a small unconcerning matter, nor fainting under them, as a burden so great and oppressing that no deliverance was to be expected. To enforce the exhortation, Wisdom useth the amiable and endearing title, "My son," to signify that God in the quality of a Father afflicts his people; the consideration whereof is very proper to conciliate reverence to his hand, and to encourage their hopes of a blessed issue.

The proposition that ariseth from the words is this: *It is the duty and best wisdom of afflicted Christians to preserve themselves from the vicious extremes of despising the chastenings of the Lord, or fainting under them.*

To illustrate this by a clear method, I shall endeavour to show, I. *What it is to despise the chastenings of the Lord, and the causes of it.* II. *What fainting under his rebukes signifies, and what makes us incident to it.* III. *Prove that it is the duty and best wisdom of the afflicted to avoid these extremes.* IV. *Apply it.*

I. First. To "*despise the chastenings of the Lord,*" *ολιγωρει*, imports the "making no account of them," as unworthy of serious regard, and includes *inconsiderateness of mind, and an insensibleness of heart.*

1. *Inconsiderateness of mind with respect to the Author or end of chastenings.*

(1.) *With respect to the Author.*—When the afflicted looks only downwards, as if the rod of affliction sprang out of the dust, (Job v. 6,) and there were no superior cause that sent it. Thus many apprehend the evils that befall them, either merely as the productions of natural causes, or as casual events, or the effects of the displeasure and injustice of men; but never look on the other side of the veil of the second causes, to that invisible Providence that orders all. If a disease strikes their bodies, they attribute it to the extremity of heat or cold, that distempers their humours; if a loss comes in their estates, it is ascribed to chance, to the carelessness and falseness of some upon whom they depended: but God is concealed from their sight by the nearness of the immediate agent; whereas the principal cause of all temporal evils is the over-ruling providence of God. "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6.) They come not only with his knowledge and will, but by his efficiency. The locusts that infected Egypt were as real an effect of God's wrath as the most miraculous plague, although an east-wind brought them, and a west-wind carried them away. (Exod. x. 13, 19.) The arrow that was shot at a venture, and pierced between the joints of Ahab's armour, was directed by the hand of God for his destruction. (1 Kings xxii. 34.) Shimei's cursing of David, though it was the overflowing of his gall, the effect of his malignity, yet that holy king looked higher, and acknowledged, "The Lord hath bidden him." (2 Sam. xvi. 11.) As the Lord is a God of power, and can inflict what judgments he pleaseth immediately; so he is a God of order, and usually punisheth in this world by subordinate means. Now, wherever he strikes, though his hand is wrapped-up in a cloud, yet if it be not observed, especially if by habitual incogitancy men consider not with whom they have to do in their various troubles, this profane neglect is no less than a despising the chastenings of the Lord.

(2.) *Inconsiderateness of the end of the divine discipline* is a great degree of contempt.—The evils that God inflicts are as real a part of his Providence as the blessings he bestows; as in the course of nature the darkness of the night is by his order, as well as the light of the day: therefore they are always sent for some wise and holy design. Sometimes, though more rarely, they are only for trial, to exercise the faith, humility, patience of eminent saints; for otherwise God would lose in a great measure the honour and renown, and his favourites the reward, of those graces,—afflictions being the sphere of their activity. But for the most part they are castigatory, to bring us to a sight and sense of our state, to render sin more evident and odious to us. They are fitly expressed by "pouring from vessel to vessel;" that discovers the dregs

and sediment, and makes it offensive that before was concealed. The least affliction, even to the godly, is usually an application of the Physician of spirits for some growing distemper; every corrosive is for some proud flesh that must be taken away. In short, they are deliberate dispensations to cause men to reflect upon their works and ways, and break-off their sins by sincere obedience. Therefore we are commanded to hear the voice of "the rod, and who hath appointed it." (Micah vi. 9.) It is a preacher of repentance, to lead us to the knowledge and consideration of ourselves. The distress of Joseph's brethren was to revive their memory of his sorrows caused by their cruelty. Now, when men disregard the embassy of the rod, are unconvincible notwithstanding its lively lessons; when they neither look up to Him that strikes, nor within to the cause that provokes his displeasure; when they are careless to reform their ways, and to comply with his holy will; as if afflictions were only common accidents of this mutable state, the effects of rash fortune or blind fate, without design and judgment, and not sent for their amendment;—this is a prodigious despising of God's hand. For this reason the scripture compares men to the most inobservant creatures, to the "wild ass's colt," (Job xi. 12,) "the deaf adder," (Psalm lviii. 4,) to the "silly dove without heart:" (Hosea vii. 11 :) and the advantage is on the beasts' side; for their inconsideration proceeds merely from the incapacity of matter, of which they are wholly composed, to perform reflex acts; but man's incogitancy is in sole fault of his spirit, that wilfully neglects his duty. The prophet charges this guilt upon the Jews: "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see." (Isai. xxvi. 11.)

2. *Insensibility of heart* is an eminent degree of despising the Lord's chastenings.—A pensive feeling of judgments is very congruous, whether we consider them in *genere physico* or *moralis*, "either materially as afflictive to nature, or as the signs of divine displeasure:" for the affections were planted in the human nature by the hand of God himself, and are duly exercised in proportion to the quality of their objects; and when grace comes, it softens the breast, and gives a quick and tender sense of God's frown. An eminent instance we have in David; though of heroic courage, yet, in his sad ascent to mount Olivet, he went up weeping, with his head covered and his feet bare, to testify his humble and submissive sense of God's anger against him. (2 Sam. xv. 30.) Now when men are insensible of judgments, either considered as natural or penal evils; if, when they suffer the loss of relations or other troubles, they presently fly to the comforts of the Heathens, that we are all mortal, and what cannot be helped must be endured, without the sense humanity requires; that calm is like that of the Dead Sea,—a real curse: or suppose natural affection works a little, yet there is no apprehension and concernment for God's displeasure, (which should be infinitely more affecting than any outward trouble how sharp soever,) no serious deep humiliation under his hand, no yielding up ourselves to his management; this most justly provokes him. Of this temper were those described by Jeremiah: "Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction." (Jer. v. 3.)

Secondly. *The causes of this despising of God's chastenings are,*

1. *A contracted stupidity of soul, proceeding from a course in sin.*—There is a natural stubbornness and contumacy in the heart against God, a vicious quality derived from rebellious Adam. We are all hewn out of the rock, and digged out of the quarry; and this is one of the worst effects of sin, and a great part of its deceitfulness, that by stealth it increaseth the natural hardness; by degrees it creeps on like a gangrene, and causes an indolency. (Heb. iii. 13.) The practice of sin makes the heart like an adamant, the hardest of stones, that exceeds that of rocks. (Zech. vii. 12.) For, hence proceeds such unteachableness of the mind, that when God speaks and strikes, yet sinners will not be convinced; that briars and thorns are only effectual to teach them; and such untractableness in the will, that when the sinner is stormed by affliction, and some light breaks into the understanding, yet it refuseth to obey God's call.

2. *Carnal diversions* are another cause of slighting God's hand.—The pleasures and cares of the world, as they render men inapprehensive of judgments to come, so regardless of those that are present. (Luke xxi. 34.) Some, whenever they feel the smart of a cross, use all the arts of oblivion to lose the sense of it: the affliction, instead of a leading them to repentance, leads them to vain conversations, to comedies, and other sinful delights, to drive away sorrow. Others, although they do not venture upon forbidden things to relieve their melancholy, yet when God, by short and sensible admonitions, calls upon them, they have presently recourse to temporal comforts, which, although lawful and innocent in themselves, yet are as unproper at that time as the taking of a cordial when a vomit begins to work; for whereas chastisements are sent to awaken and affect us by considering our sins in their bitter fruits, this unseasonable application of sensual comforts wholly defeats God's design. For nothing so much hinders serious consideration as a voluptuous indulging [of] the senses in things pleasing; like opiate medicines, they stupify the conscience, and benumb the heart. It is Solomon's expression: "I said of laughter, It is mad;" for as distraction breaks the connexion of the thoughts, so mirth shuffles our most serious thoughts into disorder, and causes men to pass over their troubles without reflection and remorse. And as the pleasures, so *the business of the world* causes a supine security under judgments. We have an amazing instance of it in Hiel the Bethelite, who laid the foundation of his city in the death of his first-born, and set-up the gates of it in his youngest son; (1 Kings xvi. 34;) yet he was so intent upon his building, that he disregarded the Divine *Nemesis* ["Justice or Vengeance"] that was apparent, fulfilling the terrible threatening prophesied against the builder of Jericho. (Joshua vi. 26.)

3. *An obstinate fierceness of spirit, a diabolical fortitude*, is the cause that sometimes men despise afflicting providences so far as to resist them.—There is a *passive* malignity in all, an unaptness to be wrought on and to receive spiritual and heavenly impressions from God's hand; but in some of the sons of perdition there is an *active* malignity, whereby they furiously repel judgments, as if they could oppose the Almighty. Their hearts are of an anvil-temper, made harder by afflic-

tions, and reverberate the blow; like that Roman emperor, who, instead of humbling and reforming at God's voice in thunder, thundered back again. All judgments that befall them are as strokes given to wild beasts, that, instead of taming them, enrage them to higher degrees of fierceness. The prophet described some of this rank of sinners, who said "in the pride and stoutness of their hearts, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars;" (Isai. ix. 9, 10:) and thus many, though not explicitly, yet virtually, declare a resolution, notwithstanding the most visible discouragements from heaven, to proceed in their sinful courses with more greediness, and from a sullen, secret atheism are more strongly carried to gratify their lusts again when they are in afflictions.

II. I shall proceed to consider the other extreme, of *fainting under God's rebukes*.

First. 1. The original word, *εκλυου*, signifies "the slackening and relaxing of things that were firmly joined together."—The strength of the body proceeds from the union of the parts, when they are well compacted together; by their disjoining it is enfeebled, and rendered unfit for labour. In this notion, the apostle, in verse 12, exhorts them to "lift up the hands that hang down, and" strengthen "the feeble knees;" that is, to encourage and strengthen their souls by a real belief of the promises made to afflicted Christians.

2. It may respect the *sinking and falling away of the soul like water*, being hopeless of overcoming troubles.—When water is frozen into hard ice, it will bear a great burden; but when it is dissolved and melted, nothing is weaker: so the spirit of a man, confirmed by religious principles, is able to sustain all his infirmities. (Prov. xviii. 14.) *Si fractus illabatur orbis*; * if the weight of the heaviest afflictions fall upon him, yet his mind remains erect and unbroken, and bears them all with courage and constancy. But if, through impatience under tribulation and diffidence in the divine promises, we shrink from our duty, or reject the comforts of God, as if they were small and not proportionable to the evils that oppress us; this is to faint when we are rebuked by him.

Secondly. *The causes of this despondency are usually,*

1. Either *the kind* of the affliction.—When there is a singularity in the case, it increaseth the apprehension of God's displeasure, because it may signify an extraordinary guilt and singular unworthiness in the person that suffers; and upon that account the sorrow swells so high as to overwhelm him.

2. *The number and degrees* of afflictions.—When, like those black clouds which in winter days join together, and quite intercept the beams of the sun, many troubles meet at once, and deprive us of all present comfort. Job lost his children by a sudden, unnatural death; and was tormented in all the parts of his body, and reduced from his rich abundance to the dunghill, and a potsherd to scrape his boils. Indeed, his heroic spirit was supported under those numerous and grievous troubles; but such a weight were enough to sink the most.

3. *The continuance* of afflictions.—When the clouds return after rain,

* HORATI *Carm.* lib. iii. od. iii. 7. "Beneath the crush of worlds, undaunted he appears."—FRANCIS'S Translation.

and the life is a constant scene of sorrows, we are apt to be utterly dejected, and hopeless of good. The Psalmist tells us, "All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning;" (Psalm lxxiii. 14;) and from thence was strongly tempted to despair.

4. *The comparing their great sufferings with the prosperity of those who are extremely vicious*, inclines some to despair.—For not only their present evils are heightened and more sensibly felt by the comparison, but the prosperous impiety of others tempts them to think there is no just and powerful providence that distributes things below; and, looking no higher than to second causes that are obvious to sense, they judge their state past recovery.

III. The next thing is *to prove that it is the duty and wisdom of the afflicted not to despise the chastenings of the Lord, nor to faint under them.*

1. It is their *duty* carefully to avoid those extremes, *because they are very dishonourable to God.*

(1.) *The contempt of chastisements is a high profanation of God's honour*, who is our Father and Sovereign, and in that quality afflicts us.—It is our apostle's argument: "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?" (Heb. xii. 9.) It is a principle deeply planted in the human nature, which the most barbarous nations have kept inviolable, to express humble respects to our parents, from whom we derive our life, and by whose tender care we have been preserved and educated, although their discipline be rigorous; but it is infinitely more just and reasonable, that we should reverently submit to "the Father of spirits," who hath the highest right in us. As much as the immortal spirit excels the infirm, corruptible flesh, proportionably should our reverence to God, when he most sharply rebukes us, exceed our respects to our earthly fathers, when they correct us. The manner of the apostle's expression is very significant: "Shall we not much rather?" If there be any vital spark of conscience remaining in our breasts, if reason be not wholly declined to brutishness, we cannot do otherwise.

(2.) *Fainting under chastenings reflects dishonourably upon God.*—It is true in some respects, those who are extremely dejected are not so guilty as the despisers: for usually they acknowledge the order and justice of his providence. But that false conception of the Father of mercies, either that he "willingly afflicts the children of men," or that he hates them, because he afflicts them here, is so contrary to his holy nature, and injurious to his goodness, the special character of his nature, (1 John iv. 9,) that it is an equal provocation with the slighting his sovereignty.

2. *It is the best wisdom not to despise God's chastenings, nor faint under them.*—I will not insist upon the consideration, that it is the counsel of the Supreme Wisdom to us, nor that it is the avoiding [of] the vicious extremes, which is the chiefest point of moral prudence; but it is the only way to prevent the greatest mischiefs that will otherwise befall us. It is said, "He that is wise is profitable to himself;" (Job xxii. 2;) that is, either in obtaining good, or preventing

evils. Now it will appear how pernicious those extremes are, by considering,

(1.) *The contempt of chastenings deprives us of all those benefits which were intended by them.*—God's end in them is to embitter sin to our taste, and make us disrelish that deadly poison; for as, according to the rules of physic, contraries are cured by contraries, so sin, that prevails by pleasure, by something delightful to the carnal part, is mortified by what is afflictive to sense. Repentance is a duty that best complies with affliction; for when the spirit is made sad, and brought to the sobriety of consideration, it will more readily reflect upon the true causes of troubles: when the springs overflow, it is but directing the stream into a right channel, the changing the object of our grief, namely, mourning for sin, instead of sorrowing for outward trouble; and we are in the way to happiness. Sensible sorrow leads to godly sorrow: the natural is first, then the spiritual. Now the despisers of God's hand, that are unaffected with judgments, are incapable of this benefit; for if they do not feel the blow, how shall they take notice of the hand that strikes? If they are not softened with sorrows, how shall they receive the divine impression? If they have no sense of his displeasure, how shall they fear to offend him for the future? If the medicine doth not work, how can it expel noxious humours?

(2.) *The neglect of chastenings doth not only render them unprofitable, but exposes to greater evils.*

(i.) *It provokes God to withdraw his judgments for a time.*—This the sinner desired, and thinks himself happy that he is at ease. Miserable delusion! This respite is the presage of his final ruin. It was the desperate state of Judah, as God expresses it: "Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more:" (Isai. i. 5:) the words of an anxious father that has tried all methods, counsel, kindness, corrections, to reclaim a rebellious, obstinate son; and, finding no answerable effect, gives him over, to follow the pernicious swing of his corrupt desires. No severity is like the suffering him in his licentious courses. Thus when God hath used many gracious ways to reduce the sinner by his word, Spirit, and judgments, but he is inflexible to the calls of the word, impenetrable to the motions of the Spirit, and insensible of afflicting providences; when, after a combat with the rod, sin comes off unwounded, and the rod retires; this calm is more dreadful than the fiercest storm; nothing can be more fatal to the sinner; for by this divine desertion he is given over to a reprobate mind and vile affections, he goes on undisturbed in his sins, and every day increaseth his enmity against God, and provokes God's enmity against him. It is not conceivable that one who is not made pliable to the grace of God by afflictions, should submit when he is in pleasant circumstances, and disposed to enjoy sensual satisfactions. If the whip and spur cannot break and tame the unruly beast, certainly the rich pasture will never make him manageable: so that God's ceasing to punish the sinner at present is so far from being a favour, that it is the effect of his deepest displeasure; for it contributes to his hardening. It was the case of Pharaoh: when any of the plagues were removed, indulgence occasioned his induration. As water, taken from the fire,

freezes sooner and harder, because the thinner parts are evaporated by the former heat; so when men are taken off from the fire of affliction, they are more confirmed in their vicious courses than if they had never been afflicted.

(ii.) *The slighting of lighter strokes provokes God sometimes to bring more dreadful judgments in this life upon sinners.*—No man can endure that his love or anger should be despised. Nebuchadnezzar commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter for those who contemned his threatenings. God tells the Israelites, “If ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times more for your sins.” (Lev. xxvi. 23, 24.) He will change the rods into scorpions, and will scourge them for their continued rebellions. It is the intent of that expostulation: “Shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all?” (Amos iii. 5.) Shall God remove his judgments while sinners are careless and unreformed, as if they might be final conquerors over them? No; he will multiply and greaten them. It may be, at first God blasts part of the estate, and the sinner is not apprehensive of his hand; then he comes nearer, and snatches away a dear relation; if still the sinner is unaffected, he strikes his body with a lingering or acute disease; if still he be not concerned for God’s displeasure, he wounds his spirit, makes him sink in sense and conscience at the same time, fills him with terror by the reflection upon his wicked ways and the foresight of that dreadful tribunal before which he must appear; so that, although he cannot live, he dare not die; though his earthly tabernacle be ready to fall upon him, he is afraid to go out and meet the Supreme Judge: and if this doth not work a sincere, thorough change, God casts him into hell to the company of the giants,—those bold rebels that fought against God. Briefly: as under the law an incorrigible son that neglected his father’s reproofs was to die without mercy, so an unreformed sinner, who kicks against the pricks, and refuses to submit to God’s corrections, shall be cut off in his obstinacy: (Prov. xxi. 16:)* justice will proceed to excision and acts of vengeance against him.

(3.) *Fainting under chastenings is pernicious to sufferers.*—For it renders them utterly indisposed for the performance of duty, and incapable of receiving the comforts proper for an afflicted state.

(i.) *It renders them utterly indisposed for the performance of duty.*—Hope draws forth all the active powers of the soul; it is the great motive to diligence, and instrument of duty: despair—like extremity of cold, that checks the spring, and binds up the earth, that its fruits cannot appear—hinders the free exercise of reason and grace, and cuts the sinews of obedience. He that is hopeless of a good issue out of troubles, will neither repent nor pray nor reform, but indulges barren tears instead of real duties. Besides, it often falls out, that the same affliction is sent from God’s displeasure upon his people for their sins, and is the effect of the rage of men against them upon the account of their professing his name. Such is the wisdom and goodness of God, that by the same fiery trial he may refine his servants from their dross and impurities, and render the glory of the gospel more conspicuous. The hatred of religion

* Vide MR. MEDE in loc.

and a blind fury may transport men to acts of cruelty against the saints ; but it is by the permission of the universal Sovereign, who hath the hearts of all in his hands, and suffers their rage for holy ends. The enemy designs against their faith ; but God's aim is to make them change their lives. Now if, either through strong fears or the stinging sense of troubles upon the account of religion, our courage fails, we are presently in danger of falling away and denying our Master. The faint-hearted person is usually false-hearted ; and, for want of resolution, being frightened out of his conscience and duty, chooses sin rather than suffering, and thereby justly deprives himself of the crown of life, that is promised only to those who are faithful unto the death. Besides, not only the loss of heaven, but the torments of hell, are threatened against those who withdraw from the service of God to avoid temporal evils. "The fearful and unbelieving" are in the front of those that "shall have part in the lake of fire and brimstone ; which is the second death." (Rev. xxi. 8.) Now what folly is it, when two evils are propounded, to choose the greatest ; that is, eternal death, rather than temporal ! and of two goods, to prefer the less ; a short life with its conveniences on earth, before that which is eternally glorious in heaven ! By which it appears, how much it concerns us to fortify and fix our minds, by a steadfast belief of God's supporting presence with us in all troubles, and of his gracious promise, that "in due time we shall reap, if we faint not in well-doing."

(ii.) *They are incapable of the comforts proper to an afflicted state.*—Those arise *from* the apprehension that God loves whom he chastens ; (Rev. iii. 19 ;) for the least sin is a greater evil than the greatest trouble, and his design is to take that away ; and *from* the expectation of a happy issue. Hope is the anchor within the veil, that, in the midst of storms and the roughest seas, preserves from shipwreck. The character of Christians is, that they are "rejoicing in hope:" (Rom. xii. 12 :) but when the afflicted are under fearful impressions that God is an irreconcilable enemy, and sadly conclude their miseries are past redress, those divine comforts, that are able to sweeten the most bitter sufferings to believers, are of no efficacy ; their deep sorrows are not like the pains of a travailing woman, that end in a joyful birth, but the killing tortures of the stone, that are fruitless to the patient. An obstinate grief, and rejecting the consolations of God, is "the beginning of sorrows," the first payment of that sad arrear of mourning that shall be exacted in another world.

USE.

The use shall be to excite us to those duties that are directly contrary to the extremes forbidden ; namely, *to demean ourselves under the chastenings of the Lord with a deep reverence and humble fear of his displeasure, and with a firm hope and dependence upon him for a blessed issue upon our complying with his holy will.*

USE 1. *With a humble reverence of his hand.*—This temper is absolutely necessary and most congruous with respect to God, upon the account of his sovereignty, justice, and goodness, declared in his chastenings ; and with respect to our frailty, our dependence upon him, our obnoxiousness to his law, and our obligations to him, that he will please to afflict us for our good. This is the reason of that expostulation :

“Will the lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey?” (Amos iii. 4.) Shall God’s threatenings and judgments have no effect? “Who ever hardened himself against him, and prospered?” “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?” the most sensible and severe attribute, when it is incensed: “Are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor. x. 22.) Can we encounter offended Omnipotency? Can we with an army of lusts oppose myriads of mighty angels? It is not courage, but such a prodigious degree of folly and fury, that one would think it were impossible a reasonable creature were capable of it. Yet every sinner unreformed by afflictions is thus desperate: “He stretcheth out his hand against God, and strengtheneth himself against the Almighty. He runneth upon him, even on his neck, upon the thick bosses of his bucklers.” (Job xv. 25, 26.) Such a furious rebel was Ahaz, who “in the time of his distress did trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz.” (2 Chron. xxviii. 22.) But God hath most solemnly declared, that he will be victorious at last over the most fierce, obdurate enemies: “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me.” His power is infinite; and anger puts an edge upon his power, and makes it more terrible. If our subjection be not voluntary, it must be violent: it is our wisdom to prevent acts of vengeance by humble submissions. The duty of the afflicted is excellently expressed by Elihu: “Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.” (Job xxxiv. 31, 32.) Add further: upon another account reverence is due to God’s chastenings; for when love is the motive that incites one to give us counsel, though it be mixed with reproofs, and his prudence is not great, yet a respect is due to the affection. Now God, who is only wise, chastises men from a desire to make them better and happy; he intends primarily to refine, not to consume, them by afflictions; so that a serious regard to his hand is the most just and necessary duty of the creature. Briefly: every chastisement should leave deep and permanent impressions upon us; the sense of God’s displeasure should make our hearts mournful and mollified, broken and contrite, that his will may be done by us on earth as it is in heaven.

USE 11. *Let us always preserve a humble dependence and firm hope on God for a blessed issue out of all our troubles.*—The support and tranquillity of the soul ariseth from hence. Christian patience “suffers all things,” as well as charity, being encouraged by a continual expectation of good from Him. Patience confirms all other graces, and is to the whole armour of God what the temper is to material weapons, that keeps them from breaking in the combat. Now to maintain a constant hope in affliction, it is necessary to consider the reason of the exhortation, as it is admirably amplified by the apostle.

1. *The relation God sustains when he afflicts believers.*—He is a Judge invested with the quality of a Father. The covenant of grace between God and Jesus Christ, our true David, contains this observable clause: “If thy children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.” (Psalm lxxxix. 30—32.) The love that ariseth from this relation, though

it cannot hate, yet it may be displeased, and chastise them for their follies. Moses tells the Israelites, "Thou shalt consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." (Deut. viii. 5.) In children reason is not fully discluded; they are not capable to govern themselves, and are only taught with sensible pleasure or pain; so that a father is obliged to join correction with instruction to form them to virtue. This is so far from being inconsistent with paternal affection, that it is inseparable from it. For a parent to suffer a child to go on pleasantly in sin without due punishment, is pure cruelty, disguised under the mask of pity; for by the neglect of discipline he is confirmed in his vicious courses, and exposed to ruin. The apostle therefore adds, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." As from the severest wrath he sometimes forbearth to strike, so from dearest love he afflicts. Humble believers, through a cloud of tears, may see the light of God's countenance; for, having elected them by special love to a glorious inheritance above, he dispenseth all things here in order to the preparing them for it, and all temporal evils as means are transformed into the nature of the end to which they are subservient; so that the sharpest sufferings are really from God's favour, since they are beneficial for our obtaining real happiness. The devil usually tempts men in a paradise of delights, to precipitate them into hell; God tries them in the furnace of afflictions, to purify and prepare them for heaven.

2. *It is a strong cordial against fainting to consider, that, by virtue of the paternal relation, "He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."*—For no troubles are more afflictive and stinging, than those that are unexpected. Now when we are assured that there is no son whom the heavenly Father doth not chasten, we are less surprised and less troubled when we meet with crosses. Indeed there is hardly any kind of affliction that may befall us, but we have some instance in scripture of the saints suffering the same. Are we poor and mean in the world? We should consider that poverty with holiness is a divine complexion; Jesus Christ, the holy and beloved Son of God, had not where to lay his head. Are we under bodily distempers? Good Hezekiah was struck with an uncomfortable disease as to the quality of it; and Gaius had a flourishing soul in a languishing body. Are our dear relations taken away? Aaron and David lost some of their sons by terrible strokes. Are our spirits wounded with the sense of God's displeasure? Job and Heman were under strong terrors, yet the favourites of heaven. Briefly: how many, most dear to God, were called forth to extreme and bloody trials for the defence of the truth! How many deaths did they endure in one torment! how many torments in one death! Yet they were so far from fainting, that the more their pains were exasperated, the more their courage and joy were shining and conspicuous; as the face of the heavens is never more serene and clear, than when the sharpest north-wind blows. It is the apostle's inference: "Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race that is set before us." This is further enforced by the following words: "If ye be without chastening, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." (Heb. xii. 1, 8.) If God doth not vouchsafe us the mercy of his rod, it is evident we are not part of his fatherly care. The bramble is neglected, while the vine is cut till

it bleeds. It is a miserable privilege to be exempted from divine discipline, and by ease and prosperity to be corrupted and made fit for destruction. St. Austin * represents one expostulating with God: *O Deus, ista est justitia tua, ut mali floreant, et boni laborent?* "O God, is it righteous with thee that the wicked should prosper, and the good suffer?" *Dicis Deo, Ista est justitia tua? et Deus tibi, Ista est fides tua? Hæc enim tibi promisi, ad hoc Christianus factus es, ut in seculo isto flores, et in inferno postea torquereris?* "God replies to him, Is this your faith? Did I promise you temporal prosperity? Were you a Christian for this, that you might flourish in this world, and be miserably tormented in hell?"

3. *The apostle represents the special prerogative of God as "the Father of spirits."* (Verse 9.)—And so [He] hath a nearer claim to us "than the fathers of our flesh;" and that He is not liable to those imperfections that attend the earthly relations. "They for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure:" human love is a troubled, irregular passion, mixed with ignorance, and prone to error in the excess or defect. Sometimes parents are indulgent, and by a cruel compassion spare their children when they are faulty; sometimes they correct without cause; sometimes, when the reason is just, yet they err in the manner or measure of the correction, so that their children are discouraged. But in God there is a perfect union of wisdom and love, of discretion and tenderness; his affection is without the least imperfection, his will is always guided by infinite wisdom. If his children offend, he will chastise them "with the rod of men," (2 Sam. vii. 14,) that is, moderately; for as in scripture things are magnified by the epithet "divine," or "of God," so they are lessened by the epithet "human." Accordingly the apostle declares to the Corinthians, that no temptation had befallen them, but what was "common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. x. 13.) As a prudent physician consults the strength of the patient as well as the quality of the disease, and proportions his medicine; so all the bitter ingredients, their mixture and measure, are dispensed by the wise prescription of God, according to the degrees of strength that are in his people.

4. *The apostle specifies the immediate end of God in his chastenings:* "But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." (Verse 10.)—This is the supreme excellency of the divine nature; and our conformity to it is so valuable, that it renders afflictions not only tolerable, but so far desirable as they contribute to it. In the present state our graces are imperfect, and our conformity to the divine purity is like the resemblance of the sun in a watery cloud,—very much beneath the perfection and radiation of that great light. Now, God is pleased to fashion us according to his image by afflictions, as a statue is cut by the artificer, to bring it into a beautiful form. He is pleased to bring us into divers temptations, to try our faith, to work in us patience, to inflame our prayers, to mortify our carnal desires, to break those voluntary bands whereby we are fettered to the earth, that we may

* In Psalm xxxv.

live with those afflictions wherewith others die. And certainly, if we make a true judgment of things, we have not the least cause to suspect the love of God, when he chastises us to take away sin, the only abominable object of his hatred and deep detestation, and to render us partakers of the divine nature; and the present "peaceable fruit of righteousness" is the product in those who are duly exercised by their troubles. It is an allusion to the reward of the conquerors in the Olympic games, who had a crown of olives, the emblem and shadow of peace; but true peace, a divine calm in the conscience, shall be the recompence of all that exercise the graces suitable to an afflicted state. In short, the apostle assures believers, that they are chastened of the Lord, to prevent their condemnation with the world. (1 Cor. xi. 32.) It is this rod that truly delivers them from hell; it is this consideration that changes thorns into roses, and extracts honey out of wormwood. If the way be stony or flowery that leads to blessedness, a Christian should willingly walk in it. To conclude: from the consideration of what the scripture declares concerning temporal evils, let us "lift-up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for our feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed;" that is, in our affliction let us take courage and resolution from the promises, and live in a holy conformity to God's will, that the weak or faint may be restored.

The first and last lesson of pagan philosophy was to support men under the storms to which they are liable in this open state; to render the soul *velut pelagi rupes immota*, "as a rock unshaken by the waves:" but all their directions were unsuccessful, and so could not secure them from impatience or despair. But the gospel, that assures us of the love of God in sending afflictions for our spiritual and eternal good, is alone able to compose the mind; and whenever we faint in troubles, it is either from infidelity or inconsideration. It is impossible a person should be a Christian, and be incapable of comfort in the most afflicted state; for we are really so by the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter. When we speak sometimes to those we judge infirm, we speak to infidels, who only receive remedy from time, which they ought to receive from faith. They have the name of God only in their mouths, but the world is in their hearts; their passions are strong and obstinate, not subject to sanctified reason. The difficulty they have of being comforted, discovers the necessity of their being afflicted; they need conversion more than consolation. Others, who are sincere in the faith, yet are apt to faint under troubles, from an error like that of the apostles: when their Lord came upon the waters in a stormy, tempestuous night to their assistance, they thought he was a spirit; so *they* look on God as an enemy, when he comes to sanctify and save them. The sovereign remedy of our sorrows is, to correct the judgment of sense by a serious belief of God's promise: thus we shall reconcile the roughness of his hand with the sweetness of his voice. He calls to us from heaven in the darkest night, "It is I; be not afraid:" he corrects us with the heart and hand of a father. A due consideration of these things will produce a glorified joy in the midst of our sufferings: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Rom. xv. 4.)