

## SERMON UPON JOB X. 2.

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*I will say unto God, Do not condemn me ; show me wherefore thou contendest with me.*—JOB X. 2.

THESE words are spoken by Job in the bitterness of his soul, and as one weary of his many and heavy troubles. In them take notice—

1. Of a resolution of addressing himself to God, and bringing his complaint before him, 'I will say unto God,' &c.

2. The matter of his address ; it is double—

[1.] A deprecation of condemnation, 'Do not condemn me.'

[2.] An inquiry after the reasons of his afflictions, 'Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.'

Let me first explain the letter of the words, and then come to the sense.

1. The deprecation 'Do not condemn me.' Do not make me or count me wicked. So Heb. his conscience did testify of his uprightness, and therefore he desireth God would not deal with him as wicked. It is explained ver. 7, 'Thou knowest I am not wicked.' Condemnation is the sentence of a judge. Now in a judge three things are considerable—(1.) His opinion ; (2.) His sentence ; (3.) His execution. With respect to all three the word is used.

[1.] The opinion of a judge deeming or counting one wicked ; as to justify is to count one righteous : Rom. viii. 33, 34, 'It is God that justifies ; who is he that condemns ?' So to condemn is to count one wicked. This respects the inward mind, and what appeareth on evidence. So it is said, Prov. xvii. 15, 'He that justifieth the wicked, and condemneth the just, they are both an abomination unto the Lord.' It is not meant of judicial absolution and condemnation, but in private opinion.

[2.] The sentence passed or pronounced on the tribunal. So to condemn is to declare one unrighteous or punishable : Dent. xxv. 1, 'If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them, then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked ;' that is, pass sentence upon them, pronounce them wicked. Otherwise to declare our opinion is not always lawful. We may *pejus timere*, fear the worst, for our caution ; but not *simpliciter definire*, absolutely determine, till called to the judgment.

[3.] The execution. When they are dealt with as wicked : 1 Kings viii. 32, 'Then hear thou in heaven, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his own head ; and justifying

the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness.' Like expressions there are often : as Ps. cix. 7, 'When he shall be judged, let him be condemned;' Heb. 'go out wicked, or guilty.' So Ps. cxxxv. 5, 'They shall be led forth with the workers of iniquity;' that is, as malefactors to execution. Now all these senses are intended, opinion, sentence, stroke; chiefly the last. Do not deal with me as a wicked person, or afflict me as an evil-doer. He desires God to deal more tenderly with him, not as a judge, but a father: Jer. x. 24, 'O Lord, correct me, but in judgment; not in anger, lest thou bring me to nothing.'

2. His inquiry after the cause of his afflictions, 'Show me wherefore thou contendest with me.' The word 'contendest' is emphatical. It notes God's contending with man as an adversary in a suit or cause. Before he considered God as a judge; now as an advocate pleading, not for, but against him. For providence is a kind of arguing and pleading, not by words, but deeds; and therefore called his controversy; as Hosea iv. 1, 'The Lord hath a controversy with the land;' and Micah vi. 2, 'The Lord hath a controversy with his people, and will plead with Israel.' This controversy is pleaded with sharp afflictions whereby God appeareth against them as their opposite party. Now Job desireth to know the reason and cause, he having feared God and eschewed evil. And yet God suffered all this misery to come upon him, as if he were condemned and executed without trial.

[1.] The sense. Before I tell you that, let me note to you that there is a mixed nature in a child of God, but a prevalency of the better part. Accordingly this scripture must be explained. There is some weakness bewrayed in these words, but more grace.

(1.) It was weakness that he mistook the present dispensation, thinking that God condemned him when he did but try him. He may sharply chastise those whom he loveth and justifieth, yet not condemn them as wicked; rather the contrary: 1 Cor. xi. 32, 'When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.'

(2.) It was weakness, in that he thought there was no sufficient cause that God should condemn him; whereas the common pollution wherein we are involved doth sufficiently justify the severest trials he can bring upon us. He hath cause enough to condemn his best servants, and those that are not wicked; yet because they are sinners, ought to look upon themselves, in strict justice, as deserving the greatest punishments: Ps. cxxx. 3, 'If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who should stand?' Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.'

(3.) Clearly he was under some perturbation and passion; for he considered God not only as a judge, but as a litigant party with whom he might expostulate about his quarrel and controversy: 'Show me wherefore thou contendest with me;' whereas an absolute submission is necessary. Partly because of his sovereignty: Job ix. 12, 'He giveth no account of his matters.' Partly because of his exact justice. God's judgments are sometimes secret, but always just: Ps. cxvii. 2, 'Clouds and darkness are round about him.' There are reasons which we see not.

(4.) Here is some taxing of his providence, as if his dealing were

unjust, and God did oppress him with his great power. For so it followeth, ver. 3, 'Is it good for thee that thou shouldst oppress, and despise the work of thine hands?'

(5.) In all such cases there is an over-valuing of our worldly comforts and conveniences, and we look more to the loss and want of these things than the use and benefit we should get by the affliction; whereas a christian should more regard the fruit of adversity than the trouble of it: Heb. xii. 11, 'No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby.' And if God awaken him to more seriousness in religion, by his smart, loss, and want, his pleasure is more than the pain, and the gain than the want and loss.

[2.] There is something good and gracious in it.

(1.) That he bringeth his complaint to God. He doth not complain of God, but to God. To murmur in our own bosoms, or to vent our discontent to others, is in effect to slander God behind his back. Therefore his resolution to go to God is commendable: 'I will say unto God,' saith Job. This is to bring our complaint before his face.

(2.) It is good that it was grievous to him to be in the state of a condemned man. Not only to be counted a sinner, but as wicked, or one that was not sincere and approved of God, because his judgments seemed to put him in that number. To be accepted with the Lord, and approved of the Lord, is a christian's all.

(3.) That he desireth to know the cause, end, and use of his afflictions. This is good and holy if it be done—

(1st.) Not to satisfy curiosity, but conscience; for sometimes we may be in the dark about the reasons of God's dealings with us; as 2 Sam. xxi. 1, 'David inquired of the Lord,' concerning the famine, that he might know his duty.

(2d.) By way of humble supplication, not by way of expostulation, as if we were innocent, and hardly dealt withal.

*Doct.* 1. That open and free dealing with God in our bitterness and troubles is better than to smother and stifle our griefs, or vent them in discontent to others.

So Job saith here, 'I will say unto God,' &c. Thus David telleth us that he practised this open and free dealing with success: Ps. cxix. 26, 'I declared my ways, and thou heardest me;' that is, he opened his whole case to God, conflicts, distresses, hopes, supports, sorrows, dangers, hide nothing from him; as a man will acquaint his bosom friend with all his condition, or as sick patients will tell the physician how it is with them. Now thus to do is—

1. Filial ingenuity; for the Spirit of adoption worketh most in our addresses to the throne of grace; and there it betrayeth itself in a *παρρησία*, a telling God our mind: Heb. iv. 16, 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need;' Heb. x. 19, 'Having boldness to enter into the holiest;' Eph. iii. 12, 'In whom we have boldness and access with confidence.' Laying forth our whole estate and condition before him, sins to be pardoned, doubts to be resolved, miseries to be redressed, perplexities to be helped by his counsel, our weaknesses to be confirmed

by his strength, our griefs and fears, that he may pity us and help us. Tell God of all; your temptations, passions; these you should distinctly lay open before him. Natural pride and self-love will not let us take shame upon ourselves, and guilt is shy of God; but the Spirit of adoption bringeth us to him with openness of heart.

2. There is in it candid simplicity. David's *maschil*, or psalm of instruction, viz. Ps. xxxii., shows us thus much; for ver. 2, he mentioneth 'guile of spirit,' which made him hang off from God. But then you find by the 5th verse, he had come to his ease sooner if he had sooner confessed his sin. We are in distress of conscience till this be done; especially when trouble of conscience cometh upon us for some great sin, which God will cause to be manifested for his glory. Till we come to a clearness and openness of mind, we keep Satan's counsel. Moses had a privy sore, which he was loath to disclose, and pleadeth other things, insufficiency, want of elocution; but carnal fear was the main; therefore God gently toucheth his privy sore: Exod. iv. 19, 'The Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt, for all the men are dead which sought thy life.' He never pleaded that; but God knew what was the inward let. It is a mighty thing sincerely to open our hearts to God.

3. It argueth a man given to prayer when all our complaints run in that channel, and if we have any grievance and burden upon us, we bring it before the Lord.

But must we pray when we have a distemper upon us, and come to God with our raving passions? I answer—

[1.] If this be known, we must get it removed; for we must lift up pure hands, without wrath and doubting, 1 Tim. ii. 8; and a pet against providence is the worse kind of wrath, for then we are angry with God himself. Now passion putteth strange fire into our censers.

[2.] If we are blinded for the present, and there be failings in our addresses to God, he will pardon them, but loveth the plainness of his people's hearts.

[3.] By praying, the distemper may be cured; for when we own God as our supreme and most holy and just judge, the tempest ceaseth, and our thoughts are appeased, and we reduced to a better frame.

*Use 1.* To direct us what to do when we have many estuations of mind. Go, open the case to God. The apostle giveth this direction: Phil. iv. 6, 7, 'Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' As in an earthquake, when the imprisoned wind once gets a vent, the heaving and shaking ceaseth; such a quieting force there is in prayer.

2. It persuadeth us not only to pray, but to deal sincerely with God, and open our hearts to him. Tell him your griefs, wants, fears, temptations, what reasonings are apt to arise in your minds against his providence; let God know all. He knoweth it already, but let him know it from you. Give an account of yourself to God, but with that humility which becometh a creature subject to him, and hath given up himself to be ordered and disposed by him according to his own pleasure. Tell him how you came to reconcile his attributes and his pro-

vidence; you dare not quit the sense of your integrity, but you know not the meaning of his dispensations. Such plain dealing God liketh better than arting and parting it in prayer.

*Doct. 2.* From his deprecation of condemnation observe, it is grievous to a child of God to be condemned as a wicked man.

1. They are apt to fear it in great pressures, when God pursueth with multiplied and redoubled strokes; for these reasons—

[1.] Providence seemeth to mark them out for his enemies when he spendeth the arrows of his indignation upon them. Affliction is an act of judication. The apostle saith, 'We are judged when we are chastened of the Lord,' 1 Cor. xi. 32; and again, 1 Peter iv. 17, 'That judgment beginneth at the house of God.' God will prove himself impartially just in correcting the sins of his own; therefore he covereth himself with frowns, and seemeth to condemn us as an angry judge, rather than to correct us as a loving father. They are indeed acts of his holy justice, correcting and humbling them for sin. So far the best must own it: Ps. exix. 75, 'I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.' But then the vindictive wrath, according to strict justice, must be deprecated: Ps. cxliii. 2, 'Enter not into judgment with thy servant.' And the providence must be expounded aright. We are not condemned when we are judged, but judged that we may not be condemned. The dispensation is medicinal, not vindictive; to promote our humiliation and sanctification, not to procure our ruin and destruction.

[2.] The world is apt to make this interpretation of great afflictions: Acts xxviii. 4, 'This man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, vengeance suffereth not to live;' and Luke xiii. the first five verses, they thought those greater sinners than others whom these dismal accidents befell, and so turn matters of warning into matters of censure. Nay, of Christ himself: Isa. liii. 4, 'He hath borne our grief, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him smitten, and stricken of God, and afflicted.' As if these afflictions befell him for his own evil deserts, and out of a disaffection to him, as one pursued by God's justice. The like conceit had Job's friends of him: Job vi. 4, 'If thy children have sinned against him, and he hath cast them away for their transgression.' And in many other places. Therefore this arrow sticketh fast in their sides; by it they are pierced, and hit in their main confidence.

[3.] Conscience may have many misgivings because of afflictions: 1 Kings xvii. 18, 'O thou man of God! art thou come to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?' Affliction reviveth the guilt: Job xiii. 26, 'Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the sins of my youth.' They sat so close to his conscience that he could not get rid of them. Such suspicions and fears are revived in their hearts. It were well if it were only to humble us for the demerit. So we ought to judge ourselves as deserving condemnation. But to question the truth of God's grant, as if he did retract it, and make our pardon void by these afflictions, this should not be; or to conclude that he has a purpose to ruin us and condemn us for ever, this is downright despair.

2. This is grievous to them. Guilt affects the saints most. A rod dipped in guilt smarteth sorest upon their backs.

[1.] This for the present depriveth them of the sense of God's love to them, which is their all and their happiness. Nothing cheereth them so much as the beams of his reconciled face: Ps. iv. 6, 7, 'Lord, lift up thou the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time that their corn and wine increased;' Rom. v. 11, 'We joy in God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have received the atonement.'

[2.] It questioneth their love of God, as if all were counterfeit; for God cannot condemn the soul that loveth him. And his providence seemeth to their consciences to speak out condemnation to humble them. Peter took it tenderly to have his love questioned: John xxi. 17, 'Master, thou knowest all things, and thou knowest that I love thee;' as Job afterwards, 'Lord, thou knowest that I am not wicked.'

*Use 2.* It showeth what we should do that the wounds of an healed conscience may not bleed afresh again.

1. Interpret the dispensations of providence aright. Whatever God's dealings be with his children, it is to prevent condemnation, not to revive it upon them. If we have nothing else to weaken our faith and confidence, it is a temptation from Satan to question our estate merely upon the account of afflictions. It is his suggestion, If God did love thee, he would not follow thee with his judgments; but that he hateth thee, and hath no delight in thee; this is from Satan. For so his instruments said to Christ: Mat. xxvii. 43, 'He trusted in God; let him deliver him now if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.' Now retort it for Satan: Nay, because God loveth me, he dealeth thus with me; he meaneth to save my soul. Because we are children of God, therefore we are the more afflicted, that sins may be prevented, grace increased.

2. Remember the absoluteness of God's pardon. Sin pardoned is remembered no more, Jer. xxxi. 34; nor would be found, Jer. l. 20: all sins cast into the depth of the sea. God will not recall his sentence of pardon.

3. Make your interest in Christ more certain and clear; for certainly 'there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ,' Rom. viii. 1.

Now these things evidence that we are in Christ—

[1.] A change of nature is necessary: 2 Cor. v. 17, 'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' If it be so, you may appeal to God that you are not a wicked man. A sinner indeed, but renewed and reconciled. You have obtained mercy not to be wicked.

[2.] You must walk holily, that you may have the testimony of a good conscience, which is a notable support in troubles: 2 Cor. i. 12, 'For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundant to you-ward.'

4. There must be serious endeavours against the remainder of sin that may prevent the reign of it, for then you are not under the law, but under grace: Rom. vi. 14, 'To break the power of sin is not the work of a day; these sad dispensations tend to it, not to infringe our justification, but promote our sanctification, that we may carry it more

cautiously, holily, and thankfully to God: Isa. xxvii. 9, 'By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin;' Heb. xii. 10, 'They verily for a few days chastened us for their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.'

*Doct.* 3. That it is a good thing to inquire after the cause and reason of our afflictions.

1. They will not else be so honourable to God; for God loveth to be clear when he judgeth, Ps. li. 4, or to have the reason of his dispensation seen, that he may have the glory, we the shame: Jer. ii. 17, 'Hast thou not procured this unto thyself?' Micah vii. 9, 'I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.'

2. Nor are our chastenings so profitable unto us till we know why he doth contend with us. We reap a double advantage when we know for what sin: 1 Cor. xi. 30, 'For this cause many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.'

[1.] That God never afflicteth but for a cause is necessary to be known for his honour; but for what cause, that is necessary to be known for our profit. We are apt to flatter ourselves with notions and generals. Sin in the general is the common pack-horse, upon which men lay all their burdens. But come to particulars, amend them, avoid sin; there we are at a loss: Mal. iii. 7, 'Return unto me, saith the Lord of hosts: but they said, Wherein shall we return?' There we show that our repentance was but a notion. *Dolus latet in universalibus*—Deceit lurks under generals. Therefore it is an advantage to know that not for sin in general, but for this sin, God afflicts us.

[2.] We can the better judge of the greatness of that sin; for we know causes by effects, and can the better see our folly by our smart: Jer. ii. 19, 'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee. Know therefore, and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God.' God is fain to teach us as Gideon taught the men of Succoth, by briars and thorns. By the evil that we suffer he showeth us the evil which we commit, and so helpeth our faith by our sense.

3. Our sufferings else are more uncomfortable. No rod so uncomfortable as a dumb rod, when we do not know the cause and use of it, but barely feel the stroke, and see no more. But when we see the use, that maketh for comfort: Ps. xciv. 12, 'Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and instructest him out of thy law.' When the rod hath a voice, and speaketh out the mind of God to us: Micah vi. 9, 'Fear the rod, and who hath appointed it.'

*Use* 3. It is lawful humbly to desire God to show us the reason of his dispensations. And here I shall a little speak to the case.

1. For men who are wicked to make this request to God is to leave the matter of repentance upon an uncertain debate: and it is all one as if a man should break through a thorn hedge, and curiously desire to know which thorn had pricked him. For those that are overgrown with sin, it is enough to know that the author of all afflictions is God;

the cause is sin, and the end is repentance; that they must be new creatures, or they are undone for ever. To be more particular with them is to defeat the purpose of the dispensation, and to put them upon the leaving of one sin when God calleth for a change of state, or a passing from death to life; and this is but like mending a hole in an house that is ready to drop down.

2. To put this question to God when we do not search diligently ourselves is to betray a duty by our prayers: for when you complain, you must also search: Lam. iii. 39, 40, 'Wherefore doth a living man complain? a man for the punishment of his sins. Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.' Let us search what sins have an hand in all that cometh upon us, and what special provocation we are guilty of.

3. When one that for the main hath walked faithfully with God puts the question, these two cautions must be observed—

[1.] That it be not out of the impatency of the flesh, murmuring against and taxing God's providence, as if he dealt hardly with them, who for wise reasons will dispose of the temporal interests and condition of his people according to his own pleasure, for his honour and their profit. If there be an overvaluing of the prosperity of the flesh, we bewray the cause, and yet do not see it. This is that God aimeth at, but you would translate the matter to some other thing. He would teach you that your happiness lieth not here; that patience and humility under the sharpest trials is better than immunity from them.

[2.] That it be not from an over-conceit of our own holiness, so that you wonder why God should afflict you. Alas! the sins of the regenerate are very provoking, and may occasion sore afflictions in this life: Amos iii. 2, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities.' They sin against a nearer relation than others do, even against God, who is their Father by the new birth, which is more heinous than if a stranger did it, 1 Peter i. 17. They sin against more excellent operations of the Spirit than others do, a principle of life within them: 1 John iii. 9, 'Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin.' There is more unkindness in their sins: Ezra ix. 14, 'Should we again break thy commandments?' They know more of the sting of sin, and have drunk of the bitter waters, Joshua xxii. 17; against more knowledge, for they know more what the will of God is, James iv. 17. They make profession of a strict obedience, and that by covenant, vow, and dedication. God's quarrel against you is the quarrel of his covenant, Lev. xxvi. 25. You dishonour God more than any others by your sins: Neh. v. 9, 'Is it not good that ye should walk in the fear of God, because of the heathen?' You harden the wicked more than such sins in other men would do: Ezek. xvi. 51, 'Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but thou hast multiplied thine abomination more than they, and hast justified thy sister in all thine abominations which thou hast done.' Think of these things, and then put the question.

4. If the inquiry be humbly and dutifully made, it may be known wherefore he contendeth with you.

[1.] Partly by the word of God: Heb. ii. 2, 'If the word spoken by



angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward,' &c.

[2.] Partly by checks of conscience. What is your greatest burden in sore troubles? Gen. xlii. 21, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother.' It was many years before, yet their trouble brought it to their remembrance: Isa. lix. 12, 'For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them.'

[3.] Partly by christian friends, what they tell us of and observe in us. As Nathan to David: Ps. cxli. 5, 'Let the righteous smite me, and it shall be a kindness.'

[4.] Partly by enemies. Reproaches of enemies; they are sharp and quick-sighted; they soon spy out the faults of others. We often hear our enemies teaching our duty to us, that will not hearken to God. The staff of Egypt is a broken reed, Isa. lvi. 6, with Ezek. xxix. 6, 7.

[5.] The nature of affliction. God knoweth how to strike in the right vein. Usually one contrary by another.

[6.] By his Spirit, with due application to him: Job xxxiv. 32, 'That which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity I will do no more.'