

# WRITINGS OF JAMES BUCHANAN

by James Buchanan

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*A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by James Buchanan, compiled for study and devotional reading.*

29 Chapters

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## 01.00. Comfort in Affliction

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Comfort in Affliction James Buchanan, 1837 "This is my comfort in my affliction — for Your Word has given me life." Psalms 119:50 "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray!" James 5:13

## 01.000. Preface

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PREFACE The two first Meditations relate to the simplest elements of religious truth, and are designed to be introductory to the more peculiar doctrines of the Christian faith which are subsequently explained. The reader is requested to consider them in this connection. The Author might assign the request of many friends as a reason for publication; but he feels that a Christian Minister gives a sufficient reason, if, with somewhat of the same spirit, he can say with the Apostle Peter, "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things." 2 Peter 1:12-15 The Author takes this opportunity of declaring his conviction, that works like the present, however suitable in other cases, are ill adapted to the condition of those who are in extreme suffering, or who are otherwise disabled from much reading or continuous thought. In such cases, a few words from the "living oracles" — a verse or two from the Word of God, repeated and reflected on at intervals, will afford more solid comfort than even the best of human compositions. And, indeed, one of the leading designs of the following work is to turn the attention of every sufferer to the Bible as his comfort in affliction — it is a stream which may guide him to the Fountain of All Consolation.

TO THE AFFLICTED,

Mourners in Zion, be comforted! If yours is a life of sorrow — yours also is a religion of hope. If the book of Providence seems to you to be "written within and without," like Ezekiel's scroll, in characters of "lamentation, and mourning, and woe" — the Bible is filled with consolation and peace. And the more stormy your passage through this world, the more solemn God's judgments, the more severe and confounding your trials and bereavements may be — the more should that blessed book be endeared to your hearts, of which every true disciple will say, with the afflicted Psalmist, "This is my comfort in my affliction!"

It is not one of the least benefits of severe affliction, that it shatters our confidence in every other support, and breaks up our hopes from every other quarter — and leads us, in simplicity, to search the Word of God for comfort. Nor is it one of the least recommendations of that precious book, that its characters become more bright in proportion as all else around us is dark; and that, when all other information becomes insipid or nauseous — its truths are rendered only the more sweet and refreshing by the bitter draught of sorrow. The Bible cannot be known in its excellence,

nor its truths relished in their sweetness,

nor its promises duly appreciated and enjoyed

— until, by adversity, all other consolation is lost, and all other hopes destroyed. But then, when we carry it with us into the fiery furnace of affliction, like the aromatic plant, which must be burnt before the precious perfume is felt — it emits a refreshing fragrance, and is relished in proportion

as our sufferings are great.

Glorious peculiarity! Other books may amuse the hours of ease. Other knowledge may suffice to pass the short day of prosperity — but this book alone is for the hour of sorrow; this knowledge comes to my aid when all other knowledge fails; and, like the sweet stars of Heaven, the truths of God shine most brightly in the darkest night of sorrow! And why is it so? Is it because the Bible denies the existence of sorrow and suffering — or, because it represents the afflictions of life as being few in number, or easy to be borne? Does it seek to withdraw our attention from them — or, does it ridicule the feelings which such afflictions awaken, and enjoin a heartless indifference to whatever may befall us? Does it mock the friendships of nature — and scorn our feelings when these friendships are broken up by bereavement? God forbid! On the contrary, the Bible proceeds on the assumption that sorrow and suffering prevail in the world; that all, without exception, are liable to their depressing influence. And, so far from representing them as being few in number, or easy to be borne — it presents a picture of human life, which, in the season of youth and hope, many may be disposed to regard as gloomy and exaggerated — but which, in the hour of sorrow, comes home to the heart as the only faithful representation of this state of trial. It declares to every disciple, that "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows" and that, although "trouble springs not from the dust, nor sorrow from the ground — yet man is born to sorrow as the sparks fly upwards." Nor does it seek to withdraw our attention from the afflictions of life. On the contrary, it presses them on our regard; it declares them to be a proper and beneficial subject of contemplation, and affirms, "that it is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of mirth." And, in doing so, it is far from enjoining us to contemplate any scene of sorrow, with heartless indifference, or stoical unconcern. That religion which commands us to "weep with those who weep," cannot be supposed to condemn the tears which we shed over our own sorrows or bereavements. Nor can its Divine Author, who wept over the grave of Lazarus, be regarded as the pattern of his people, if, unlike him, they are to derive their support in the hour of sorrow from the suppression of those feelings which nature prompts, and of those tears which nature sheds, over the grave of friendship. And if stoic apathy and indifference is not enjoined, far less does the Bible sanction or countenance that bitter ridicule of human suffering — and that sarcastic contempt of human life, which, in the madness of despair, some have been tempted to indulge, and which has led them to strip man of his rightful dignity, and life of its due importance, and to regard the chequered scene of his existence with misanthropic bitterness, and even the last tragic scene of death with morbid unconcern.

Ah! little would such a scheme have suited the hearts which God has given us! But the Bible breathes the spirit of compassion over all our sorrows. Its Divine Author sympathizes with us in the lowest depths of our affliction; he ridicules not even the weakness of nature, but tenderly binds up the heart when it bleeds; for, "even as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him," and that divine pity breathes throughout every page of Scripture! The grand peculiarity of the Bible, as a book of consolation, is, that while it seeks not to cast our sufferings into the shade, but rather sets them before us in all their variety and magnitude — it teaches us to find consolation in the midst of acknowledged sorrow, and causes light to arise out of the deepest darkness. In many respects, it gives a more gloomy view of human life than we are often willing to entertain. It represents affliction as divinely ordained for us, and divinely appointed — so that it cannot be escaped. It tells us that our future life will be chequered with trials, even as the past has been. It

gives no assurance of respite from suffering, so long as we are in this world. And, when it traces these afflictive events to their causes — when it represents suffering as the fruit and the wages of sin — when it charges us with, guilt, and affirms that we have provoked the Lord to anger — when it leads us to regard our sorrows as connected with our characters, and inflicted by a righteous governor and judge — and when, carrying our eye beyond this world altogether, it points to an eternal state of retribution, where sorrows infinitely more severe, and judgments infinitely more confounding, await impenitent and unforgiven guilt — it does present such a view of our present condition and future prospects, as may well fill us with awe and alarm! And yet still it is the book of consolation — still it contains . . .

the elements of peace,

the seed of hope,

the well-spring of eternal joy.

It is out of the very darkness of our present state and our eternal prospects, that the brightness of that dawn appears which shall issue in everlasting day. The golden rays of divine light and love appear in the midst of that thick cloud — the cup of bitterness is sweetened by an infusion of mercy, so that the Christian can be "joyful in the midst of tribulation," and "greatly rejoice, though now, for a season, if need be, he is in heaviness, through manifold trials."

For, while the Bible spreads out to our view the whole scene of human life, chequered with every variety of shade — it raises our eye above it, and reveals a supernatural and spiritual System, which stretches over and comprehends every part of it — a System founded on principles which are as fixed as the incidents of human life are fluctuating — a System which overrules every event that may happen, and determines them all, however casual they may seem to be, to some great and lofty end — a System which, although in its immensity it is incomprehensible; and, in many of its bearings, mysterious — is, nevertheless, when in any measure understood, a great and lofty System, and obscure only because of its transcendent grandeur — which gives stability to what was before uncertain, and throws light on what was formerly dark, and imparts regularity and order to what might otherwise seem to be a world not only of vicissitude — but of chance.

It is by revealing this spiritual and supernatural System, that the Bible seeks to elevate our minds out of the depression which the present aspects of the world might occasion — not by concealing the dark aspect of "seen and temporal things," but by bringing into view along with them, the glory of "unseen and eternal things." Not by disputing the reality of those afflictions which we feel, and underrating their magnitude — but by showing us their necessity and suitability, as means under a higher economy than that of the present life — an economy which stretches from eternity to eternity — which comprehends in its course all orders of creatures, and every class of events, and which controls and overrules them all for the promotion of an end worthy of the magnitude of the scheme, and infinitely important to ourselves.

Believing that the Bible furnishes . . .

the only rational account of the origin and design of suffering under God's government, the only genuine and abiding source of consolation under sorrow, and the only sure antidote against the fears which must ever be associated with a sense of guilt — I propose to select from Scripture,

and to illustrate, in a short series of Meditations, the principal topics which bear on this subject, so as both to justify God in his ways of dealing with men, and to point out the method of deliverance and the grounds of hope which he has offered for their consolation and comfort.

## 01.01. Meditation 1

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### MEDITATION 1.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50 "The Lord reigns!" Psalms 97:1 The Bible lays a solid ground for our comfort, when it assures us that all things are under the government of God. He superintends the affairs of this world, both as the provident parent and as the moral governor of his creatures. The Bible declares that God created them, and that whatever beings he deigned to create, he does not disdain to care for. It assures us that no being is so great as to be exempt from his control — and none so little as to be beneath his regard. And, in like manner, that his eye is directed to every event which may befall any one of his creatures — with no event being either so momentous or so insignificant, as to be beyond his management or unworthy of his notice. The sparrow which falls to the earth, is not less an object of his regard than the seraph that stands before his throne! That all his creatures in this world, and all the events of human life, of what kind soever they may be, are under any kind of regulation or control — is, of itself, fitted to banish that feeling of uncertainty and hopelessness which the aspect of events might otherwise awaken. And how important to know . . . that nothing happens by chance, that everything is ordained and appointed according to certain principles which are fixed and stable, and that these principles will continue to be developed, until the grand end of God's government shall have been attained!

But, however important this information may be, it could ill suffice to cheer the heart amidst its sorrows, or to inspire that living hope which alone can bear us up under their heavy pressure — were we not farther assured, that the government under which we live is conducted by . . . a God of infinite intelligence and wisdom;

a being who cannot err — one who knows the end from the beginning; and is alike incapable of choosing an improper end, or of employing unsuitable means for its attainment. A persuasion of God's perfect wisdom in the management of our affairs is the more needful, in proportion as we feel our own helplessness, and are taught, by disappointments and trials, that our affairs are too high and too great to be managed by ourselves. And when assured of this precious truth, we shall the more readily submit to all God's appointments, satisfied, that although we know not the plan of his operations — yet it is known and approved of by One whose wisdom is the best guarantee of the universe. And thus, too, will the idea of blind fate be excluded, not less than the idea of chance — that fate in which many have found a miserable refuge, when they saw too much uniformity in nature to warrant the belief that it was governed by chance.

Still the heart desires something more. It is not enough that the world is neither left to the random vicissitudes of chance, nor governed by a blind and inexorable fate. It is not enough for our comfort to know that a God of infinite intelligence presides over its affairs, and that its laws are the emanations of his wisdom. Great and glorious as these discoveries are, the heart longs to know the character, not less than the wisdom of that Almighty Being, and to be made acquainted, if not with his secret purposes, at least with the nature of his moral perfections, and his dispositions towards ourselves.

It would be a small consolation to reflect, that our affairs are managed by infinite wisdom — could we, without a contradiction, imagine, notwithstanding, that such a being is indifferent to our welfare, or that he might be disposed to relinquish our cause, from a regard to other interests more important. Or, more awful still, that his wisdom existed apart from love, and was associated with such dispositions as could prompt the purpose, and such power as must insure the accomplishment, of our ruin. And but for the revelation of his true character, the heart which stands most in need of consolation, might be the most apt to entertain the sad conclusion, that God cared not for its sorrows or joys; for, when bleeding under the stroke of affliction, and stunned by the shock of bereavement — we contemplate the dark and uncertain aspects of the present world, it requires no slight knowledge of God's moral perfections, and no weak or wavering confidence in his intentions — to still the tumult of grief, and arrest the progress of grief towards despair. But here, as at every other point of peril, the Bible comes to our aid; and, as if this point were the most perilous of all, it throws such a flood of light on the moral character and benevolent dispositions of God, as may well warrant the supposition that it was mainly given to convince us of his love, and to enable us to cherish the most confident trust in his faithfulness and mercy — even when the aspects of his providence are the most trying to our patience and faith. The Bible declares the perfect rectitude of the divine character. It assures us that "he is just in all his ways, and holy in all his works." It represents him as the Righteous Governor of the universe, whose laws are in perfect consistency with the principles of equity, and whose character is in accordance with his laws.

Referring to those principles of morality which are engraved on the heart of man — it declares that they were engraved by the finger of God, and that conscience is his vice-regent, speaking to us in his name, and making known to us the principles of his moral administration. And it unfolds a more copious code of morality, in which the same principles are revealed, for our better information and surer guidance — principles which, being engraved in the book of nature, and revealed in the written Word, are infallibly certain, and ought to be regarded as a true manifestation of the righteous character of Him, who is the author alike of nature and of revelation. By both, we are assured that unerring rectitude governs the universe — that nothing in the shape of evil will be permitted to befall us, which is not in perfect consistency with justice; and that God will exercise such discernment in his treatment of men — as omniscient wisdom, combined with infinite rectitude, alone could insure. Were we assured only of the infinite wisdom and rectitude of that government under which we live — we might derive from these considerations, if not a good reason of hope, at least a sufficient motive to silent resignation. But it would be more consoling still, did we know that our governor and judge is not only wise and righteous — but favorably disposed towards us, and interested in our welfare. Power, wisdom, and rectitude, render the character of an earthly sovereign venerable and solemn. But love to his subjects gives him the more endearing character of the father of his people. And such a father is God to all his subjects. Everywhere throughout his vast dominions, does his benevolence extend — a benevolence which, like the light and heat of the sun, diffuses itself over all lands; and, while it gilds the scene of joy and prosperity, penetrates also the poorest cottage, and cheers the deepest scene of sorrow. Go where you will, the kindness of God appears; all nature bears witness to its bounty, "the earth is full of its richness."

Look to the structure of nature, the constitution of your own being, and the course of providence — and in each, you will discern such proofs of his love, condescension, and care — as may well assure you of his interest in your welfare, and of his disposition to make you happy. Had he been indifferent to human happiness, or disposed to inflict unnecessary suffering — then why that admirable adaptation between your faculties, and the objects by which they are at once exercised and gratified? Why that adequate supply in nature for every craving of desire within you? Why . . .

that beauty which delights the eye,

that music which charms the ear,

that air which refreshes and invigorates,

that food which nourishes the body?

Why those facilities of obtaining knowledge, and those powers of enjoying it in the hour of sweet meditation? Why does the sun keep its appointed time, and the moon her seasons? Why does the rain fall and the dew distill? Why does . . .

spring prepare the ground,

and summer raise the blade,

and autumn yield her fruit?

Why — but that God who governs all, cares and provides for us, as a father for his children! Else, where now there is harmony — might not opposition have existed between the faculties of our being, and the objects by which we are surrounded? Might not appetite have been made to crave — and no supply have been provided? Might not an eye longing for beauty — have opened only on deformity? Might not the ear which loves the music of sweet sounds — have been distracted by discord? The air which now refreshes and invigorates — might have been an oppressive or noxious exhalation. Instead of nourishing food — we might have had loathsome husks. Those faculties of thought and reflection which constitute our highest dignity — might have been withheld, and we would have resembled the beasts that perish. Or they might have been so disordered and deranged in their operation — that they would toil in vain, and only err the more, the farther they seemed to carry us. Or the objects and laws of nature, and the truths of science and religion, might have been hid in impenetrable mystery, or so complicated as to mock the utmost efforts of our powers. And when the reverse of all this is the case — shall we not acknowledge that nature herself bears ample proof, in the structure of our being, and the provision which has been made for our happiness — that God is good as well as great — that his benevolence is as vast as his wisdom — and that our well-being is matter of his concern, even as our being itself was derived from his will.

Nature can carry us thus far, and thus far it carries us with the sanction of Scripture. That blessed book assures us that "God is love," — that "his tender mercies are over all his works," — that "he is good unto all," — and that "he has never left himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from Heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Viewing ourselves as subjects of his government, surely these considerations, drawn from the simplest elements of religion — should exercise some influence over our hearts, when we meditate on the chequered scene of human life. When we contemplate the numerous dangers to which we are exposed, our own ignorance of the means of securing safety, and our utter lack of command, in some cases, of the means that are necessary, and, in all, of power to render them effectual; and when, in consequence, we feel that we cannot calculate on the course of events, and seem to be tossed about on the waves of a troublous and uncertain sea — then surely it would be a consolation to know . . .

that infinite wisdom presides over all;

that to God nothing is uncertain or contingent; and

that, whatever may be the result, nothing can happen by chance — but everything will be ordered by One who cannot err.

When, again, we feel that we are involved in an inextricable labyrinth of difficulties — when the iron hand of necessity seems to crush us to the earth without leaving one hope of escape — when all seems to be so inevitably fixed and certain, that our prospects on all hands are shut in with dark clouds, and we are brought to the very border of despair — then surely it is consolatory to reflect, that it is not a blind or inexorable fate which oppresses us — but that all our present difficulties have been appointed by One who has power to relieve as well as to afflict us, and appointed, too, for reasons which are satisfactory to omniscient wisdom. And when, again, we contemplate the prevalence of suffering, and the apparently irregular distribution of good and evil in the present world; when we see many in prosperity, while we are ourselves in trouble — and yet are at a loss to discover, in our blindness, the reasons for which such unequal measures of prosperity are dealt out — then surely we may well allow the consideration of God's infinite rectitude to quiet our murmurings, and to allay the violence of our regret, especially when we are so ignorant both of our own character and of theirs, and so ill-qualified to judge of the treatment which is best for us; and so well assured, that the principles of God's government shall not be fully developed, nor the whole results of his dealings with us ascertained — until this temporary scene of trial and discipline shall have passed away, and given place to that eternal state, in which the issues of time will be fully disclosed, and where "God shall be justified when he speaks, and clear when he gives his final judgment."

## 01.02. Meditation 2

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### MEDITATION 2.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50 "For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lamentations 3:33 On a general and comprehensive view of the structure of nature, and the course of providence, no man of ordinary candor will fail to acknowledge, that we live under the government of a Being essentially wise and just; and that the moral faculties with which he has endowed his creatures, and the many sources of gratification which he has opened for their enjoyment, can only be ascribed to a principle in the divine mind, which approves of what is morally good, and delights in the diffusion of happiness.

Yet, notwithstanding the many proofs which nature furnishes of the rectitude and benevolence of the Great Author of our being — it cannot be denied, that suffering, to a very great extent, exists in this part of his dominions. When we reflect . . .

on the convulsions of nature, by which whole cities have been engulfed in a common ruin;

on the vicissitudes of the seasons, by which famine and pestilence have been sent forth to slay their thousands and tens of thousands;

on the existence of numerous diseases, which are secretly undermining the health of some, and will ultimately terminate the lives of all;

on the mass of suffering which exists in the various asylums to which the poor, the diseased, or the insane, are carried from every corner of the land;

on the numerous chambers where private families are called to wait on the slow progress of decay, or the violent paroxysms of fever, or where the poor paralytic, half living, half dead, drags on the weary hours of an ambiguous existence;

on the numerous families pining under the iron hand of poverty, or more dreadful still — torn by the evil passions and loose propensities of one or more of their members;

on the disasters which bankruptcy occasions, when families, accustomed to the comforts and conveniences of life, are reduced to the necessity of abandoning all their former habits and their fondest hopes, and of betaking themselves, if fit for the task, to daily toil — if unfit, to humiliating dependence;

on the truly miserable case of widows and orphans, deprived of their natural protectors and guardians, and thrown on the cold charities of the world;

and finally, on the vast charnel house of death, where all the friends we once loved, and all the worth we once revered, and all the hopes we once cherished, lie buried in deep forgetfulness!

Oh! when we reflect on these varied scenes of humiliation and sorrow, who that has a human heart can fail to weep over the afflictions of human life, or to feel that the wisdom and benevolence of God being certain, there must be some profound reason for such painful providences as these?

Again, notwithstanding the many proofs which the moral constitution of our own being and the course of providence present, of the rectitude and holiness of the Governor of the world — it cannot escape the observation even of the most superficial inquirer . . .

that here the measures of outward prosperity and adversity are by no means dealt out according to the comparative deserts of men;

that many whose conduct has best attested the excellence of their character, are in deep trouble — while others, who neither practice nor profess religion, live in unbounded prosperity;

that the pure and upright are frequently immersed in poverty — while the profligate are surrounded with wealth;

that the good often groan under the oppression of the wicked, to whom power is given over their fellow men;

and that the whole world presents a different aspect from what the innate dictates of our moral nature would lead us to expect, were this a state of retribution under the government of a righteous judge.

One of the most solemnly interesting inquiries to which the thoughts of a reflecting mind can be directed is: To what cause are we to attribute the prevalence and the unequal distribution of affliction in the present state? And the solution of this question will lead to another of equal importance and interest, namely: How far these afflictions should affect our confidence in God, or our future hopes under his government? In reference to the first of these questions, namely: To what cause we are to attribute the prevalence and the unequal distribution of affliction in the present state — both reason and Scripture concur in ascribing every affliction with which men are visited, to the purpose and providence of God. Suffering does not arise accidentally in his dominions — but is the product of God's deliberate counsel, and the result of laws which he has established for the government of his subjects. It is neither a necessary adjunct, nor a casual accident of our nature. Not necessary, for omniscient wisdom and almighty power might constitute even a created being without suffering — such are now the holy angels in Heaven, and such was man before the Fall. Nor accidental, for that were to exempt the happiness of his creatures from God's control, and virtually to set aside his overruling providence.

It is true, that suffering sometimes proceeds so immediately and so manifestly from the conduct of individual men, that to their follies or vices it may be ascribed as its proximate cause — the horrors of disease being the natural fruit of profligate manners — and the hardships of poverty resulting naturally from habits of indolent indulgence, or improvident thoughtlessness. But even in such cases, these afflictive results are determined by a law which God has established — a law which attaches health and comfort to frugal and temperate habits, and entails disease and poverty on the opposite vices. And God being the author of that constitution of things under which we live — to his sovereign will we must look as the ultimate cause of such a connection between sin and its appropriate misery.

And, in other cases, as in the dread visitation of famine, or pestilence, or the more ordinary occurrence of family bereavement — we see God's hand, as it were, visibly stretched forth: "Is there evil in a city," says the sacred writer, "and the Lord has not done it?" "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil; I the Lord do all these things." It was the Lord who rained fire and brimstone out of Heaven on the cities of the plain. It was the Lord who sent the deluge on the earth, until all men and every living thing died. It was the Lord who glorified himself in the destruction of the Egyptian host. And he still guards us against the foolish notion that the sufferings of life are fortuitous or accidental, lest we should thereby be led to overlook his hand in them, and so "to despise the chastening of the Lord."

Every affliction, then, with which any of us is visited — is the result of God's deliberate purpose — and no evil befalls us without his permission or appointment. Nor are our afflictions to be regarded as the results of the careless or capricious exercise of almighty power; but, on the contrary, they are to be ascribed to the most comprehensive wisdom, acting according to principles which are fixed and determined as laws of the divine government. God is not a careless or inattentive spectator of what passes among his subjects; he does not send evil among them at random, nor without cause, nor without a well defined end in view. Such capricious exercise of almighty power is incompatible with the possession of omniscient wisdom; and as his attributes forbid, so no exigency in his government can ever require it. He cannot be taken by surprise, neither can he act from the impulse of momentary feeling. Every attribute of his nature, and every principle of his government, are alike stable and excellent; and from these, not from caprice or passion, does affliction spring.

Far less can affliction be ascribed to the deliberate exercise of cruelty — or the sudden gust of revenge. If the comprehensive wisdom, the almighty power, and the perfect independence of God, forbids us to imagine that he can, in any case, permit evil to arise through negligence or caprice — then surely the infinite benevolence which prompted him to communicate being to his creatures, and to open up for them so many sources of enjoyment, may well forbid the thought that he is capable of cherishing one vindictive feeling, or of taking delight in the infliction of suffering. Infinitely great, and glorious, and happy in himself — what possible motive can exist in the divine mind for the exercise of these cruel and vengeful passions, which he has forbidden his own creatures to cherish, and by which, where they are indulged, his creatures are debased? Shall we attribute to the most glorious Being in the universe, those passions by which only the basest of mankind are animated — and which, wherever they exist, render the character hateful, and the bosom which contains them wretched as well as guilty?

God forbid! All nature bears witness to the benevolence of its author; and that benevolence assures us, that whatever evils may exist under his government, they are not inflicted in the exercise of cruelty, or for the gratification of angry passion — that to whatever other cause they may be ascribed, they cannot be referred to any disposition on the part of God, that would lead him unnecessarily to make his creatures unhappy, or to take pleasure in their suffering.

And, in addition to the testimony of nature, God does most solemnly disclaim every such feeling, and assures us that "He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." In these words, it is not denied that affliction proceeds from the hand of God. On the contrary, it is admitted that he does afflict and grieve the children of men. But then, in regard to the disposition and feelings with

which he does so, it is affirmed that "He does not afflict willingly." This cannot be understood to signify that affliction comes without the will, or contrary to the purpose of God, or that he does not approve of the painful discipline to which his people are subjected. On the contrary, every suffering which he inflicts is the fruit of his deliberate wisdom, and the object of his holy approbation. But when it is said that "He does not afflict willingly" — we are given to understand . . .

that he has no pleasure in the misery of his creatures, considered in itself, and apart from its causes and ends;

that he does not lift the rod merely to render them unhappy, and far less to gratify his own passion;

that, but for moral considerations, physical happiness is with him a far more pleasing thing than physical suffering;

and that, while he has no pleasure in making his subjects wretched, he does delight in their comfort and well-being. This view, indeed, of the feelings with which God contemplates the sufferings of his creatures, necessarily arises out of the simplest idea which we can form of his character, as a perfectly wise and good Being. To what cause, then, it may be asked — are we to ascribe the sufferings which actually prevail under his administration? The Bible enables us fully to answer this question, by the views which it presents of God's character — as the Governor of the world; and of the present state — as one of respite and trial.

God is revealed, not only as a being of infinite moral perfection and blessedness — but as the righteous moral governor of his intelligent creatures. And the course of his providence is represented as not only comprehending the means by which he preserves them in existence — but also as constituting the discipline by which the ends of his moral government are fulfilled. To the idea of a moral government, a law of some kind is absolutely essential; and a law of any kind being given, it was necessary that it should be accompanied with such sanctions of reward and punishment, as might put a difference between the obedient and disobedient subjects of it.

Hence, if by any means sin should appear, God determined that suffering should arise along with it. And in the very structure of our own being, he has instituted physical checks as well as moral restraints to disobedience, and has connected therewith not only the pangs of an accusing conscience — but also a numerous train of diseases, and the sentence of death.

These arrangements, by which suffering is inseparably connected with sin, are far from being arbitrary — they flow necessarily from the perfections of the divine nature. Could we, indeed, entertain, for one instant, the monstrous idea, that God, although possessed of infinite power, and wisdom, and benevolence, was, nevertheless, in moral respects, a being of a neutral character — that he had no holiness, no rectitude, no justice — that he had no predilection for one style of moral character in his subjects, more than another — that ingratitude, and sensuality, and deceit, were not more offensive to him than the opposite virtues — then, and then only, could we conceive of him lavishing the wealth of almighty power and unbounded beneficence on all his creatures alike, and making no difference between Seraphic virtue and Satanic guilt. But, being holy and just, as well as good — he must necessarily approve of what is congenial to his own character, and conformable to that law which is but the transcript of his character, and the expression of his unchangeable will. Although, therefore, from the benevolence of his nature, he must delight in the diffusion of happiness — yet, from the holiness and rectitude of his character, the principle, that sin

should be connected with suffering, must be the object of his moral approbation.

Further, men are not only represented in Scripture as the subjects of a moral government — but as subjects placed in a very peculiar and interesting state, a state of acknowledged guilt — yet of delayed punishment, in order to their probation and trial for an everlasting destiny hereafter. Their present state is not one of retribution — but of respite. Sentence has been passed against them as guilty — but the effect of that sentence has been for a time suspended, in order to the application of means, on the part of God, for their redemption. And being neither like the angels, perfectly holy and happy, nor like devils, absolutely lost — they occupy a middle state, which may be either the scene of their education for Heaven, or of their preparation for Hell. To one or other of these departments of the invisible world, all will before long be transferred. But, meanwhile, they are dealt with as creatures that have incurred condemnation — but who, through the mercy of God, are capable of rising to glory.

These two views, the one of God's character, as a moral governor and judge; and the other of mankind, as sinners in a state of respite and trial — satisfactorily account both for the sufferings which men endure, and for the unequal distribution of them. Were there no sin, there would be no suffering. Or were this the place of strict retribution, suffering would be awarded according to the amount of guilt. But this world being a middle state, enjoyment and sorrow are so intermingled as to prove, at once, the benevolence and the rectitude of God. To the great moral ends of this economy, the discipline of affliction is, in many respects, needful; and hence the varied evils with which God has seen fit to visit us. Of these afflictions, viewed as parts of his own procedure, and a means of beneficial discipline, God must be supposed to entertain a holy moral approbation. And yet, in none of his dispensations, however dark and distressing, does he take pleasure in inflicting unnecessary suffering, or in making his creatures unhappy. For it is expressly declared, that "he has no pleasure in the death of the sinner," and that "he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men."

These views throw an interesting light, both on the character of God, and on the nature and design of affliction under his government. As God is to be regarded both as an affectionate father and a righteous judge — so affliction is presented in two lights in Scripture, in each of which, it is compatible with the most perfect benevolence in the divine mind. It is there represented as being partly corrective and partly penal. At one time, the chastisement of an affectionate father; at another, the sentence of a righteous judge; while, in both, it is declared to be the result of sin. In neither case is it the spontaneous infliction of one who delights in suffering for its own sake — but the result of principles from which no wise father or judge will ever depart in the management of his children or subjects. The meaning of the declaration, that "God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," may, perhaps, be best illustrated, if, conceiving of him as the father and governor of his rational creatures, we take, as an illustration, the parallel case of an affectionate father, or a benevolent judge among ourselves.

Take the case of an earthly parent: suppose him to be endowed with all the tenderest sensibilities of nature — conceive of him as delighting in the health and welfare of his children, and, in the exercise of every benevolent affection, lavishing on them all the riches of a father's kindness and a father's care. You say, on looking at his gracious countenance and his smiling family — this is an affectionate father. But a secret canker of ingratitude seizes one or more of his children — they

shun his presence, or dislike his society, and at length, venture on acts of positive disobedience. He warns them, he expostulates with them — but in vain, they revolt more and more. At length, in the exercise of deliberate thought, he lifts the rod and chastens them — and he who once was the author of all their happiness, has become also their calm but firm reprove. And who that knows the tenderness of a father's heart, will not acknowledge, that severe as may be the suffering inflicted, such a man does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of his love?

Again, conceive of a man of benevolent feelings invested with the office of magistrate or judge — conceive of Howard, the unwearied friend of his race, who visited the prisons of Europe to alleviate the miseries of the worst and most destitute of men — conceive of such a man sitting in judgment over the life or liberty of another. Can you not suppose that, while every feeling within him inclined him to the side of mercy, and his every sensibility would be gratified, were it possible to make the felon virtuous and happy — he might, notwithstanding, have such a deep moral persuasion of the importance of virtue and order to the well-being of the State, that he could consign the prisoner to a dungeon or the gallows, and that, too, with the perfect conviction that it was right and good to do so. While, still, every sentiment of the heart within him, if it could be disclosed, would bear witness that he afflicted not willingly, and that he had no pleasure in the death of the criminal?

Such a father and such a judge is God. The sufferings which he inflicts, whether they are viewed as corrective or penal, are compatible with the loftiest benevolence in the divine mind. And, unquestionably, the fact, that "God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," may, in one light, be regarded as a ground of consolation, inasmuch as it assures us that the Almighty Being, in whose hands our destinies are placed has no pleasure in the mere infliction of suffering — that, in his holy mind, not one passion exists which can be gratified by it — and that, even "as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear him."

We confine our present meditation to the mere negative view of affliction — that it is not the result of a capricious or cruel delight in suffering on the part of God. Hereafter we shall see abundant reason to believe that it is, under a system of grace, the result of pure and comprehensive benevolence, and the means of much positive good. In the meanwhile, let us not allow even the darkest aspects of God's providence to shake our faith in the benevolence of his character. And when, through the sharp inflictions of his rod, we are tempted to entertain hard thoughts of Him — let us remember the precious truth, that "God afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men." But while these views are, in some respects, highly consolatory, inasmuch as they assure us of the benevolence of God — yet, to every reflecting mind, another question will suggest itself, to which, without such a revelation as is contained in the Gospel, no satisfactory answer can, in our opinion, be returned. The benevolence of God being admitted, the question arises: How far the afflictions which do prevail, notwithstanding, should affect our hopes of future happiness under His government? To those who rest their hopes of exemption from future punishment on the mere general benevolence of God, this should be a very serious and solemn inquiry. For God is, at this moment, a Being of infinite benevolence — and yet, suffering to a great extent prevails in his empire. So the question may well be entertained, whether, being afflicted now under his administration, we may not, for the same reasons, be equally or still more afflicted hereafter? And this inquiry becomes the more serious, when we connect affliction with the causes to which it is ascribed. What are these causes? Why, they are the sins with which we are chargeable on the one hand — and the holiness and justice of God's character on the other side. But an effect can

only be prevented by the removal of its cause; so it is a very solemn reflection, that the holiness and justice of God are unchangeable attributes of his nature; and that, if we continue to be chargeable with sins, they must, for anything we know, perpetuate our sufferings. So far from allaying our apprehensions from this cause, the fact that God "afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men," gives a very solemn sanction to the moral principles of his government, when, notwithstanding his benevolence, he visits his creatures with severe calamity. The benevolence of God being admitted, the whole course of his providence may be regarded as a very solemn exhibition of the holiness and justice of the divine government. And unless, in these circumstances, we can discover some way of escaping from guilt, or can entertain the delusive hope, that God's holy and righteous government is to be radically changed — we cannot fail to have many dark thoughts, and many anxious fears, respecting our future prospects.

We see that God is wise, and righteous, and benevolent — and yet notwithstanding, or rather for that very reason, we feel that God is pouring many a bitter ingredient into our cup — that he is visiting us with trials of a very severe and confounding nature; and can we help inquiring whether it will be so forever? whether this life is to be the pattern of our immortal existence? or whether, in the eternity which awaits us, we have reason to expect either the unmingled good, or the unmingled evil which are combined, at present, in the chequered scene of life? We want some assurance, on this point, to remove our doubts, and misgivings, and fears; and, without such assurance, we feel that our eternal prospects are dark and uncertain indeed.

These misgivings are not without a foundation in reason; for as manifold as are the proofs which our own experience supplies of the benevolent character of God, and explicit as is the sanction which Scripture gives to the indications of nature — there are many things, notwithstanding, both in nature and in Scripture, which are fitted to awaken alarm respecting the relation in which we stand to that prestigious Being, and the mode in which he may yet deal with us here and hereafter. God may be perfectly wise, and just, and good — yet, conceiving of him as the moral Governor and Judge of mankind, we cannot fail to understand that he must put a difference between the righteous and the wicked — that his administration may require the sanction of punishment, and that the very perfection of his character may thus become the strongest reason for the infliction of suffering, where his law has been dishonored, and his authority contemned. The infinite power, and rectitude, and wisdom of God, which, to innocent beings, must be a source of the highest and purest delight — may thus become, to sinful creatures, the occasion of alarm, and dread; and a secret distrust of their interest in his favor will prey upon their minds, even in the midst of all the riches of his benevolence which nature displays.

Accordingly, may I not appeal to every human being, whether he has not felt in his own bosom many a secret misgiving respecting his personal interest in the favor of his Judge, and many a dark foreboding in respect to his future prospects — and that, too, while he could not shut his eyes to the evidence, nor bring himself to deny the reality of God's wisdom, and rectitude, and love? The reason is, that every man knows and feels that he is guilty; that he has violated the law, and forsaken the service of God; and that God, being a righteous governor, may, notwithstanding his benevolence, be disposed to punish transgressors.

Conscience makes this suggestion, and the course of God's providence confirms it; otherwise, why so much suffering, if a benevolent God entertains no hatred against sin? The feelings of our

own minds must convince us, that the present course of God's providence is utterly irreconcilable with the idea, either of his wisdom or benevolence, unless, in our own conduct, he finds a holy reason for his method of dealing with us. And no conscience can be so blinded as not to perceive much in the state and conduct of every man, that may warrant a Holy God in inflicting suffering and death. The Bible does unquestionably, in the first instance, confirm the testimony of nature and conscience in respect to the present state of trial. It acknowledges the existence of sorrow and suffering, under the government of a most wise and benevolent God. It declares that, notwithstanding the moral faculties which God has given to us, and the moral indications which the course of providence affords, good and evil are not here dealt out according to the strict measure of desert. And the reason which it assigns for the sufferings that prevail in the world, is the prevalence of sin, while it attributes the regular distribution of good and evil, to the nature of the present state, as one of respite and trial for an eternal state after death. Had its communications stopped at this point, it would have confirmed our worst fears, and deepened our most distressing thoughts. For, when revealing, as it does, the benevolence of God, it declares notwithstanding, that even under his government, sin must be connected with suffering; and when it points to an eternal state, where the principles of his holy and righteous administration shall have their ultimate outcome, and be more fully unfolded — how could we avoid the apprehension that we are obnoxious to the displeasure of our Almighty Judge, and in danger of an eternal state of retribution from his righteous hand? So far from allaying these apprehensions, in the first instance, or declaring them to be unreasonable in themselves, or inconsistent with our just deserts — it is one leading object of the Bible to confirm their certainty, to impress their truth on the heart, and to assure us that judgments, infinitely more awful than those which prevail in the present world, await the transgressors of the Divine law, in a future state of strict judicial retribution. The Bible sanctions all the judgments which conscience has ever pronounced against us. It delineates our characters in the darkest shades of guilt; and it affirms that, notwithstanding the benevolence of God, sin cannot escape punishment, without inferring a violation of those eternal principles on which the government of the universe is conducted, and on the maintenance of which, the glory of God, and the happiness of his obedient creatures depend. Are any who now meditate on this serious subject along with me ready to exclaim: How, then, can the Bible be our comfort in affliction — the Bible, which presents a more humiliating view of our character, and a more distressing view of our state, and a more alarming view of our everlasting prospects, than what is contained in any other book, or what has been suggested from any other quarter; or what, fearful and desponding as we are, we have ever been willing to entertain?

Ah! brethren, you see how true it is, that the Bible does not seek to comfort you . . .

by denying the evils of your condition,

or by withdrawing your attention from them,

or by soothing you with partial views of their extent,

or delusive expectations of their removal.

It probes your case to the very bottom. It unfolds all the evil that is within, or around, or before you. And this it does, not only from a regard to truth, which, however dark and distressing, cannot be compromised in any communication from God to his creatures — but also, and especially, with a

view to shatter your confidence in every spring of spurious comfort, and every false ground of hope — and to lead you in simplicity to a ground of consolation, which alone can cheer your hearts amidst your present sorrows, and support your spirits in the prospect of what is yet before you; and which, bearing, as it does, the impress of God's hand, shall endure, when all other confidences are shattered, and all other hopes destroyed.

I have adverted to the difficulties in which our relation to God, and our prospects under his government, are involved, because they shut us all up to the doctrine of the cross — and because they will lead us to the only source of sound and abiding consolation — the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. We shall find that every such difficulty vanishes, every doubt is repressed, and every fear destroyed — when that love is apprehended and believed.

But, meantime, hesitate not, I beseech you, to receive the testimony of God respecting your state, and character, and prospects, and turn not away in disgust, because, in the light of Scripture, they seem dark and appalling. True, they are dark and appalling indeed — but is it not your interest to know the real state of the case? Is it possible that God can err in the estimate which he forms of your character, or deceive you as to the fate which, under his own government, awaits unforgiven guilt? From whom, if not from God, can you expect to have such information as shall render your present and future condition, and his plans and intentions with regard to you, intelligible and certain? And although you must feel the statements of Scripture respecting your guilt and your deservings to be humiliating and painful in the extreme — yet does not your own observation, so far as it extends, concur with the testimony of Scripture, in regard to the present state? And do not your own consciences suggest many anxious forebodings respecting the future, the same in kind with those which the Bible sanctions and certifies? Are you not, at the very best, uncertain of future happiness? Are you not, more frequently still, oppressed by the thought, that the future may be not less, and perhaps more, distressing than the present? Does not conscience plainly intimate, that, under the government of a righteous Being, you have no reason to expect any mark of his favor — and much to anticipate his disapprobation and wrath? And when the Bible makes these convictions sure, when it seals them with the authority of that God who cannot err, and unfolds the views with which he regards, and the punishment with which he will visit impenitent guilt. Oh! it is surely your highest wisdom to listen patiently, and to inquire earnestly, whether, after all, there may not be some way of escape from a state which you feel to be one of dreadful uncertainty, and from a prospect which conscience has surrounded with terrors?

There is one such way of escape — and only one. The Scheme of Redemption is the grand peculiarity of the Bible. It is there set forth as a prominent feature in God's moral government — as a plan, with reference to which, this world was at first created, and has since been sustained, and many things permitted to occur in it, which, under a system of immediate retribution, could not have been allowed to happen, or to continue. And it is uniformly represented as the grand means by which God's character was to be fully disclosed, not only to men — but to all his intelligent creatures. This gospel scheme will be found to illustrate or explain whatever is dark or intricate in the arrangements of providence. It establishes the principles on which his moral government is founded, while it explains the reasons why these principles are not fully developed in the present state. And, above all, it unfolds to man a view of God's dispositions towards him, and a prospect of his own future destiny — which are alike fitted to awaken his profoundest admiration, and his deepest gratitude, and to silence every complaint, and solace every sorrow which the present

aspect of providence might otherwise awaken.

## 01.03. Meditation 3

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### MEDITATION 3.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him might not perish — but might have eternal life" John 3:16

We learn from the chequered scene of human life, not less than from the plain testimony of Scripture — that there are two principles in the divine character. The one, the principle of love, which delights in the diffusion of happiness, and is averse from the infliction of misery. The other, the principle of holiness and rectitude, which must invariably connect suffering with sin. We see, in the present state, the operation of both principles, in the blended enjoyments and sorrows of human life. And the grand problem is, whether, as in the present state, God's holiness and justice must forever entail suffering on his disobedient subjects — or, whether his love may not devise a remedy for existing evils, so as to render it compatible with the moral interests of his government to exempt them from punishment, and receive them into his favor?

We cannot venture to state the problem, so as even to imply the possibility of his abolishing suffering while sin continues; or of his love being exercised to the effect of rendering his creatures happy — without regard being had to the interests of his inflexible holiness and justice. We dare not ask, whether God's love may not triumph over his rectitude; or, whether his benevolent delight in happiness, may not be greater than his holy aversion to sin? Nor could we entertain such a question, would we wish to solve it in the affirmative, for that were to loose the bonds of his government — to reverse the whole principles and methods of his present administration — to subvert the moral constitution of our own being — to array one attribute of God's character against another — and thus to annihilate every ground of rational confidence, and to introduce universal uncertainty in respect to his government. The present state affords no evidence of such opposition between the benevolence and the holiness of the divine character — and far less of any likelihood that his benevolence will triumph over his holiness. Both are seen to be in operation; and the many proofs of his benevolence with which we are surrounded, so far from assuring us of future exemption from suffering, serve only to augment our anxiety on the subject. For, as suffering to a great extent exists under his government now, notwithstanding his benevolence — the question arises with tenfold interest: may not the same, or still greater sufferings, be awarded for the same reasons hereafter? With the Bible in our hands — no doubt or difficulty on this momentous subject remains. For, while it confirms and illustrates the testimony which his own providence bears to the holiness and rectitude of the divine character — it reveals a scheme of redemption, in which "truth meets with mercy, and righteousness with peace," and by which God can be "faithful and just in forgiving sin;" the "Just God," and yet "the Savior of the guilty;" "just even while he justifies the ungodly." In this stupendous scheme, we know not whether most to admire the inflexible holiness, or the marvelous love which it displays, or the profound wisdom by which both are combined, so as mutually to establish and illustrate each other. For what can be said either of the holiness, or of

the love of God, by men — nay, by angels and seraphs — who have beheld them burning bright in the upper sanctuary, and adored them uninterruptedly, in their full measure, in the presence of God himself. Nay, though all parts of God's universe should concert together, and all intelligent spirits unite in gathering the proofs which nature furnishes, and combining the separate testimonies of all worlds to the holiness and goodness of God — what could be said of either that would outweigh or bear comparison with the import of that single statement, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him might not perish — but might have eternal life!"

God loved the world! From the spontaneous love of God, the plan of our salvation proceeded, that being the source of every blessing which this salvation includes, and of every hope which it warrants or inspires.

Let us meditate on the NATURE of this love. It is not the mere general benevolence which delights in the diffusion of happiness among the obedient subjects of the divine government — nor is it the mere sentiment of compassion with which a benevolent being may be supposed to regard the misery of his apostate creatures, and which might lead him to pity their case, even while he punished their guilt. It is not a mere passive emotion in the divine mind — but an active and operative love, which prompts the purpose, and forms the plan of relieving them. It is the attribute of mercy — mercy that not only relieves the wretchedness — but pardons the guilt of its objects, and which allows not even the most aggravated sinfulness to be a bar to the communication of its blessings. Of this attribute Heaven itself affords no exemplification, for there no sin has ever been forgiven. This world is the theater which God has selected for the manifestation of the glory of his character, as "the Lord God merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin." And in what circumstances was this love displayed? When the world was in a state of rebellion against him;

when the human character had been totally changed from its pristine innocence, and had become the very reverse of God's holiness;

when, instead of being the object of men's supreme reverence and affection — he was the object of their enmity and dread;

when the holy attributes of his nature, and the moral principles of his government, and the righteous precepts of his law — were all alike distasteful to their depraved minds;

when his sole prerogative, as the Governor and Judge of the world, had been carelessly forgotten, or daringly denied;

when the sublime temple of nature, at whose altar they should have worshiped the one living and true God — was filled with the shrines of idolatry — where his supremacy was virtually denied, or divided among a multitude of false gods;

and when the more sacred temple of the human heart, where God desired to dwell, and to be ministered unto by a train of holy affections — had become a chamber of imagery, filled with a host of wicked passions — a temple, indeed, of spiritual idolatry, where the best of all homage, that of man's affections, was rendered, if not to idols of gold and silver — yet to the wealth, and honors, and pleasures of the world;

when, in one word, God's character was hated by man, and man's character odious to God!

Yet, even then, "God Loved the World." Not surely because he could regard the character of men with delight — far less because their conduct had deserved his favor, for their character was regarded by him with utter abhorrence, and their conduct had exposed them to his righteous judgment. But while he hated and condemned their sin — no malice mingled with that hatred — and no revenge dictated that condemnation. On the contrary, he pitied their case, even while he abhorred their guilt! And, in the exercise of a free, generous, and sovereign love, he resolved to seek and to save the lost! And what was the MEASURE of that love which he felt, and which the scheme of redemption unfolds? What man, what angel, what seraph, will undertake to measure it, when this one clause is added, "God SO loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son!" To comprehend the full import of such words, we must be able to enter into those feelings of ineffable love with which the Father regards his only begotten Son — a Son, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory with himself, and possessing, along with the divine attributes of almighty power and omniscient wisdom — a character in all respects the same as his own — a character of unspotted holiness, and infinite benevolence and love — a Son, too, held in honor and high estimation in Heaven, where angels and seraphim adored him as their Creator and Lord — and who, from the beginning, was "his delight, rejoicing always before him."

Mysterious and incomprehensible as, to our limited capacity, many parts of this sublime subject may appear — we cannot fail, at least, to be convinced, that no form of words could possibly express a greater amount of love than the simple statement, that "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son." This love will be still farther enhanced in our estimation, if we consider the benevolent design of God in giving his Son, and the beneficial results of that gift to his believing people. It was that those who believe might not perish! In common with the rest of mankind, they were in danger of perishing. They had already within them the seeds of perdition, and the sentence of death stood recorded against them. They were enemies to God in their hearts, and their enmity was manifested by the frequent transgression of his law, and a constant estrangement of affection from his character and service. And, as immortal creatures, destined to live forever, and about to enter, in a very short period, on a state of righteous retribution — they had no solid ground of hope that their eternity would be a happy one. But, on the contrary, had reason to fear, that there lay before them an everlasting state of guilt, debasement, punishment and despair. It was God's design in sending his Son to deliver them out of that estate of guilt and danger — to open up a way of escape, and to rescue them, by the operation of his grace, from the power of those evil passions, which, had they been perpetuated, would necessarily have issued in the miseries of eternal Hell. And when we consider the odious nature and debasing tendency of sin, and the amount and duration of that punishment which God has denounced against it — oh! how grateful should we be for the least intimation of God's willingness to save us from it! And how much more grateful, when we are assured that our deliverance from it is one of the objects which God has most at heart. We cannot suppose that he takes pleasure in the death and destruction even of the guilty — when we are assured that "he gave his only begotten Son, that we might not perish." The magnitude of the danger to which we were exposed, and the awful nature of the punishment which awaited us — may well awaken our profoundest admiration of that love which has opened up a way of escape. But even this is not all. God's love is not exhausted, nor his benevolent design completed — by redeeming his people from guilt and suffering. It points to a

higher end, even their exaltation to a state of perfect blessedness — that they "might have eternal life." The Gospel of Christ not only states the consoling fact, that "there is forgiveness with God," and that "he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner" — it conveys also the cheering news of an endless life beyond the grave — a state not only of conscious existence — but of perfect uninterrupted and endless felicity — provided and secured by the mediation of Christ, for every one that believes on his name. Their preparation for this glorious state was one of the objects of the Savior's mission, and, by his grace, a new spiritual life is put within them which shall never die — but which shall grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength, until it issues in life eternal. It declares that our present life is but a pilgrimage, during which we are to prepare for entering on the full privileges of children in our father's house, and the enjoyment of that rich inheritance which belongs to them in Heaven. It declares that death, so far from annihilating the immortal spirit, or impairing its energies, or introducing it into a dark and troubled scene of doubt, or despair, or punishment — is, in the case of every believer, the birthday of the soul, when, being released from the body, it is born into immortality, and placed at once in the presence of God and his angels! And in order to fit us for a prospect so lofty and boundless, Christ has declared it to be the grand end of his mission . . .

to raise human nature out of the debasement into which it has fallen;

to purify, and elevate, and refine its noble faculties;

to restore man not only to the friendship — but also to the likeness of God, in whose image he was created;

to cleanse him from the pollution of a world that lies in wickedness — and so to present him faultless and blameless before the presence of God. This he does by the agency of the Holy Spirit, and by means of the truths contained in his Word. And in the new spiritual life thus given, every believer has within him . . .

the germ of life eternal;

the first dawn of that glorious light in which he is to live and have his being forever;

the commencement of that course of progressive improvement and happiness, which shall have no interruption and no end — and which death, so far from disturbing, shall serve to advance, by placing him in circumstances where the highest exercise of his faculties, and the largest acquisitions of knowledge — shall be combined with enjoyment of the purest happiness, and the noblest society in the universe!

Considering the capacities of man, may we not ask, with befitting reverence, what higher proof could God himself have furnished of his love?

If it was an act of great benevolence on the part of God, that he communicated existence at all, even for an hour to the insect, or for a few years to man upon the earth — then how much more that he made man immortal?

If we adore his benevolence in providing a liberal supply for the physical needs of his creatures — then how much more should we admire his goodness, when the needs of our rational and immortal nature are the objects of his regard?

If exemption from calamity, so long as we live on the earth, is a ground of gratitude — then how much more the exemption of the soul from the burden of guilt, and the danger of punishment, its promised deliverance from the whole host of evil passions, and the numerous sufferings which follow in their train?

And, above all, if the prospect of health or preferment in this world should make us thankful — then how much more that boundless prospect of eternal life, wherein our faculties shall be forever improving, and our happiness, nay, our very capacities of happiness, increasing forever?

What more shall we say? that God was so resolved on this, that, when nothing else could secure it, "he gave up his only begotten Son."

It may be asked: Why did God give up his only begotten Son? What necessity existed for so costly a sacrifice? Might not the mere intimation of his kind intentions towards us, conveyed through one of his commissioned servants, have served to remove our fears, and to establish for us a ground of hope? Had God been a being of mere compassion, and had we been regarded in no other light than as the objects of his pity — this course might perhaps have been adopted, although we should thus have been deprived of the noblest proof of the strength and ardor of that affection which burned in the divine mind towards us.

But, besides being a God of mercy, he is also the inflexible moral governor and judge of men; and, besides being the objects of his pity, we were the responsible subjects of his government, and amenable to punishment for our crimes. As his moral government was to continue forever, and as, wherever it extends throughout the universe, it is based on the principles of rectitude and retribution, it was necessary to guard against any dishonor being put on that law, which is a transcript of his own holy character, and the rule of his universal and eternal jurisprudence.

Hence God would not cancel its threatenings, nor relax its authority, nor mitigate its requirements — even when he had formed the purpose of saving the sinful. But, on the contrary, he made the manifestation of his forgiving mercy the occasion of a brighter display of the holiness and justice both of his character and law. For this purpose, he entered into a covenant with his only begotten Son — choosing him as the substitute of the guilty, whom he designed to save; laying upon him the responsibility of their guilt, and exacting from him the penalty which they had incurred, and engaging, in return, to impute to them the merit of his sufferings and obedience, and to deal with them according to his deserts. And this was done, that while his forgiving mercy was manifested in giving up his Son, and, for his sake, receiving his people into favor — his unbending equity might be displayed, and his law magnified and made honorable, by the vicarious sufferings and death of their surety. As no proof of his love could be greater than the act of giving up his Son, so surely, no proof of his holiness and justice could be stronger than what arises from his not sparing that Son when he stood in the place of the guilty. What greater honor could, in the nature of things, be paid to the law, than what was implied in the voluntary submission of God's own Son to its demands?

What a spectacle to men and angels! the Son of God submitting to that law in his own person, acknowledging the justice of its threatenings by enduring them, and the equity of its precepts by obeying them, and declaring his holy determination to uphold its authority, and to establish it forever, even at the very time when his love prompted him to deliver his people from its condemning power!

It was in this sense that God gave up his Son — he "gave him to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins." It was to manifest "grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life," that Christ consented to become man; and it was "that God might be just, while He justified the ungodly," that Christ was "wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities," and that "He who knew no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This glorious scheme of salvation, therefore, while it is pervaded by the golden principle of divine love, is yet founded on the principles of eternal justice. In it "truth met with mercy, and righteousness with peace," and the full satisfaction which it provides for the claims of divine justice, may well serve to silence every doubt or misgiving which, notwithstanding the benevolence of God, might be awakened in our minds, by a consideration of the holiness and justice of the divine administration.

Thus, both under the economy of providence, and under that of grace, the holiness and the love of God, so far from being inconsistent with, or opposed to one another — are, by an admirable arrangement of divine wisdom, made mutually to illustrate and enhance each other.

Under the scheme of providence, there are many enjoyments which bespeak the love of God — and many sorrows which bespeak his justice; and every reflecting mind must feel, in looking on the chequered scene of life, that the greater God's love is — the more righteous also is his justice; and the more righteous his justice — the more wonderful his love — since, notwithstanding the one, suffering prevails, and, notwithstanding the other, many blessings are bestowed. In like manner, in the cross, God's love appears in the gift of his only begotten Son; but his justice also in the awful death which the Savior endured. And we feel that if God had not been gracious, we would have less revered the justice which demanded it — and that, had he not been just, we should less have esteemed the love which prompted the sacrifice of his only Son. The consolation which may be drawn from the cross, is the only thorough remedy for sorrow — the only abiding antidote against despair. That consolation arises, partly, from the manifestation which is there made of God's disposition and character, as the Lord God merciful and gracious; and from which we may draw the precious assurance, that "if God spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up to the death for us all — much more will he, with him also, freely give us all things." It arises partly, also, from the assurance, that One has undertaken our cause, who is both able and willing to help us, and with whom the Father is ever well-pleased. And, finally, from the fullness and completeness of that redemption which he has wrought out. This scheme of redemption is complete in all its parts, and adequate to the supply of all our needs. Being framed by the unerring wisdom of God, and sealed with the precious blood of his Son, and administered by the agency of his Holy Spirit — its efficiency is guaranteed by every attribute of the divine nature; and while it throws an interesting light on the present scene, it is a system which stretches forward into eternity, and presents a remedy, not only for every present sorrow, but also for every future fear.

What sin is there which this redemption will not expiate?

What sorrow is there which this redemption cannot soothe?

What need is there which this redemption cannot supply?

What fear is there which it may not dispel?

What holy hope is there which it does not sanction?

What attribute of God is there which it does not illustrate?

What human exigency is there for which it does not provide?

It is consolatory, too, to know, that while this redemption is infinitely full, it is also freely offered to all; and this is intimated in these words, which contain the very sum and substance of the Gospel, "Whoever believes in him shall not perish." Whoever — where, then, is the sinner that is excluded from this salvation? Where the man who is not warranted to repose his confidence in the Savior? "Whoever," be he rich or poor, young or old, prosperous or afflicted, learned or unlearned, yes, comparatively righteous or desperately wicked — still that word is enough for him. It holds out a warrant and an encouragement to the most abandoned and forlorn; and this warrant is confirmed by the assurance, that "He came to call not the righteous — but sinners to repentance," and that whoever "comes unto him, will never be cast out."

Glorious scheme of salvation! Well may the angels desire to look into it, and well may they hence derive an increase to their knowledge of the manifold wisdom of God! Far more should we make it the theme of our profoundest meditation, and seek to comprehend and embrace it in all its fullness, since it is God's own plan for abolishing sin and its consequent evils. It is a plan which, whether we view it in reference to the character of God which it unfolds, or in reference to the benefits which it confers on all who embrace it — will ever seem the more beneficent and wise, in proportion as our knowledge and experience of its provisions and practical effects are enlarged; and which, to men, and angels, and seraphim, will be the theme of exhaustless meditation and praise, in that blessed world where its glorious issues will be unfolded, and its benefits fully enjoyed.

## 01.04. Meditation 4

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### MEDITATION 4.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out!" John 6:37 When a thoughtful mind, especially in the season of affliction, or in the prospect of death, considers its relation to God and its eternal prospects, it can hardly fail to be impressed with the transcendent importance of that question, "What must I do to be saved?" If the inquirer betakes himself to the Bible, with the view of obtaining satisfactory information on this momentous subject, he finds God's own answer to that question, in these memorable words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." These words are few and simple — but they contain the sum and substance of the Gospel message; they teach him to believe the record which God has given respecting his Son, and, believing that record, to place his personal trust and dependence on Christ, as an all-sufficient Savior, able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him. But when this plain and simple answer is given, to his question, the anxious inquirer is apt to be staggered and perplexed by its very simplicity. He is not prepared to find that every bar has been taken out of the way, and that he is at liberty to repair to Christ at once as his Savior. He is surprised, and begins to doubt whether he has understood the message in the sense in which God would have him to understand it. He ponders on other passages of Scripture which declare God's wrath and curse on account of sin, or which require holiness of heart and life, or which speak of the difficulty of being saved; and, without adverting to the fact that these passages refer to difficulties which arise out of his own fallen and depraved nature, and which God's grace alone can remove, he is apt to think that something must be done by him, before he is warranted to embrace the offer of the Gospel, or to trust in Christ as his Savior. Hence, encouraged, on the one hand, by the possibility of his being saved — and distracted, on the other hand, by the supposed necessity of fulfilling certain conditions before he is warranted to take God's invitation to himself — he derives little or no immediate comfort from the simple message of the Gospel, and remains for a time at a distance from Christ, or only fearfully looking to him as one that may ultimately be his Savior. To an inquirer in these circumstances, nothing can be more useful than to set before him a clear view of the warrant of faith, or of the ground on which he is encouraged at once, and without any delay, to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to come to him for pardon and peace.

I. The first ground on which the most disconsolate inquirer may be encouraged to return to God, through Christ, without delay — is the character of God, as it is revealed in his Word. That character is set forth in Scripture in a variety of aspects, which are all fitted to conciliate the love, and to secure the confidence of sinners. Let every serious inquirer consider the testimony of God in this matter: "The Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with Moses there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed: The Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for

thousands." God's love and mercy are declared with a fullness and variety of expression which leave no room for unbelieving doubt or suspicion. His very name is "the Lord God merciful and gracious;" he is declared to be "abundant in goodness;" he is said to be "keeping mercy for thousands" Nor is this a solitary passage, different from the general tenor of God's Word: his character is delineated in the same way in so many places, that our chief difficulty consists in making a selection of the most striking and impressive proofs.

We have taken one passage from the Law; let us look now to the Psalms, "You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon you." "You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious; long-suffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth." "Your mercy is great unto the heavens." "The Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting." "Great are your tender mercies, O Lord." "Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever."

Passing from the Law and the Psalms, let us look now to the Prophets, "Who is a God like unto you, that pardons iniquity, and passes by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage; he retains not his anger forever, because he delights in mercy." "You are a God, ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." "Though he causes grief — yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies." "As I live, says the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

If we look to the gospel Evangelists, we see there recorded the words of Christ himself, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world — but that the world through him might be saved." "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one who sees the Son and believes on him, may have everlasting life."

And, finally, let us hear the testimony of the Apostles, "God is love," says John. "God is rich in mercy" says Paul. "The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy" says James. "The Lord is long-suffering to us," says Peter, "not willing that any should perish — but that all should come to repentance."

Thus the unanimous testimony of the Law, the Psalms, the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Evangelists, and the Apostles of the New — bears witness to God's character, as a Being of manifold mercies, whose very name is love. A clear apprehension and cordial belief of this great truth, would do much to remove all the scruples and fears which prevent many an anxious inquirer from coming to him for life and salvation. In general terms, we all admit, indeed, the merciful character of God; but surely, if it impart no comfort, and inspire no confidence, and awaken no gratitude — it must either be very imperfectly apprehended, or little, if at all, believed. The proper effect of such a character, when seen in all its glorious excellence, is to banish distrust and suspicion, and to awaken admiring love, and childlike confidence. The kindness or benignity of an earthly friend produces these feelings, and his very character is regarded as a sufficient warrant for our going to him in a time of straits, and frankly laying before him our difficulties and needs, in the assurance, that his kindness will prompt him to listen to our request, and to take an interest in our case.

Why is it otherwise with us when God is concerned, unless it is that we either do not sufficiently understand the benignity of his nature, or are suspicious of the sincerity of his kindness? Did we really believe God to be so very gracious and merciful a Being as his Word declares him to be; did

we realize his infinite love, and were we assured that his love is perfectly sincere — Oh! how would this banish the hard thoughts of him which we are too prone to cherish, and destroy those scruples, and misgivings, and fears, of which we are sensible when we think of repairing to him for mercy. The evil is, that even when the grace and mercy of God are not formally called in question, there often remains in the heart an undefined and vague suspicion of his sincerity, or an idea that his love is wavering and uncertain, if not capricious, in its exercise. And hence, all the cheering influence which the light of his love might exert upon us, is destroyed by the intervention of our own dark unbelief, just as the rays of the sun are intercepted, and their influence diminished, by the dense vapors and thick clouds of the sky.

Grace and mercy, indeed, are not the sole attributes of God; and the sinner who would fondly cling to these, may be repelled by the reflection that, as merciful as God is — he is also holy and just. That he is declared, both by the voice of conscience, and by his own revealed Word — to be the avenger of sin, and that, as such, he cannot be regarded by any sinner without alarm and terror.

All this is true; and were it overlooked or forgotten, we would entertain a very partial and delusive idea of the divine character. It is equally true that unassisted reason can discover no method of reconciling the exercise of mercy with the claims of justice — and no ground of confidence in God, such as would warrant the hope of safety for a sinner. But in God's revealed character, justice and mercy meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other. We are under no necessity of forgetting any attribute of his nature, or of adopting a partial view of his character, for the sake of deriving peace and comfort from it. We can regard it in all its holiness, and yet feel that we are safe. For,

II. God's declared satisfaction with the redemption of Christ, affords a warrant and encouragement to the sinner, such as should banish all the fears which even a correct and scriptural sense of God's holiness and justice may have awakened in his mind. That he should have a deep and abiding sense of God's holiness and justice — is no more than Scripture requires, and the state of the case demands. That a sense of God's justice, combined with a sense of his own guilt, should awaken fear and terror, is equally plain; but he will thereby be only the better qualified for coming to God as he is revealed in the Gospel. Under this impression, let us turn again to the first passage formerly quoted, a passage in which the whole character of God is revealed, first, as infinitely merciful, and secondly, as strictly holy and just. On reading that passage, the sinner may be disposed to say, oh! how sweet and encouraging is the first part of it, "the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands," — this is sweet, it is as cool water to the parched ground — would that it had ended here! But when I proceed I find it written, "that he will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generations" — this damps my rising hopes, it sinks my heart within me; for am I not guilty? And if he will by no means clear the guilty, what avails it to me that he is merciful and gracious? I am irrecoverably ruined and undone. My guilt and God's justice are, after all, as certain as his loving-kindness; and how, then, can I draw near to God?

All this is true. It is equally true, that while, in one passage, we read that "God is love," we read in another, that "our God is a consuming fire." How, then, may a sinner extricate himself from this perplexity — how may he obtain relief — when he cannot deny his own guilt, and dares not

dispute God's inflexible justice? Is there one sinner who feels, that were his guilt out of the way, he would willingly go to God, as the Lord God merciful and gracious — and who is debarred only by a sense of divine justice? Let him look to the cross of Christ, and he will see the barrier removed; there God's character is displayed in all its attributes, and these attributes are seen to be perfectly harmonious. "Truth meets with mercy, and righteousness with peace," and the Lord is beheld as at once the "Just God," and yet "the Savior." In the cross, the love and mercy of God appear in the gift of his own Son; and his justice is at once displayed and satisfied by the atonement which was there required and rendered. By the substitution of Christ as our Redeemer, in our place, and by the infliction of that punishment on him which our sins had deserved — the law was magnified and made honorable, and the reason for punishment having been removed, God's justice is satisfied. And now, "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing unto them their trespasses." He has declared his satisfaction with the work of the Redeemer; and now, on the ground of that great atoning sacrifice, he gives to every repentant sinner the liberty of free access to his throne — his justice no longer stands in the way; and, lest the peculiar heinousness of any man's sins should discourage him, he has given forth that gracious declaration, "the blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin."

Behold how the sinner's perplexity is removed; he sees in the cross that God can be at once the Just God and yet the Savior — faithful and just even in forgiving his sins, and cleansing him from all iniquity. There he discovers how both parts of that sublime passage may be reconciled; and how true it is that while, without satisfaction, God would by no means clear the guilty — yet, being satisfied with Christ's atonement, he is the Lord, forgiving iniquity, and transgression and sin.

Oh! what relief must the clear apprehension of this one truth impart to the convinced sinner! What a heavy burden must it lift from off his heart! He needs not deny his guilt, or dispute God's justice — no, he sees and acknowledges both; but neither is now a bar in the way of his access to God, for God in Christ, the Judge on the mercy-seat, the Lawgiver on the throne of grace — declares that, by the Redeemer's atonement, he is satisfied, and that now "there is forgiveness with him and plenteous redemption."

Neither God's justice,  
nor the sinner's guilt,  
nor the demands of a broken law,  
nor the voice of an accusing conscience,  
nor the sacred majesty of God's government

— should now discourage him. God is satisfied with Christ's redemption, and that is enough for us. He has declared his satisfaction, and why should we be doubtful or downcast? Let us rather sing with the prophet, "O Lord, I will praise you; for though you were angry with me — yet your anger is turned away, and you comfort me. Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust, and not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation."

III. Remembering, then, God's gracious and merciful character, and his declared satisfaction with Christ's redemption as the ground of pardon — let us consider the language in which he now speaks to sinners from the mercy-seat, and we shall find in his invitations a full warrant for

confidence and trust. Both God and Christ invite sinners to draw near in such terms as leave no room and no apology for refusing. These invitations are frequently repeated, and given in every variety of form, the best fitted to remove our doubts, and secure our confidence. They are addressed to sinners as such, and to all sinners, without exception, to whom the Gospel is sent — insomuch that it may well be said, that if there be a man on earth who is not a sinner, to him alone are they not applicable. But to every man that is a sinner, and just because he is a sinner — they are addressed.

Let us listen, then, to the gracious terms in which God speaks to sinners from the mercy-seat — and let us listen to them as if God spoke to us alone. "Ho! every one that thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money — come buy and eat; yes, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." "Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Say unto them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" "Come unto me," says Christ himself, "all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink." "And the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) and the bride (the Church universal) say, Come. And let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

One might think that these plain and express Scriptures should banish all unbelieving doubt and suspicion; for in them God speaks, Christ speaks, the Spirit speaks, the Church speaks, and all say, "Come!" But as if a mere permission or invitation were not enough, the apostle represents God as beseeching or entreating us to come. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled unto God."

Now, let me ask my doubting heart: What reason can justify your refusal to come to God in Christ, or what excuse can be offered, when so plain a warrant is given, for hesitation or delay? You are a sinner — true; but if you were not a sinner — you would not need to be saved, and the Gospel would not have been addressed to you. You are a great sinner — be it so; but is not Christ a great Savior too? You know not whether your name is written in the book of life — true; but God speaks to you in his Word. And unless you are prepared to avow a suspicion of God's sincerity, you know that he has invited you to draw near. And if, notwithstanding, you refuse, what other account can be given of you, than that which the Lord gave of the unbelieving Jews, "You are not willing to come to me that you might have life!"

IV. Besides the revealed character of God, and his declared satisfaction with the Redeemer's work, and his free and affectionate invitations to sinners — another ground of encouragement may be found in the assurance which he has given of success, confirmed, as that assurance is, by the recorded experience of all who have ever put God's faithfulness to the proof. God's assurance is, that every one that comes, shall he made welcome; and thus we read in that precious Scripture, "Him that comes unto me, I will never cast out." This glorious truth rests on God's faithfulness, and

should be received with all trust on his sure and simple word. But it is confirmed and illustrated by the experience of every sinner that has at any time ventured, on the faith of God's word, to come to him. No such sinner has ever been cast out. Every believer can set to his seal that God is true. If we ask any Christian friend whom we know, whether he has ever had occasion to doubt God's faithfulness to his promise, or to repent of his going to God in Christ, on the strength of his testimony, he will tell us: "Never! God was more gracious to him, the more he trusted in God; he drew near, and was made welcome; he has never had reason to regret that he took God at his word; his only regret is, that he was so long faithless and unbelieving." This is the unanimous testimony of the Church, that no poor sinner was ever sent empty away. And if it is so, why should any of us doubt our warrant to go to Christ now? Is he not unchangeable — still the same "Lord over all, who is rich in mercy to all that call upon him in truth?" Is not the warrant of faith the same now as it ever was — as full and as free as it was to them? We are apt to imagine that there is a defect in our warrant — that others have had special revelations which have not been addressed to us; and, before venturing to come to Christ, we seem to wish and expect that something more should be revealed to us than God has revealed in his Word. But here we err, not knowing the Scriptures, and the power of God. The revealed Word is the only warrant of faith. We must come to God on the ground of Bible testimony, if we come at all. It is amply sufficient to justify and to encourage us in venturing to come; and if we believe not Moses and the prophets, if we believe not God speaking in the Word, "neither would we believe though one should rise from the dead." And, let it be observed, this has been the warrant of faith from the beginning — the sole and sufficient ground on which any sinner was ever prevailed with to betake himself to Christ. It was on the strength of God's testimony that the apostles believed — that the confessors and martyrs of the primitive Church believed — that each and every Christian, since the foundation of the Church was laid, first formed his resolution to cast himself on the forgiving mercy of God.

Ask any Christian friend: "Had you any special revelation; were you told that your name was in the book of life; or, what encouraged you to come to Christ?" And he will answer: "I had no special revelation — but that which is in your hands; I had no insight into the secrets of God's decrees — but I read the Bible; I heard God speaking to sinners in the Word — I knew myself to be a sinner, and that God spoke to me. I believed his Word, because I judged him faithful that had promised; I came to him on the warrant of his own invitation, and I have found, in my blessed experience, that there not one good thing which the Lord had spoken has failed — all came to pass."

Such will be the testimony of every child of God. It is true, indeed, that even when the warrant is clear, the sinner may find that there is something in the state of his own mind that hinders him from complying with the gracious invitation; that, while the way is open, there is a barrier within, arising from the depraved state of his heart, which he cannot overcome in his own strength; and that, although no new revelation be needful to perfect his warrant to believe, a new and spiritual influence is needful to dispose him to believe. This is a great and a most momentous truth — but it does not affect our warrant for coming to Christ — that is clear, full, and undeniable. And, being so, if this bar, arising from the depraved state of our own hearts, prevents us from believing — then our final ruin and perdition must not be ascribed to any defect in Christ's Gospel — it lies wholly on our own heads.

Oh that we all felt this great truth, for it would shut us up to the grace of the Holy Spirit! God has revealed that his grace will be given in answer to prayer; for, says he, "Ask and you shall receive."

"If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

V. Finally, if we are still in doubt as to our warrant to come to Christ at once, and without delay — let us consider, that this is not only in Scripture the matter of permission and of encouragement — but the subject of an express and positive command. It is not a mere privilege, which we are at liberty to enjoy — it is a duty which we cannot neglect or trifle with, without incurring guilt and condemnation. It is given in the shape of a precept, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." And, lest this should be regarded as partaking more of the nature of an advice than of an injunction, it is expressly called a commandment, "This is his commandment — that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ." That this commandment imposes an imperative obligation on every sinner, appears from the word which is frequently used in Scripture to denote the reception of the Gospel message. It is called obeying the Gospel, or the obedience of faith; and that guilt is incurred by trifling with that message, or refusing to comply with it, appears from our Lord's solemn statement, "He who believes on him is not condemned — but he who believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God."

He who reflects on such passages, should need little urgency to be persuaded as to his warrant to go to Christ without delay. He may well say, this is no light matter — it is a matter of life or death. If God had only invited me to come to him, that might have been sufficient; but when he commands me, there is no room left for hesitation. I might have felt, had he only given a general permission, that it would have been presumption in so great a sinner as I am, to close with it, or to plead it at his throne; but if it would have been presumption to take his gracious promises to myself, is there not greater presumption in setting myself against his positive command, in refusing to believe, when he makes it a matter of express duty? There is now no room for hesitation or delay. He has spoken graciously to me — he has invited me to draw nigh — he has commanded me to seek his face — he has charged me, at the peril of condemnation, to betake myself to Christ as my Savior — and I will venture, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

Oh! when the poor sufferer, stunned and confounded by the heavy strokes of providence, or lacerated by the keener strokes of conviction in his soul, is almost distracted by the terrors of the Lord — is it not a comfort to him in his affliction, that Jesus himself has said, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" And, "him that comes to me, I will never cast out?" He calls us to come to him with our burden — let it be the burden of guilt, or the burden of sorrow, or the burden of fear — to come and lay it down at the foot of his cross. And, lest the disconsolate spirit should fear that he will not be made welcome, Jesus assures him, that "he will never cast him out." Oh! how sweet and consoling that invitation, and this assurance, to those who are sensible of their condition as sinners and as sufferers! And how should we respond to it, if not in the language of the apostle, "To whom, Lord, can we go, but unto you? You have the words of eternal life!"

## 01.05. Meditation 5

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### MEDITATION 5.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"Though the mountains depart and the hills be removed — yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed — says the LORD, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10 In some hour of pensive thought, everyone must have experienced a strange mixture of feelings, in contemplating the aspects of nature, with reference to the short and uncertain duration of human life. Some objects in nature present, indeed, a fair emblem of our fleeting existence. The lily, which blooms and fades in spring — the rose, which summer expands, and which sheds its leaves before summer is closed — the thousand insects which glitter in the morning sun, and which are brushed into the pond by the breeze of evening — the vapor which rises from the earth, and floats for a season in the sky — but is dispersed so soon as the meridian sun pours its full flood of light and heat over the earth and sea.

These objects, so beautiful, and yet so transient, seem to be faithful emblems of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and as such, they are referred to in the sacred page, when man, in all his glory, is compared to the "grass which grows up," and to "the flower of the grass which flourishes," and "to the vapor which appears for a little time, and then vanishes away." Other objects in nature are of a firmer texture and more enduring form; such as the mighty oak, which centuries have confirmed in strength — the trees of the forest, which our grandsires planted, and under which our fathers rested — and which, after all the storms that have raged around them, still afford us their shelter and shade. In contemplating such objects, a melancholy feeling is apt to steal over us — a feeling as if our age were as nothing in comparison with theirs. And we are ready to remember, with pensive sadness, the many generations of our friends whom they have survived, and to think, with sadness still more pensive — that the same branches may wave in the wintry wind, or grow green in the spring, or cover the earth with their shadow in autumn — when our frail bodies shall have been laid in their narrow home, and our eye forever shut to all the loveliness of nature. Yet, even in these objects we may discern the symptoms of age and frailty. The oak may be gnarled and bent, and here and there a branch may exhibit that rottenness which is the prelude to universal decay. But other objects there are which have had a still longer existence, and yet exhibit no tendency to change. The everlasting hills on which the eyes of our forefathers looked, are still before us. We live amidst the mountains to which they repaired as a harrier against invasion, or a refuge from ignoble thraldom — but where are the millions of our race whom these mountains sheltered? Where the eyes which once rested on their verdure? Where the limbs which toiled up their steep ascent? A thousand generations of our race have passed away — but these mountains are still substantially the same. In contemplating such scenes, who has not felt a sense of his own insignificance stealing over his heart, while he thought of the contrast which their stability presents to the frailty of man? But what shall we say, if even those objects which are most stable and enduring, shall be declared by God himself to be frail and

perishing in comparison with ourselves — if the everlasting hills shall be held up as a faint emblem of our immortal and imperishable being; and if, after all the lessons which the flowers of the field, and the fleeting vapors of the sky, and the swiftness of the shadow, have been made to teach us of the vanity and uncertainty of our existence — here, those objects in nature which are of the firmest texture and most enduring form, shall be found, notwithstanding, too frail and fleeting to body forth our immortality? Above all, what shall we say, if those very objects which fill us with the deepest sense of our own frailty, by presenting a contrast in their enduring age to our own uncertain life — shall be selected by God himself, as emblems of his faithfulness to a promise which eternity alone can fully accomplish — and if even the everlasting hills shall be found too transient to represent the perpetuity of that kindness which he bears to us, and of that peace which he is willing to confer? "Though the mountains depart and the hills be removed — yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed — says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

Besides the promise which is directly conveyed to us in these words, they obviously presuppose, or imply, certain great truths which lie at the foundation of Christian comfort and hope.

1. The promise obviously implies the immortality of man. It points to the dissolution of the material world, and assures him that he shall survive the wreck of mountains. It refers to the day when the "earth shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the heavens shall be rolled up as a scroll" — and tells us that man, small, and insignificant, and frail as he seems to be, is destined to an immortal existence, and shall be the object of God's care, after all other things shall have passed away! Did the believer fully realize this truth, which is one of the first elements of his creed, might he not, even when standing amidst the everlasting hills, exclaim, "Frail as I am, and deeply as in such scenes I feel my frailty — I am still immortal, and their duration shall bear no comparison with mine. True, they have stood the shock of ages, and ages yet to come may leave them where they stand; and long before they shall depart, nay, long before the trees which crown their summits shall wither or decay — the grave shall have received my mortal remains. But the soul within me cannot die; it will survive the shock of dissolution; death will be its birthday into an immortal existence. And in some future age, it will witness the removal of these mountains, and the dissolution of this world, while still it is exulting in the spring-time of eternal youth."

2. This promise implies the eternity and immutability of God, by whom it is made. He speaks as the eternal God — to man as an immortal being. He shall exist, unchanged and unchangeable, after this world shall have passed away. And what is God to His redeemed people? He is their Friend, their Portion, their All. Being assured, then, of their own immortality, what should afford a surer ground of confidence, or nourish a more joyful hope — than the thought that the God whom they love, in whom they trust, and whom they have chosen as their portion — shall exist, and continue the same forever? Yes, though all things else be changed — though the sun is blotted from the sky, and the stars fall from the heavens, and a universal change passes over the face of nature — yet, God being forever the same, He will be their everlasting support, the "strength of their hearts, and their portion forever." Did the believer fully realize this, might he not, even when he contemplates his departure out of this world, exclaim, "Take me from this earth, or let the earth itself be dissolved! Let me pass, if it is His will, into the eternal world. Being assured of my immortality, and of God's eternal and unchangeable nature — I cannot be unbefriended or forlorn. Amidst all changes — He will be the same. And having my hope and confidence in God, that hope

and confidence cannot be impaired by the greatest convulsions of nature."

"In the beginning You laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing You will change them and they will be discarded. But You remain the same, and Your years will never end!" Psalms 102:25-27

3. But what bond exists between God and man? What is the ground or warrant of that confidence which we draw from the consideration of God's eternal existence, in respect to our own immortal state? The bond which connects God with man, the ground and warrant of our confidence — is His Word. It is plainly implied in this promise, that God's word, the word which he has spoken for the comfort of his people, shall endure, and shall have its accomplishment, after "the mountains have departed, and the hills have been removed." God gives his simple word as our guarantee for eternity! In the midst of all our fears, he interposes his promise, and that must be our stay! And is it not sufficient? His word is immutable as God himself; by his word, the world was created; by his word, the world will be dissolved; and by the same word, his people will be sustained amidst all changes. That is a bond of security which time cannot invalidate, nor death impair, nor the wreck of universal nature destroy — for, says the apostle, "we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible — by the word of God, which lives and abides forever." And then, as if to meet the very fears which a sense of our frailty awakens, he adds, "all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower thereof falls away; but the word of the Lord endures forever. And this is that word which by the Gospel is preached unto you." Of that word, our Lord himself declared, "that Heaven and earth shall pass away — but one jot or one tittle of the law cannot fail." "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure." Hebrews 6:17-19

While these three things — the immortality of man, the immutability of God, and the everlasting verity of his word — are necessarily implied in this sublime promise — its more direct and immediate object is to assure us of the unchangeable kindness of God, and of the everlasting stability of a covenant in which that kindness has been embodied, and is revealed. That we shall survive the dissolution of material nature is a sublime truth; but far more cheering is the assurance, that God's kindness shall not depart from us, nor his covenant of peace be broken. This covenant, and that kindness, are in some respects distinguishable from each other — his kindness is the cause, the covenant is the effect. His kindness being the spring, in the divine mind, of all those streams of mercy, which flow through the channel of the covenant, for the refreshment of his weary and forlorn people.

It is the Covenant of GRACE which is here spoken of. It is mentioned in connection with God's kindness; and he speaks as a forgiving father: "My covenant shall not depart, says the Lord that has mercy on you." Blessed be God! It is not of the covenant of works that he has spoken these unchangeable words, otherwise we might well call upon the hills and the mountains to fall upon us, and hide us from His wrath. The covenant of works is called "the ministration of death," "the ministration of condemnation" — but it is added, that it was a ministration which was to be done

away. But the covenant here spoken of is "the ministration of the Spirit," "the ministration of righteousness," "the everlasting covenant," of which the apostle says, "if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remains is glorious."

It is a Covenant of REDEMPTION. God here speaks as the Redeemer of his people, "For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord your Redeemer."

It is GOD'S Covenant. He appropriates it to himself when he calls it the "covenant of MY peace;" nay, it is identified in Scripture with the necessary and unchangeable attributes of the divine nature. It is called "the counsel of God," "the wisdom of God," "the power of God unto salvation." So that if there is an immutable perfection in God, which no change in creation can alter — we may rest assured of the stability of that covenant which is the charter of our immortal hopes. His faithfulness, his truth, his love — are all pledged to its accomplishment; and for the honor of his name, as well as for the happiness of his people, "God will ever be mindful of his covenant."

It is a Covenant of LIFE — eternal life being the end in which it terminates. It is a covenant of faith — faith being the means by which its blessings are enjoyed. It is a covenant of promises — promises which embrace everything that is needful for our safety and improvement here, and for our endless happiness hereafter. It is a sure covenant, based on God's infallible decree, registered in his unchangeable word, and sealed by the Savior's blood. It is a well-ordered covenant, arranged by unerring wisdom, and adapted, in all respects, to the nature and necessities of his people.

It is a covenant of PEACE, of actual peace with God, and of sensible peace in the heart. Of actual peace, for Christ "has made peace by the blood of the cross." He has taken away the enmity, and laid the ground of a full and everlasting reconciliation between God and his people. So soon as we know the completeness and sufficiency of Christ's atoning sacrifice, and the success with which he discharged the conditions and stipulations of that covenant — we not only see the solid ground of a sinner's acceptance, but we may also enjoy, in a measure proportioned to the strength and constancy of our faith, the sensible experience of peace in our own hearts. And what kind of peace is this? God says, it is "My Peace," "the very peace of God which surpasses all understanding!" It is the same peace the Savior referred to, when, conversing with his sorrowing disciples in the prospect of his departure, he bequeathed it as his dying blessing, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid!" "Not as the world gives," for the world gives insincerely or partially, or only for a season — its best gifts, even when longest enjoyed, are in their own nature transient. We shall either be taken away from them, or they shall be taken from us, and assuredly they must terminate when the world itself is no more. But the peace of God, having its seat in the soul, and being independent of all outward conditions, is "a well of water that springs up unto everlasting life!"

It is an EVERLASTING Covenant. Its origin is hid in the eternal counsels of God before time began — and its outcomes shall be unfolded after time shall have run its course. The "eternal purpose which he purposed in Jesus Christ before the world was," although not revealed in all its vastness until "the fullness of times," did, nevertheless, determine the course of providence, and influence

the condition of the human race, from the beginning. All events, the fall itself, the subsequent treatment of Adam and his posterity, the rise, establishment, and overthrow of nations and kingdoms, the marvelous economy of the Jews — all were permitted, with reference to this scheme of salvation, and were from the first subordinate, and will ultimately be rendered subservient, to the confirmation and establishment of God's eternal covenant.

Down to this hour, it has stood unchanged, and from this hour onwards, to the end of time — will its influence extend. Men will, as of old, ridicule its claims, or deny its truth, or reject its authority, or refuse its offered blessings. Infidels, and idolaters, and the wicked of all classes, may combine to overthrow it — the fires of persecution may be lighted, and the sword unsheathed against its defenders. But that covenant, which rests on the decree of God, which bears the seal of the Redeemer's blood, and to which the Divine Spirit bears witness — shall survive every successive assault, and remain, unchanged and unchangeable, after all its enemies have gone down to the grave! Nay, after the earth itself shall have been dissolved, and every man shall have disappeared from its surface — that covenant shall be still the same — eternity itself will only unfold its everlasting outcomes!

These great truths —

the immortality of man,

the immutability of God,

the verity of his word,

the stability of his covenant,

the unchangeableness of his kindness

— these are the pillars and supports of Christian faith and hope. They are eternal and unchangeable truths. Therefore, "We say with confidence: The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging!" "My heart and my flesh may fail — but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever" — for this is his own imperishable promise, "Though the mountains depart and the hills be removed — yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed — says the LORD, who has compassion on you." Is it true that we are immortal beings? Is it true that there is an unchangeable and eternal God? Is it true that he has spoken to us, and that his Word is in our hands, a Word which shall endure forever? Is it true that, in that Word, God reveals to us a covenant, in which, if we are personally interested, our safety is infallibly secured in time, and our happiness for eternity? Is it true, that, on our entering within the bonds of this covenant, embracing its promises, and conforming to its holy spirit — our eternal state depends? And is it, then, reasonable to delay for one hour the act by which we are to secure a saving interest this covenant? Is it right to pass on, from one stage to another of our earthly journey, all the while exposed to sudden death, without having made the everlasting salvation of our souls a matter of certainty? Would the men of the world thus delay, were a covenant or compact left open for their signature, by which they could secure a rich inheritance for themselves and their children on

earth? Would they not be anxious to affix their names to the agreement, so as that all parties might be legally bound — lest, by sickness, or death, or some unforeseen contingency, their opportunity of implementing the deed might be forfeited? Yet, this is for an inheritance on the earth, an inheritance which they cannot long enjoy, however long it may endure — for they and their children must leave it at death. But here is a covenant waiting for our signature, a covenant with God, a charter for an immortal inheritance! Have we signed it for ourselves? Have we done our best to get the names of our children enrolled as "heirs of God" — or are we still "strangers to the covenant of promise, without Christ, and so without God, and without hope?"

Gracious God! have you given us such an economy of grace — a covenant which, like the rainbow, spans the whole horizon of time, and casts on its troubled atmosphere the rays of peace and hope! And shall we not see your rainbow in the clouds, and be glad? Have you sent this covenant as an ark on the swelling waters — and shall we not flee to it as our refuge, and be safe? Have you let down this golden chain out of Heaven, and shall we see it hanging over us, and within our reach, and not lay hold of it? Have you placed us under a dispensation, dictated by kindness, designed for peace, founded on a great redemption, sealed with the blood of your own Son, attested by all your people as well-ordered in all things and sure, and effectual for the highest and holiest ends of our nature? And shall we, educated from our infancy in the knowledge of its truth, and sensible, as we are, that it provides for those needs of our nature which the world cannot supply, and those evils for which the world offers no remedy, shall we — thus educated, thus convinced — turn away from our covenant God, and his everlasting kindness?

God forbid! What shall support us, if this is taken away? The world is about to be destroyed, and even though it were eternal — yet, being mortal, we cannot long enjoy it! Our bodies must be dissolved back into dust — and our immortal, imperishable spirits, what will be their destination at the hour of death? What hopes could we cherish, nay, what dark forebodings might we not feel, were we not supported by God's own recorded promise, "Though the mountains depart and the hills be removed — yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed — says the LORD, who has compassion on you."

## 01.06. Meditation 6

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### MEDITATION 6.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:14-16 In these words, the same divine person, "Jesus the Son of God," is presented in two very different aspects — in the one, as a suffering Savior — in the other, as an exalted Redeemer. And the sorrows which he endured on earth are referred to, as having conduced to the perfection of his character, and the efficacy of his work, as our High Priest in Heaven.

Referring to his sufferings on earth, the apostle declares that he "has been tempted in every way, just as we are." The Redeemer himself is thus presented to our view as a Sufferer; and, perhaps, the most instructive statement respecting the use of affliction, and one which may best serve at once to show its necessity, and to teach us patience in enduring it, is the statement of the apostle, that "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering." Hebrews 2:10 From the disparity of the two cases, it is evident that suffering could not be designed, in all respects for the same uses, when it was applied to "the Captain of our salvation," as when it is inflicted on ourselves. He did not need, like his people, to be convinced of the unsatisfying nature of created happiness, nor to be weaned from attachment to the world, nor to be trained, by any process of discipline, into a state of perfect conformity to the divine will. No alloy of sinful appetite or passion impaired the purity even of his human soul, for he was "without sin."

We are taught, indeed, to believe, that his human nature was, like ours, progressive. He was born into our world in a state of infancy, and although perfect, as being free from every moral blemish — yet his human soul was capable of progress, for "he grew in wisdom as well as in stature." And since, in our own experience, suffering is conducive to the progress of wisdom, who can tell how far the discipline of affliction may have served to expand the powers and to foster the graces by which his holy humanity was adorned!

But, leaving this inquiry, I observe, that it is not in regard to his human nature, viewed apart from the divine, that the apostle here speaks. His words refer to Christ, as "God manifested in the flesh," or as "Emmanuel, God with us." And it is of Christ, in his one person, and in his official character as the Captain of our salvation, that he affirms that "he was made perfect through sufferings." It is declared that these sufferings were essential to his offices, and that they served to perfect his qualifications as our Mediator. In meditating on this view of the subject, we cannot fail to see: That his sufferings perfected his character as Mediator, inasmuch as they constituted that

atonement for sin, by which he had engaged to redeem his chosen people. That our Lord was personally free from sin — is too frequently and plainly stated in the sacred volume, to admit of being either doubted or denied. And, for this reason, it might have been expected that he would have been exempt from all suffering, and especially from death, which is declared to have been "the wages of sin." And unquestionably, had he become incarnate for any other purpose than that of expiating the sins of his people, he would have been as free from suffering as he was from guilt, and his life would have been as much distinguished for its felicity, as it was remarkable for its holiness. But "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." These sufferings were necessary, for "without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." And they were so endured, as to render him perfect, as the Captain of our salvation. Notwithstanding the pressure of that fearful weight of guilt which crushed his soul, and caused him to be "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" — he persevered until he obtained the victory; and although, towards the conclusion of his sorrows, they were awfully aggravated by the judicial withdrawal of his Father's countenance, when he was forsaken and left alone amidst the darkness of Calvary — yet, for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, until he could say: It is finished! And then, as our redemption was completed, so, as our Redeemer, he was made perfect through suffering. By his sufferings, his mediatorial work was fulfilled; and on the ground of his atoning sacrifice, he was qualified "to save unto the very uttermost, all who come unto God by him." The valley of humiliation and sorrow being the path through which he reached the glories of that mediatorial throne, where he now reigns as a Prince and a Savior, giving repentance and the remission of sins. And should not this comfort the mourner? that he has a perfect Savior to look to — one who was severely tried — but who has nobly triumphed, and who has already cleared away every obstacle, and opened up a free access to pardon and peace! The sufferings of Christ were not only necessary as an expiation for sin — but also to perfect his example. He is represented in Scripture as the pattern, not less than as the priest of his Church. It is true he might have given an example of holiness, without subjecting himself to that humiliation and debasement by which the narrative of his life is distinguished; but had he not been brought into circumstances similar to those of his people, his example would neither have been so perfect in itself, nor so well adapted to the situation of those for whose imitation it was designed. Had he appeared in the form of man — but exempt from all the frailties and needs to which human nature is subject — had he lived on earth surrounded with the glories of his divinity, or even in the enjoyment of that affluence and those honors by which the great men of this world are distinguished — had he never known . . .

the bitterness of human sorrow,

the privations of poverty,

the pains of hunger and thirst, and

the sickness and toil by which the spirit of man is overwhelmed

— he would have been regarded rather as an extraordinary exception, than as an example to the common race of men. And any sentiment of admiration which his character might have awakened, would have been mingled with a feeling of envy for his privileged lot. In these circumstances, too, he could not have manifested some graces of character which it was his great object to inculcate on his disciples, and which their circumstances in the present world must frequently call them to

exercise — such as . . .

patience under suffering,

humble resignation to the divine will, and

unshaken integrity in the midst of trials and sorrows.

Hence he assumed our nature, with all its sinless infirmities and needs. He became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." There is not one form of privation, nor one kind of suffering, to which any of us can be exposed — which was not endured by him, whose character, from the manger to the cross, was that of "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And in proportion as his sufferings were numerous and severe — so was his example the more perfect, and the better fitted to engage the admiration of all who are called to endure any one of the many sorrows which were crowded into his earthly lot.

It does not fall within our present province to deduce from his example, the many instructive lessons which it affords — but only to apply it for the consolation of those who, like him, are subject to severe affliction. That it does furnish a very precious consolation to mourners, is evident from its being specially applied to their case by the apostle, when, referring to their numerous trials, he commands them to "consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest they be weary and faint in their minds." The simple fact that he was afflicted, and afflicted, too, by a very sore and protracted series of trials — should serve to banish from their minds the idea that affliction is necessarily the fruit of divine wrath, or the token of a hopeless state. For he was afflicted at the very time when God regarded him "as his well-beloved Son, in whom he was well-pleased." In Christ's afflictions, every believer may find the counterpart of his own. Born of parents occupying the lowest rank in society, he was, from his earliest infancy, subject to the privations of poverty. And even in advanced life, and when engaged in the prosecution of his public ministry, "he had nowhere to lay his head." Are any of his people subject to the same privations, straitened in their worldly circumstances, and dependent on the daily bounty of Providence for the supply of their simplest needs? And do they sometimes feel a disposition to be "anxious and troubled," or even to murmur at the unequal distribution of temporal comforts? Let them look to the Savior, and let them reflect that it was for their sakes he descended into a state of poverty, that he might give a perfect example of contentment and cheerfulness, even in the most adverse circumstances, and of humble trust in the providence of him "who feeds the ravens when they cry." And can they find it in their hearts to murmur or complain because of their poverty, when they read of the poverty of the Son of God? Are any afflicted by reason of the alienation of friends, or the malice of enemies? Are they suffering in their good name, or in their worldly respectability, by ridicule or calumny? Or have they tasted the bitterness of being betrayed by those in whom they reposed their confidence, or repaid with ingratitude by those whom they had served?

Let them look to the Savior, and behold him forsaken in early life by his nearest relatives — surrounded with enemies the more inveterate and hostile, because he had offered no provocation except to love — his character assailed as one in league with Beelzebub, although he was infinitely holier than we can pretend to be. He was followed by persecution wherever he went — repaid with ingratitude even by those for whose benefit he had exerted miraculous power — and at

length betrayed by one of his own disciples, who had lived and sojourned with him for years! And shall any complaint be heard from us, respecting the treachery of friends or the malice of enemies — when none proceeded from the Son of God? Or shall we venture to cherish resentment, or to meditate revenge, when we read, that "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly" — and died with these words on his lips, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" Are any called, in the course of providence, to endure unusually severe suffering, or to make sacrifices peculiarly painful, or to undertake labors from which they are disposed to shrink? Let them look to the Captain of their salvation, who felt, as they feel, the severity of his trials, and the arduous nature of his work; and who more than once expressed his feelings in this earnest supplication, "Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me;" but added, "nevertheless, not my will — but may your will be done." And can they, after this, venture in anything to oppose the will, or to murmur at the appointments of God — when Christ, even in the very depths of his agony, resigned himself to suffer according to his Father's will? In the lot of our Savior, not only one or a few of these evils were found — but all were combined, and each in its highest measure, as if it were God's purpose to exhibit, in his person, every form of human suffering, and in one "man of sorrows," to give an example to all who are, in any measure, "acquainted with grief." We can scarcely point to one form of misery, excepting that of personal guilt, to which we may not find a counterpart in the life of Jesus. And thus was his example perfected — a suffering Savior becomes the pattern of his suffering people. And what variety of character is thus concentrated in his one example! Immaculate purity combined with vigilance in resisting temptation — firmness and composure in the midst of difficulties, united with simple dependence on his Father's providence — the noblest magnanimity appearing under the most humble deportment — an indignance against whatever was base or dishonorable in the conduct of his enemies, united with a most tender and loving temper toward their persons. In the lowest depths of his humiliation, the Redeemer was sensible of the honor which was due to him — yet he bore reproaches and insults with a meek and quiet spirit. He was often fatigued — but never enervated by exertion. He was beset by dangers — but never daunted by them. He was assailed by persecution — yet not diverted from his purpose. He was as firm against the oppressor, as he was kind to the oppressed.

Considering all the various aspects of his character as they are presented in the narrative of his life, we see how many of the most precious and engaging of its qualities have been developed by his afflictions; and how true it is, in reference to his example, as well as to his atoning sacrifice, that, as the Captain of our salvation, "he was made perfect through suffering." Still farther, The sufferings of the "Captain of our salvation" served to perfect his mediatorial character, and to promote the end of his mission, inasmuch as they give us the assurance of his sympathy. The human spirit, when pressed down with sorrow, longs for sympathy, and the sympathy which it seeks is that of a being possessed of kindred feelings with its own. Even from among men, what sufferer will select for his friend and comforter in adversity, one who has enjoyed a life of uninterrupted prosperity, and who has never tasted the bitterness of sorrow? He seeks to another stricken spirit for sympathy. Let an angel descend from the upper sanctuary to visit the mourner, as kind and benevolent as may be his words — he is felt to be an angel still. The mourner yearns for a human heart to which he may confide his sorrows — a heart filled with the homely feelings of humanity, and feelings tried as his own have been.

Jesus, the Son of God, became man, and took "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," that he might have a fellow-feeling with our infirmities, and that we might have the strong consolation of his sympathy in the hour of trial. It is true, that in his divine nature, he was omniscient, and that all our needs were known to him before he descended into an estate of humiliation; his experience has added nothing to his infinite knowledge. But, oh! it has served to endear him to his suffering people, and to adapt his character to their need.

We cannot venture to make his human experience the subject of our speculation; but we are assured of the fact, that to his Godhead humanity was united; and we are taught in Scripture to regard the feelings of his human nature as uniting him to us in the bond of brotherhood, and as an additional motive to confide in his love. For thus says the apostle, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." Hebrews 4:15-16 The benefit of his sufferings, as affording an assurance of his sympathy, will be farther apparent, if we now meditate, On the same divine person not only as a suffering — but also as an exalted Redeemer; and consider the sorrows which he endured on earth, as having conducted to the perfection of his character, and the efficacy of his work as our High Priest in Heaven. In the one clause, the Redeemer is described as "a man of sorrows," "who was tried in all points like as we are;" in the other, as "a Great High Priest, who has passed into the heavens." His exaltation to glory is a grand and consoling truth to his people, and it is here presented as the rock of their confidence and hope, "we have a Great High Priest who has passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God;" — a Priest — a High Priest — a Great High Priest — a Great High Priest that has passed into the heavens. What more shall we add? Jesus the Son of God! The glory of his divine person, and the dignity of his exalted state, may well cheer us in the darkest hour. But the brightness of his glory, and the height of his exaltation, are enhanced and endeared to his suffering people, by the touching recollection, that "he, too, was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

It is the same divine person that has passed into the heavens, and there taken his place at the right hand of God, far above all principality and power — who once . . .

trod the same valley of tears which we now tread,

and shared our feelings as well as our sufferings on earth,

stood by the bier of the widow's son,

groaned in spirit, and was troubled, and wept at the grave of Lazarus,

spoke soothingly to his weeping sisters;

in his own person, felt what it was to live a suffering life, and to die a painful death. And in the pangs of hunger and thirst, in the privations of poverty, in the perils of persecution, and in the deep agony of the garden and the cross — tasted every variety of human sorrow, and sounded the lowest depths of human nature. The same divine person, who then suffered and wept, "has passed into the heavens" — but think not that he has left his human sympathies behind him. There, as here, he is our High Priest — a Great High Priest, and highly exalted — yet, not the less

a "merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God," — a High Priest, who is, indeed, "the brightness of his Father's glory," yet, "made like unto his brethren," that having himself suffered, being tempted, "he might be able to support those who are tempted."

He is our High Priest still! Amidst the glories of the upper sanctuary, the same gracious work, and the same suffering people, engage his thoughts, as when he sojourned on earth. Here he offered a sacrifice for sin, which he there presents at the throne; and he is exalted for the very purpose of carrying into effect, and bringing to its completion, that work of redeeming mercy which brought him down from Heaven. The office which he still sustains, and the work in which he is engaged on our behalf, are of the highest importance to our well-being; and the consideration of his sufferings on earth, imparts to his agency in Heaven a character of tenderness which is fitted to cheer the disconsolate spirit, and to invite its confidence and hope.

"He is exalted, as a SAVIOR, to give repentance and the remission of sins." He has the power of dispensing pardon — and who will question his willingness to exercise it? Did he undertake the work of redemption, "and humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," that he might accomplish it — and is he unwilling freely to bestow the pardon which he so painfully procured? Was "his soul exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," that sin might be forgiven? And now, that he has passed into the heavens, crowned with victory — will he withhold the fruits of his triumph? Has he addressed to every sinner who hears the Gospel, the most tender invitations, and called them, in accents of strong persuasion, to come to him? And will any sinner, however guilty or forlorn, be coldly received or sternly repulsed, when, taking Christ's own word for his warrant, he looks up to him in prayer?

Oh! little do we know the tenderness of his heart, and the freeness of his grace, if we can for one instant entertain these dark suspicions. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin." "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Whoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely." The warrant is clear; no bar remains to shut us out from the Savior. And the fact, that he suffered and died to redeem us, affords a precious assurance, that he is willing as well as "able to save unto the very uttermost, all who come unto God by him."

He is also represented as our ADVOCATE or INTERCESSOR with the Father. He stands engaged to plead our cause in Heaven. On earth he prayed for his disciples, and he prays for them still. Before yet he left the world, he remembered their sad estate, the trials which were yet before them, and the dangers by which they should be surrounded, and he offered up for them, and for us, that touching prayer: "Now I am no more in the world — but these are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep through your own name those whom you have given me." "I pray not that you should take them out of the world — but that you should keep them from the evil." "Sanctify them through your truth." "Father, I will that they also whom you have given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Is any mourner so disconsolate that he cannot pray — so bowed down to the earth, by the pressure of sorrow, that he cannot venture to lift his eye to the throne of grace? Let him hear the Redeemer's prayer for him, and take courage; and let him remember, that such as he was when he uttered that prayer on earth — such is he still in Heaven. What can be more consoling than to know that we go not unbefriended to the throne of

the Eternal; that at God's right hand we have an advocate, even Jesus Christ the righteous; that he has a fellow-feeling with us in all our infirmities; that he has himself known the heart of a suppliant, and, that even as he once made supplication, with strong crying and tears — so will he sympathize with our earnestness, and present our prayers with a feeling of personal interest at his Father's throne.

He is represented as our PROPHET or TEACHER; and what can be more consoling than to know, that, in the days of his humiliation, he was himself in a state of infancy, and grew in wisdom as well as in stature, since it gives us the assurance, that "he can have compassion on the ignorant, and on those who are out of the way;" that he will sympathize with our feelings, and make allowance for our slowness, and encourage, rather than rebuke, our feeble and imperfect efforts? "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." The narrative of his life on earth contains many incidents that are fitted to invite our confidence in him, as a very tender and compassionate teacher; for, although possessed of infinite knowledge, and grieved often by the narrow prejudices of his disciples — Oh! with what patience did he unravel their perplexities, and bear with their perverse ignorance, and guide them, step by step, into the knowledge of saving truth, "giving them line upon line, and precept upon precept — here a little, and there a little," "according as they were able to bear it;" not taxing their feeble powers — but allowing them gradually to open, and, as they opened, filling them with the purest light; encouraging the timid, gently restraining the forward, and rebuking none but such as were faultfinding enemies to the truth. While, over the whole field of instruction, was shed the light of his gracious love, and of his glorious example. Let the disconsolate spirit rejoice and be glad, for the Redeemer is still the teacher of his people; and with the same patience and tenderness as of old, will he bear with their infirmities, and guide them into all truth. For this end, and also for the sanctification and comfort of his people in all ages, he is the DISPENSER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. "I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth;" "who dwells with you, and shall be in you;" and "the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name — he shall teach you all things." The Redeemer has not been unmindful of his gracious promise; for, referring to the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Peter declared, "that being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has shed forth this which you now see and hear!"

Believers in all ages have acknowledged the faithfulness of his promise, and the unspeakable value of this gift; attributing all their spiritual discernment of divine truth, all their progress in the work of sanctification, and all their enjoyment of spiritual consolation — to the influences of that Divine Spirit who has engaged "to help their infirmities," and to instruct, purify, and comfort the minds of the disciples. Is any mourner, then, weighed down by a sense of his ignorance, or the hardness and insensibility of his heart, or the prevalence of corruption, or great spiritual darkness, which shuts out every ray of Christian peace and hope; and does he feel that all the consoling views which the Bible presents of the nature and ends of affliction — can have no effect on his mind, so long as it is thus hardened by sin, and overshadowed with darkness? Let him look to the Holy Spirit of promise, and rejoice that an all-sufficient Sanctifier is provided; one who can subdue the deadliest corruption, and cure the most hopeless ignorance, and dispel the deepest darkness. Let him pray for his assistance and blessing. And, to encourage his hope, let him remember, that the Redeemer who died for him, has authority to dispense the Spirit, and that his own Word

assures him, that his assistance will be given in answer to prayer. "If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children — then how much more will your Father in Heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" The Redeemer is exalted as head over all things to his Church. He is not only the king of his people, the master whom they serve, and who will not lay upon them more than they are able to bear — but he presides over everything, both in nature and in grace, by which their interests can in any way be affected, and he conducts his universal government with a view to their good. The inference which the apostle draws from the fact, that "God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son," is, that "if God spared not his own Son — but gave him up to the death for us all — much more will he with him also freely give us all things." And what is meant by the "all things" here spoken of, we gather from that noble passage, which may well be called the charter of the believer's privileges: "All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Our interest in this glorious charter rests on the right of Christ, with whom we are joint heirs. And of him it is said, "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand;" and that he has made him "head over all things to the Church, which is his body." From the intimate union which exists between the Redeemer and his people, and the deep interest which he takes in their welfare — the apostle draws the consoling conclusion, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God."

We have already seen, that, amidst the numerous afflictions of life, mourners may derive consolation from the thought that God's providence presides over their affairs. But the Bible gives a new aspect to providence, and an additional ground of comfort, when it represents all the affairs of this world as being subordinated, under the mediatorial government of the Savior, to the scheme of redemption, and as concurring with the means embraced in that scheme for the promotion of God's glory and his people's happiness. In this view, the scheme of redemption is not only the principal feature of providence — but it throws a clear light over every other part of it. Like the sun, which is not only the most glorious object in the firmament — but which sheds its luster over every part of nature, and gilds with its beams what would else have been dark and cheerless as the grave — so the scheme of redemption, while it is the most glorious object which the volume of providence presents, casts its own sacred light over every page of that volume, and gilds with the rays of mercy and peace, the darkest mysteries which it contains. For the whole government of the world is represented as having been confided to the Savior himself — so that we have the unspeakable consolation of knowing, that the same divine and compassionate Redeemer, who suffered, and bled, and died on our account — has the entire management of our affairs; that the same love which prompted him to accomplish the work of our redemption — still actuates his holy administration; and that nothing can happen in the course of providence which is not permitted or appointed by him "who loved us and gave himself for us." In proportion to our persuasion of his love, should be our confidence in his government. And what proof of sincerity, or what pledge of love, can we desire which is not afforded by his past dealings on our behalf? If he died for us, will he not now, when all things are put under his power, "make all things work together for our good?" And may we not rest assured, that the love which he manifested on earth is but a pledge of the love which he still bears to us, and that he will neither forget nor forsake us, until he has accomplished the grand end of his mission by our deliverance from all evil, and our joyful entrance into the kingdom of Heaven? "He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all — how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" Romans 8:32

True, there may still be much mystery in the methods of his providence, and we may often be at a loss to discover the operation of that divine love which he is pledged to exercise on our behalf; clouds and darkness may encompass our path, and at times our faith in the superintending love of the Redeemer may be ready to fail. But we have his sure and faithful word of promise, "that he will never leave us nor forsake us." That promise is sealed by his precious blood, in which we have both a proof and a pledge of his sincerity, that should silence every murmur of doubt or despair.

We have the testimony of all his disciples in every age, that, when "they trusted in him, they were not ashamed; and that, although they were often "led by a way which they did not know," he made "darkness light before them, and crooked things straight!" And, resting on this foundation in the humble confidence of faith, may we not say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him until the great day!"

Oh! how cheering to know, that Christ is now the same in Heaven as he was when on earth; that the glory of Heaven has not changed him; that, when he died, he did not throw aside our nature — but resumed it at his resurrection, and still retains it in personal union with the divine nature; that, amidst the joys of Heaven, he has not forgotten any one of his "little flock," for whom he suffered in the garden and on the cross; that he who was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," is now made "head over all things," yet, that he still regards us with a brother's eye; that, having borne our grief, he still sympathizes with our sorrows! He is "a Great High Priest who has passed into the heavens," yet, "he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities!" While awed by the majesty of his Godhead — how cheering to think of the tenderness of his humanity! And, when almost afraid to lift up our eyes to the place where his honor dwells, how affecting the thought, that there is a human heart on the throne of grace!

## 01.07. Meditation 7

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### MEDITATION 7.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he scourges everyone he accepts as a son. Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Hebrews 12:6-11 The Bible affords a solid ground of comfort under trial, in the views which it presents of the Uses and Ends of affliction, under the economy of redemption. While it declares, that all our afflictions proceed from the hand of God, and that he employs them as a means of manifesting the rectitude, and vindicating the honor of his government — it affirms, nevertheless, that he takes no pleasure in the infliction of suffering for its own sake, and that "he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Had the Bible presented no other than this negative view of affliction, it would still have cleared the character of God from the unworthy suspicion, that he takes a cruel or capricious delight in the infliction of suffering, and would have served so far to compose our minds under trial, by giving us the assurance, that no suffering would be inflicted without some reason which was satisfactory to His infinite benevolence and wisdom. But the Bible is far from confining its consoling discoveries to this negative view of the subject: it not only denies that affliction is the result of caprice or cruelty — but affirms that, under the scheme of grace, it is the result of pure and comprehensive benevolence, and the means of positive good.

It is one of the grandest peculiarities of the scheme which is unfolded in Scripture, that it subordinates everything to one great and beneficent end — that it educes from acknowledged evil, the most substantial good — that it makes sin the occasion of a bright display of divine holiness, and suffering the occasion of a marvelous manifestation of divine love — and that, in its application to the hearts of men, it converts the very afflictions, which are the fruits of sin — into the means of progressive sanctification and eternal blessedness. The legal desert of "the old man" is thus made the moral discipline of "the new creature," — the penalty under the Law becomes a privilege under the Gospel — and those afflictions, which were awarded as the "wages of transgression," are converted, by the scheme of redemption, into "means of grace." This is beautifully intimated in Psalms 89:1-52, where, in stating the terms of the covenant of grace, God makes affliction the subject of a promise to the Redeemer, as the head of that covenant, and through him to his believing people: "If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands — I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered." Psalms 89:30-34 Being provided for in the covenant of grace, and made the matter of a promise to the Redeemer, these chastisements are to be regarded as among the privileges of God's people. It is true, that had they not sinned, they would have been exempted from suffering; and their trials are, therefore, in one

sense, the consequences of guilt. But it is equally true, that they are not now awarded as the wages or penal effects of transgression — but subordinated to a plan of mercy, and sent for purposes of good. They come from God, not as messengers of his avenging wrath — but as tokens of his paternal love. And in sending them, he acts, not as an offended judge, awarding punishment — but as a kind and forgiving father, meting out such discipline and correction to his children as they each require.

It does not follow from these remarks, that every one who is visited with affliction is a child of God, or that, in every instance, affliction has the effect of instating the sufferer in that blessed condition. Like every other means, its effect will depend on the mode in which it is improved by the individual; and hence it is said to produce "the peaceable fruits of righteousness" only in those who are suitably "exercised thereby." In many cases, as in that of Pharaoh, affliction may be the means of hardening the heart, and may leave it more insensible to every right feeling, and more callous to every sacred impression than before. But this is no reason why we should not admire the benevolence, as well as the wisdom of God, in sending affliction — any more than the neglect of the ordinary and prescribed means, on the part of men, should lead us to question the goodness of God in giving them his Word and ordinances. By these, God furnishes them with an opportunity of improvement and a means of salvation; and in like manner, by affliction, he summons their attention to divine things, and calls upon them to repent and be saved. But while these words do not affirm that every one who is severely afflicted is a child of God — they do, on the other hand, assure us, that no amount, and no continuance of sorrow, can be a proof that we are not members of his family; and this discovery may well be regarded as a very valuable and a very consoling one.

For, when a believer is visited with severe affliction, and especially if his trials be numerous as well as severe, and if they are continued in his person, or in his family, for a great length of time, while many around him are enjoying uninterrupted prosperity, or speedily relieved from slighter trials — he will be too apt to entertain the awful thought, that God would not thus deal with him if he were really one of his children, and either despondingly to question his own interest in the divine favor, or, through the malignant suggestions of Satan, to cherish hard thoughts of God.

Many have experienced this sore trial of their patience and faith; but let it be impressed on our hearts, that it is not from the outward dispensations of providence — but from the inward qualities of our own character, that we are to draw the evidence of our state in the sight of God — that no pressure of affliction, however severe, and no continuance of it, however protracted, can prove that we are not the objects of God's fatherly love, or that we are cast out of his favor. And that, although the aspect of a frowning providence may well be improved as a call to vigilant self-inspection, that we may discover whether God has any controversy with us, and for what cause, we should not, on any occasion, venture to regard affliction as a proof of reprobacy. On the contrary, "whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives;" and if our chastisements seem to be more grievous, and more protracted than those of others, we may rest assured, either that our corruptions are so strong as to require a severe remedy — or that God is thereby preparing us for some great end, for some fiery temptation, or some eminent service in his Church on earth, or, perhaps, for a speedy translation to his own presence in Heaven. But whatever may be the immediate reasons of his dealings with us, let us rest assured, that every affliction which he sends on any of his children is the fruit of paternal love — that he has

a most holy, wise, and benevolent purpose in view — and that, either here or hereafter, we shall have reason to acknowledge with many who have gone before us, that "God has done all things well," and that "in very faithfulness he has afflicted us."

We are taught in these words, not only that divine love is the source from which the afflictions of God's people proceed — but that the end for which they are designed is the gradual improvement and ultimate perfection of their moral character.

According to the Scriptures, all suffering, under God's administration, has a moral end. Were we to view affliction by itself, and without reference to its results, it would necessarily appear a very dark and mysterious part of divine providence. Physical suffering, apart from its moral uses, cannot be an object of pleasing contemplation to any rational being in the universe; but, in connection with these uses, it may be one of the brightest manifestations of divine wisdom, and one of the clearest proofs of his comprehensive benevolence.

We are not, indeed, at liberty to suppose, that suffering under the divine government is merely corrective. On the contrary, it is, in the case of the impenitent, judicial, penal, and punitive, in the strictest sense of the terms. But even in that case, although the party immediately subject to it is not benefitted — yet the infliction of punishment on account of sin, may, nevertheless, conduce to the moral instruction of unnumbered myriads of intelligent creatures, and to their confirmation in those habits of holy obedience, which, without such moral lessons, might be in danger of being broken by the power of temptation — since, to the power of temptation, we have reason to believe, they are exposed in common with those who have already fallen.

God's government is conducted by means — to his rational creatures he presents rational inducements. And, in this view, the final punishment of some may be the result of the most comprehensive benevolence to his subjects at large — just as the incarceration, or capital punishment, of a few in this kingdom, is the means, if not of reclaiming them — yet of impressing on the minds of others the great distinctions of morals, and the obligations of social duty. But here we speak of affliction in reference to its bearings on God's people; and, in their case, not only is there a moral influence exerted on others by means of their afflictions — but a direct moral end contemplated in their own blessed experience. God visits them with affliction, that "by the sadness of the countenance, the heart may be made better." And just in proportion as moral improvement and perfection are superior to mere physical enjoyment or worldly prosperity, in the same proportion ought our gratitude for the benefit conferred, to exceed our sorrow for the suffering inflicted. To a mind which is sensible wherein the true nobility and happiness of its nature consist, there can be no difficulty in perceiving, that whatever tends to subdue unruly passion, or to implant, invigorate, and nourish the higher principles and affections of the soul — should be valued in proportion to the greatness of its design, however painful it may be in itself. And if the nauseous draught be received with eagerness, when the restoration of bodily health is expected from it — then how much more should we be willing to taste of that cup of sorrow, however bitter, by which our immortal spirits are to be restored to a state of moral healthfulness and vigor? That the general design of all the afflictions with which any of God's people are visited in the present state, is their progressive sanctification and final perfection, is evident from the whole scope and tenor of Scripture, wherein the necessity and usefulness of affliction, for this end, are frequently stated in very emphatic terms, and illustrated by apposite examples: "This is the will of God concerning

you," says the apostle, "even your sanctification." And this being the grand object of God's design in Scripture, is also the end of all his dealings in providence. It is not only said, "that affliction yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness," but that "God chastens us not for his pleasure — but for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness." That this is the design of all the afflictions with which we are visited, may well serve to reconcile us to them, even when they are most frequent and most severe. For to a mind that is sensible of its own high capacity, and of its best interests — what object can appear so truly great or desirable as this — a progressive and ultimately a perfect conformity, through the sanctification of its powers, to the very image and character of God? That man is capable of such a resemblance, is the very highest proof of his dignity as a rational and moral being. That God designs such a resemblance, is the noblest proof of his affection; for what higher gift could he bestow than a character similar to his own? And that affliction is one of the means by which this blessing is to be bestowed; and this resemblance improved and perfected, is one of the most precious truths of Scripture, and the very sweetest consolation of sorrow. Were we sensible of the infinite capacities for improvement and happiness which such a design, on the part of God, necessarily implies on the part of man; were we duly impressed with the consideration, that the nobility of our nature consists in our capacity of knowing God, and being like him; that the misery and degradation of our present estate, flow from our ignorance of God, and the dissimilarity of our thoughts and feelings to those of the Divine mind; that our only prospect of being restored either to honor or happiness, depends on our being restored, in some measure, to a state of conformity to the will and likeness of God; and that, for this high and lofty end, affliction is employed as a means by which, if duly improved, that end may be attained in some measure on earth, and enjoyed perfectly and eternally in heaven — oh! what heart would then murmur or complain, because of the strokes by which the rock is beaten into a conformity with God's image; or because of the fire of that furnace, by which the dross of our nature is separated from the pure and precious ore, and out of which we are to come as "gold seven times purified — vessels of honor, fitted for the Master's use?" That affliction is a means fitted to this end, might be inferred from the fact, that it is employed as such by a God of unerring wisdom, who knows our frame and all the influences by which it can be affected, for good or for evil. But we are not left to conceive of it as an arbitrary appointment, between which and its end, no natural adaptation can be traced. It is not only a sovereign remedy — but a suitable remedy, and adapted, in many respects, to the evil which it is designed to cure. The evil of our present condition consists mainly in our affections being estranged from God and given to the creature; in our tendency to forsake the fountain of living waters, and to hew out for ourselves in the world, cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water. The connection between alienation from God and attachment to the creature, is so intimate and sure, that the one is inseparable from the other; it being a law of our nature, that our affections and desires must have some object on which they fix their regards, and from which they draw, or expect, their gratification. And if they be once estranged from God, their proper object — they will infallibly fix on some one or more objects in the world.

Thus, a man who, forgetting his immortal prospects, debases his nature by making himself the slave of avarice; whose earliest thoughts and whose last cares are engrossed with money; who thinks of nothing, speaks of nothing, cares for nothing, and does nothing, without a reference to the accumulation of a fortune; who, for this, lives the life of a slave, and stirs not from his place of business, and plies the oar of trade "from shining morn to dewy eve". On such a man, what could have so powerful an effect as the total ruin of his fortune, and the scattering of his gains? Cruel,

indeed, would such an outcome be to all his anxious thoughts, and prudent plans, and industrious habits, and bold enterprises — had he no other than an earthly prospect. But God designs that man for eternity — He offers him a portion in Heaven — money stands between him and that prospect; and God dashes the cup of prosperity from his trembling hand, that it may not drown his soul in everlasting perdition! And is not this a benevolent deed? Is it not dictated by the highest wisdom, as the very discipline which is most necessary, and will be most effectual in such a case?

Again, a man who, losing all relish for the sweets of divine contemplation, and the exercise of his moral affections, gives himself over to the indulgence of his sensual appetites, who finds his highest happiness in the gratification of his palate, or the excitement of drunkenness, or the habits of profligacy. On such a man, what would have so powerful an effect as the total ruin of his health, and the visitation of an illness which left him neither the capacity nor the wish for his favorite indulgences? God designs that man, also, for eternity; but he lingers around the cisterns of worldly pleasure, in the fond hope of realizing a happiness which he has long waited for in vain. God shatters the cistern, and dashes the cup of pleasure out of his reluctant hand, that he may no longer deceive himself with the vain hope — but seek to the fountain of living waters which springs up unto everlasting life. And is not this, also, a benevolent deed — however painful may be the present disappointment, and however protracted the suffering which it occasions? Was it not dictated by the highest wisdom, as the very discipline which is most necessary, and will be most effectual in such a case?

Again, a man of ardent affections has allowed his heart to be estranged from God, by an undue attachment to his wife, or children, or other relatives and friends. Amiable as his kindness to them appears — yet, if they engross that place in his affection which is due to God alone — his heart is not in a right moral state, and his happiness is based on a precarious foundation. God takes away the desire of his eyes by a stroke — he is stunned by the shock of bereavement. But, perhaps, even this is not enough; his affections thus violently severed from one object, may only gather into greater strength, and settle on another. That other object of undue attachment is also smitten and dies. And it is not until, by such strokes, he is impressed with the vanity of everything, except the enjoyment of God as his chief good — that the afflicting hand of providence shall be withdrawn from him and his house.

Painful, indeed, is the breaking up of a family by bereavement, when death smites one, and then another, of the happy household. And desolate, indeed, is the heart of him who is thus left alone in a wilderness where roses once had encircled his path; but they stood between him and God, and it was in mercy and faithfulness that God sent a worm into his gourd, until it withered around him and died.

These illustrations may serve to show, at once, the goodness and the wisdom of God in sending affliction, and adapting the methods of His discipline, to the necessities of His people. And they cannot fail to recall to the minds of some, the recollection of many incidents in their past life, which were felt to be very painful, and seemed very dark and mysterious at the time of their occurrence — but to which they can now look back as the very brightest manifestation of the care and kindness of their Redeemer.

They may remember a time when the wealth, or pleasures, or business, or the world — appeared to them robed in attractions to which they were too willing to yield, and threatened to engross the

chief place in those affections which God challenges as his own.

They may remember some one object, which, more than any other, engaged their eager pursuit, and awakened their deepest interest; and that, for this, they were on the very verge of committing themselves to a course of life, which, if prosecuted with the ardor with which they were about to enter on it — would have long before now estranged them altogether from God, and ultimately conducted them to eternal perdition! But, just as their affections were gathering around it, and just as they were stretching forth their hand to seize it — that cup of pleasure, or power, or prosperity, or worldliness — was dashed in pieces. And as they wept over its broken fragments, they were taught a lesson which they were very reluctant to learn: that the creature is too frail and perishing to satisfy an immortal soul, and that God would not permit them to seek their happiness in what was unworthy of their highest pursuits.

If, by these means, they were first awakened to a perception of the vanity of the world, and of the infinite magnitude and importance of divine things; if their afflictions were so sanctified as to become the means, in the hand of God, of their conversion — then, I am sure that they cannot fail to look back on the most painful of them all, not only without one sentiment of rebellious regret — but with the deepest emotions of gratitude and of admiration! They will never cease to regard the discipline of affliction as one of the most powerful instruments of good in the hands of the Redeemer, and one of the most precious privileges of his people — if, by these means, they have really "had their eyes opened, and have been turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto the living God!" With the views which were then, for the first time, opened up to them of the transcendent truths of the gospel, and which, if they are really converted, they must still cherish with the fondest attachment — they can look back on affliction, and see it in a new and most interesting light — even as a very thick dark cloud — but a cloud, nevertheless, which has showered down upon them the most precious blessings, and has shed over their souls the freshness and fertility of "a well watered garden, which the Lord has blessed." In their subsequent history, too, they may remember, that just as often as their affections were about to return to the world, when they had begun to backslide from God, or were in danger of doing so — just so often did God interpose, by a new stroke of affliction, whereby they were admonished of their danger, and prevented from ruin.

They may remember many seasons, when the impressions of spiritual truths were almost effaced from their minds, and when "the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," were making gradual but sure encroachments on their minds and desires — when their hearts were beginning to settle down into a contented enjoyment of the world, and they were little, if at all, animated by the heavenly hopes of the Gospel. In these circumstances, it was needful for their correction, and spiritual progress, and comfort — that God should take them into his own hands, and administer such rebukes and chastisements as might wean their affections from the world, and bring them back to himself. And, in such cases, if they will consider the matter attentively, they will find, that the affliction with which they were visited, was the very likeliest and fittest means of accomplishing his gracious design. And what gratitude should they cherish towards God — what profound admiration of his wisdom — what unshaken confidence in his faithfulness — when they reflect, that at such seasons, and in such circumstances, his thoughts towards them were thoughts of love? That when they were doing what they could to provoke him, by manifesting a preference for the creature, and when they had fallen from their first love — he did not, and would not let them

forsake him; that, although willing to live at a distance from him, he was determined to bring them near; and, that when, if they had been left to themselves, they would have gone on in a course of declension and discomfort — he did, in confirmation of his holy promise, chasten them, "that they might not be condemned with the world!" And if, at such seasons, the religion which had long lain dormant in their bosoms, and seemed ready to die, was revived and invigorated, and enabled them to bear up under the shock of bereavement — oh! how should they rejoice and be thankful, that the light of religion was made to dawn on their hearts, and that the thick dark cloud was sent to turn their eye again to that light, shining amidst the storm, as the rainbow of peace and the pledge of safety?

If the believer has thus experienced, even on earth, the blessed effects of affliction, he will the more easily comprehend the import, and believe the truth, of those statements in Scripture, which refer to its ultimate outcome and effect, in a future world of perfect holiness and peace. Here, the benefits of affliction, however valuable in themselves, are only partially enjoyed, by reason of the opposition which every holy influence meets with, from the remaining depravity of his heart, and other influences of a contrary nature to which he is exposed, from the contagion of a world that lies in wickedness. The iron may be taken from a furnace heated seven times, and beaten with many strokes — but it contains within itself much dross, which prevents the pure ore from being fashioned as it ought, and there plays upon it a cold current which hardens it, even while it is subjected to the artist's stroke. But there, all dross having been removed, and all unfriendly influences excluded, it shall be presented pure and spotless, and remain so forever. It is in Heaven alone, that the full benefit of earthly afflictions shall be known and enjoyed. And what can reconcile us to the discipline of affliction, if this reflection will not — that it will terminate in a state of perfect holiness and bliss; and that, meanwhile, it is preparing us for that blessed consummation?

It will terminate — the period is not far distant when all our sorrows and afflictions shall come to an end, when death shall bring us to that house where "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest;" and when once the grave "has opened its peaceful bosom to receive us," the world, with all its changes and sorrows, can affect our comfort no more. The storm may rage above us, and the whirlwind sweep the solitary churchyard; the din of civil tumult may arise in the streets; the war-cry may be raised, and the shock of battle succeed; the voice of famine may wail around us — yet no note disturbs the peaceful slumbers of the dead! But affliction will not terminate merely in the stillness of the tomb; it will be followed by the bliss of Heaven, for which it is even now preparing us, and where, finally and forever, "the broken heart shall be bound up; the mourner comforted; beauty shall be appointed for ashes, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness!" "And God himself shall wipe away all tears from our eyes!"

## 01.08. Meditation 8

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### MEDITATION 8.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell!" Revelation 1:17-18 The Bible affords a solid ground of comfort, by the cheering light which it throws over the valley of death, and, across that dark valley, on the fields of immortality beyond it. To every thoughtful mind, death and the grave will suggest many serious reflections — reflections which must ever be of a pensive nature, and which, but for the cheering information conveyed by the Gospel — might even induce a feeling of despair. Look to the deathbed of man — and what do you behold? An intelligent creature, in the spring of life, when hope is brightest — or in the prime of manhood, when activity is greatest — or in the maturity of old age, when the fruit of a long experience was ripening for usefulness — laid prostrate by the derangement of some organ or function of his material frame. He is deprived at once, and forever, of all that hope had anticipated, or activity pursued, or experience gathered — and given over as a captive to death, and a prisoner to the grave!

Look to the grave — and what do you behold? Multitudes which no man can number, of human bodies, once as vigorous and active as our own — now buried in deep forgetfulness, and a prey to corruption and the worm — nothing remaining to attest their previous existence save a few bones beneath, and, perhaps, some fading epitaph above!

Go into every land, the same scene appears — however different in climate and scenery, however dissimilar in their institutions and customs, in this, all regions are the same — every land is the sepulcher of the dead. When musing on the earth as the vast repository of the dead, who does not feel that the grave is a melancholy scene — and yet a scene in which more than in any other he is personally interested, since it contains a large portion of his dearest kindred, and will soon receive into its bosom his own mortal remains! Dark, indeed, would be the end of man, were the grave his final resting-place! And over the wreck of the human family, we might have wept with unavailing anguish, had we not known and heard the Savior's voice, "I am the resurrection and the life! If any man believes in me, though he were dead — yet shall he live again!" The Bible gives us some consoling views of this melancholy theme, in connection with that grand and universal scheme of grace, which gilds with the rays of peace and hope even the gloomiest prospects of man. It represents death and the grave as being under the jurisdiction and superintendence of the same divine person, who, as the Redeemer of his people, exercises a sovereign dominion over all the events of the present world. Time, with its solemn events — eternity, with its awful issues — and death, the passage which leads from the one into the other — are all equally under his control! So that, into whatever state of untried existence any of his people may be brought — they cannot, by any change in their circumstances, be placed beyond the bounds of his jurisdiction, or the reach of his guardian care.

Death, which severs them from every other connection, and the grave, which shuts them up from all other help — cannot separate them from his tender love, nor exclude them from his watchful eye — for he presides over death not less than over life. To him the sepulchers of the dead are as accessible as the abodes of the living; and go where they may, after death he meets with them, and cares for them in the state of disembodied spirits, and will ultimately bring them into the general assembly of the just in Heaven.

Both worlds are equally subject to his authority, and the dark pathway between the one and the other is also under his special care. So that, whether we live in the body — it is because he sustains us; or whether we die — it is because he summons us; or whether we enter into the invisible world — it is because he admits us. And everywhere, and at all times, on earth, or in the grave, or in the separate state — we are equally under the protection of One who, possessed of infinite power, unerring wisdom, and unquenchable love — will order all things that concern us, so as to fulfill his own gracious purpose in dying for our redemption, and to promote our present progress and our eternal perfection in holiness and bliss. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28

These views are strikingly presented in the sublime prologue to the book of the Apocalypse, where, appearing to the beloved disciple in the magnificent, yet amiable character of God-man, the Redeemer declares, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell!" Every clause of this sublime declaration, coming as it does from our glorified Redeemer, is pregnant with assurance and consolation to his believing people, and is specially fitted to banish those fearful and anxious forebodings which oppress their minds in the prospect of death and the grave.

"I am the Living One," the first and the last; without beginning of days or end of years; self-existent, and therefore, independent of every outward condition; and incapable of change. He asserts his supreme divinity as a reason why his disciples should "not fear." And, surely, to every Christian mind, the fact that the Son of Man, in whom they have trusted as their Savior, is "the Living One," may well furnish a ground of unshaken confidence, since it assures us, that, happen what may — our trust is reposed on one, whose existence, and whose power to affect our welfare, cannot be destroyed by any event whatever, and that our interests for eternity are absolutely safe, being placed in his omnipotent hands! But how much greater ought to be our confidence in him, and how much sweeter the consolation which his words impart, when he adds, "I was dead." He appears to the apostle not simply as "the Living One," the self-existent Son of God — but as God manifested in the flesh, the Son of God in human nature, and even in his glorified state, "like unto the Son of Man," whom the beloved disciple had often seen and followed as the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

Let us attempt to conceive of the feelings with which the beloved disciple must have looked on his glorified Master; let us remember that he had accompanied him on earth, that he had leaned upon his bosom, and that he knew the sad history of his crucifixion — and we cannot fail to perceive how the mere fact, that the same divine Redeemer now stood before him, and spoke with him of the death which he had accomplished at Jerusalem, must have served to annihilate in the mind of the apostle the fear of death, and to open up to his view such a glorious prospect into the invisible

world, as would strip death, the pathway that led to Heaven, of its terrors, however dark and dismal it might otherwise be. And to every Christian, the words of our Lord, "I was dead," will suggest reflections that should serve to fortify the mind against the fear of death; or, at all events, to rebuke and mitigate the aversion with which it is usually contemplated. Did the Redeemer die — a Being who claims to himself the dignity of "the Living One" — a Being not only of infinite dignity — but of spotless purity, and who, from the beginning until the end of his existence on earth, was the object of God's supreme delight and approbation? And shall we complain that death is allotted as our portion also? We, who, as created beings, are insignificant by our mortality; and by actual guilt — polluted and debased? To us, death comes as wages earned by guilt; but even were it otherwise — did death come to us as an accident of our being — how could we complain of the hardness of our lot, when Christ himself declares, "I was dead?" Did the Redeemer die — he in whose sympathy and care we are commanded to confide, and to whom we are taught to look, in every hour of danger or distress, for needful support and consolation? And is it no encouragement to reflect, that he, into whose hands we commit our care, when in the extremity of mortal agony, and when vain is the help of man, has himself drunk the cruel cup before us and felt its bitterness — that every inch of that dark valley was trod by him, and that, from his own experience, he knows what strength and support we need in that dreadful hour? Did the Redeemer die — as the surety and representative of sinners — was his death a solemn expiation of our guilt, and an adequate satisfaction to God for the penalty which we had incurred? Is there no reason, then, to suppose, that dying, as he did, in the place, and on behalf of the guilty — death met him in a more formidable shape, and put into his hands a bitterer cup than can now fall to the lot of any of his people; and that their death will be greatly less terrible than it would have been by reason of his enduring in their place, the heaviest part of it? For what is it that mainly embitters death, and surrounds it, even when viewed at a distance, with innumerable terrors? Not surely the mere pain with which it is accompanied — for equal or greater pain we have often endured — not the mere dissolution of the tie between soul and body — for if that were all, however our sensitive nature might shrink from the shock — our rational nature might enable us to regard it with composure. Not the mere separation from the society and business of the present world — for that, however it may awaken a feeling of melancholy regret, can hardly account for the forebodings and terrors of which every mind is more or less conscious when it contemplates death. No; it is something more than the mere pain of dying, or the mere dissolving of the elements of our being, or the mere separation from this world — that embitters the cup of death.

"The sting of death is sin" — the same sin which gave us over as a prey to death, makes us also slaves to the fear of death. For, by the unvarying law of conscience, sin and fear are bound up together. And it is a conscience burdened with guilt, and apprehensive of punishment, which, in our case, arrows death with terrors unknown to the inferior and irresponsible creation. But Christ died to expiate and cancel the guilt of his people; he has already endured, and by enduring, has taken away the penalty of their transgression. Death remains — but its sting is taken away; so that we may "thank God, who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord," and may exclaim with the apostle, "Oh! death where is now your sting — Oh! grave, where is your victory?" Did the Redeemer die — that he might show us an example of suffering affliction with patience, and be to us a pattern of faith and hope in our last extremity? And is there no consolation in the thought, that when we reach the shore of that dark water which divides time and eternity — we can fix our eye on one who, for our sakes, crossed it in triumph before us; and think of the love of our

Redeemer, who, in compassion to our fears, became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," that, by his own example, he might teach us how to die? Had he returned from earth to Heaven in triumph — had he avoided the dark valley himself, and, summoning his legions of angels, left the world by a direct ascension to glory — then, whatever lessons he might have taught, and whatever commands and encouragements he might have addressed to his followers, respecting their conduct in that last hour of darkness and distress — his instructions would have had little effect in comparison with the charm of his example, when, placing himself in their circumstances, and submitting to their fate, he "bowed his head and gave up the spirit;" and met death, as he commands his people to meet it, in the exercise of an unshaken confidence in God, and humble submission to his will. Where shall we find such another example of holy fortitude for our imitation? Where shall we find such another instance of success for our encouragement? Did the Redeemer die — that he might not only deprive death of its sting — but overcome him that had the power of death, and take it into his own hands? Let us, then, rejoice in his success; for once Satan had the power of death — but Christ has "carried captivity captive," and "Satan has fallen before him as lightning from Heaven." In that hour, which he himself emphatically called "the hour and the power of darkness," when he was in more than mortal agony, travailing in the greatness of his strength, he vanquished death and Hell, and he wrested from the hands of our greatest enemy, and took into his own possession — the keys of death and of the invisible world. Death still reigns — but Christ has now the dominion over death! In token of his victory, the Redeemer adds, "I am alive for evermore!" The grave received — but it could not retain him. And while the fact of his interment may well serve to reconcile us to the peaceful grave, with all its loneliness and darkness, since it was embalmed by the presence of our Lord himself — the fact of his resurrection from the grave should enkindle the bright hope of a glorious morning, after that dark night has passed away.

For, did the Redeemer arise from the tomb? Then here, at least, is one example of restoration to life, after the agony of death was past — one case in which the spell of death was broken, and the cerements of the tomb burst, and the power of Satan vanquished — one living monument of the immortality of man — one incontestable proof, that the same body which died, and the same spirit which departed, may meet again after that fearful separation. Christ has risen, and in his resurrection we find the ground of an eternal hope! Did the Redeemer arise from the grave in the same character in which he died — as the head and representative of his people? Then is his resurrection not only the proof — but the pledge; not only the evidence — but the assurance of our own. For if the head is risen — shall not the members of his body rise also? If, as our representative, he has passed into the heavens — then shall not we, in whose name, and for whose behalf, he undertook and accomplished his mediatorial work — follow him in our order and time? Did we die with him, and shall we not rise with him? "If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection." "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." "Because I live, you shall live also." Did the Redeemer not only rise from the grave — but does he live for evermore? Is he the same yesterday, today, and forever? Not only eternal in his being — but unchangeable in his character, as our Redeemer? What, then, should cause us to despond, or make us afraid? "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Since Christ has died, yes, also, and has risen again, and is now and forever at the right hand of God, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing — will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus

our Lord!"

True, we know not what may yet befall us, nor into what untried circumstances, or state of being, that we may hereafter be brought. But we are sure that one day we must die and enter the invisible world; and we may well be concerned for an event which will have an everlasting outcome for good or for evil; but placing our trust in the efficacy of the Redeemer's death. And believing in the fact of his resurrection, we may take his own word as the rock of our confidence and hope, "I am alive for evermore, Amen;" and "because I live — you shall live also!"

If these views of the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord are fitted to banish, or mitigate, the fear of death and the grave, and to inspire the hope of a glorious immortality — how much should their impression be aided by the sublime statement in the last clause of the passage, "I have the keys of death and of Hell!" The power of the keys is an absolute power — a royal prerogative. Christ's authority is not confined to the visible Church on earth; it extends to the invisible world, and embraces under its jurisdiction all the disembodied spirits, of whatever character. Although they have left this world, they are still under the dominion of him, of whom it is said, that "at his name every knee shall bow, of things in Heaven, of things on earth, and of things under the earth; and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is as the Redeemer, that he asserts his claim to the keys; that claim is founded on the fact, that "he overcame death and him that had the power of death, in order to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." And it is expressly declared by the apostle, that, "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living!" Romans 14:9 That he is the Lord of the dead, is here asserted, "I have the keys of HELL." In the original there are two terms, each of which is rendered by the word "Hell" in the English version. The one, however, literally imports the invisible world at large; while the other denotes that department of the invisible world which is specially appropriated to the punishment of the wicked. In the passage before us, the more comprehensive term is used; and here, as elsewhere, it is to be regarded as signifying not merely the place of future punishment, although that is unquestionably included in it, but, more generally, the world of spirits — the entire state of retribution, whether of reward or punishment.

We learn from Scripture, that the whole of that vast world is divided into two departments, and only two — Heaven and Hell; and that between the two, a great gulf is fixed — an impassable gulf of separation. But separated as they are, Christ reigns over both; and when he says, "I have the keys of the invisible world," he asserts his dominion over all the spirits that have ever passed from this world, either into Heaven or Hell; and his absolute control over them in their final destination of happiness or woe. When it is affirmed, that he has also "the key of DEATH," it is plainly implied that no spirit can pass out of this present world without his appointment; and, more generally, that he is lord of the living not less than of the dead, and has a thorough control over everything that can in any way affect the lives of men. An absolute power over death necessarily presupposes a corresponding power over life and its affairs. And it is by the exercise of his providence in sustaining life — that he fulfills his purpose as to the time and mode of their departure hence. So that, combining these several views, we arrive at this grand and comprehensive result: that the Redeemer is possessed of absolute power over the course of our lives on earth; over the time and manner of our departure out of the world; and over that invisible state, in each of its great

departments, on which our spirits enter when they quit their mortal tabernacles. And this noble testimony to the universal power and everlasting presence of Christ with his disciples, is fitted to suggest several reflections, which may be useful in dissipating their anxieties, and in fortifying their courage, when they contemplate either the future course of their pilgrimage here, or the solemn prospect of its termination, or the still more solemn, because untried and eternal, state on which they shall enter hereafter. Has the Redeemer the keys of death? Then this consideration ought to relieve our minds both of the anxieties and the regrets which we are too apt to feel, in reference to the changes of the present life.

It should mitigate the anxiety which often preys upon the mind when we look forward into futurity, and contemplate the prospect of our own death. We should remember, that as the Redeemer alone has the keys of death — nothing can happen to send us forth from the world before the time which he has appointed for our departure. Neither man nor devils can abridge the term of probation assigned to us by our gracious Master. Nor, until he is pleased to call us away, shall any power on earth or in Hell prevail against us. No accident, no hostile violence, no insidious snare, no dark conspiracy, can touch our life — but by his command. And surely, when we reflect on the numerous dangers to which human life is, in its greatest security, exposed — the frailty of our frame — the diseases to which it is subject — our constant exposure to fatal accidents — the malice of open or concealed enemies — it must be consolatory to know, that the key of death is in the Savior's hands, and that, come what may, we cannot be forced out of the world, until he opens the door and bids us to come to Him.

More especially, when we are visited with disease, and threatened with a speedy termination of life, the Savior's power over the keys of death should repress or assuage those violent anxieties as to the probability of death or of recovery, and those disquieting speculations as to the outcome of disease, and the mode of its treatment, in which we are too apt to indulge to an extent which unfits the mind for the serious exercises of religion, appropriate to a season of personal affliction. Who has not felt in the hours of languishing and sickness — that these painful and perplexing thoughts were even more harassing to his mind, than the pressure of disease itself, and that they diverted his attention, in a great measure, from the profitable contemplation of divine things?

Now, besides that they are injurious, as tending to divert the mind from what is certain — to what must necessarily be uncertain until the event shall disclose it — and useless, as being incapable of either ascertaining or altering the future outcome — it is our privilege, as Christians, to know that such anxieties are altogether groundless. For disease cannot kill, nor can medicine cure — without the appointment of Him who holds in his own hands the keys of life and of death! And if he has fixed the outcome of this disease, why should we be anxious?

If death is in our cup — that cup has been put into our hands at the time fixed by unerring wisdom and infinite love! And if the door of death is opening for our departure — it is because the tender Savior, whom we love and trust, is summoning us to be forever with Him! Shall we, then, rebel against His appointment? Shall we doubt the love and wisdom of His determination? Or, as ignorant as we are of what is before us in this world, and of what really concerns our best interests — can we entertain the wish, that the power of determining the time of our death were wrested out of His hands and placed in our own?

True, we may have many ties that attach us to this world. We may be young, and, with the optimistic hope of youth, may cleave to life. We may be prosperous, and surrounded with many comforts. We may have a young and engaging family, whom we are loath to leave behind us to the cold charities of the world. We may have many dependents on our industry or bounty, who will bitterly lament our loss. But do we imagine that these considerations are not known to the Redeemer, or that He has not weighed them all? And if, notwithstanding, it is His will to summon us home — are we not prepared to yield up our faulty judgment to his unerring wisdom? The same consideration should prevent or repress the anxiety which is too often felt respecting the mode and circumstances of our death — not less than respecting the time of its occurrence. A pensive mind is apt to be oppressed with melancholy forebodings as to the situation in which death may overtake it — and to muse on the thousand possibilities which imagination may conjure up in the darkness of the future — until it is overwhelmed with anxieties of its own creation!

We know as little of the mode of our death, as we do of the time of our departure hence; it may be that we shall leave the world with ease — or with difficulty; by a sudden stroke — or by protracted suffering. We may be, at the time, vividly conscious, or in a state of partial aberration, or totally insensible. We may die alone, or in the midst of friends. We may die by sea — or by land; at home — or abroad; on the highway — or in the solitary desert — or on our own pillow. These possibilities are apt to be converted, by a melancholy temperament, into the food of anxious disquietude and fretting care.

It is a very obvious consideration, that such anxieties, springing, as they do, from all possible forms of death, must, for the greater part, be groundless, as death can only meet us in one form at last. And that, even in reference to that form, in respect of which they may be well-founded, they are totally useless, as being of no avail to avert or alter it. That such people harass themselves respecting a matter which must be totally unknown, and which, were it known — is, nevertheless, beyond their control. That their present fears respecting it occasion a greater and more protracted suffering than the event itself could occasion, did it really occur in its most formidable shape. That fear is, in its very nature, an anticipation, and, in some measure, a foretaste of all possible evils — whereas in death, one form of that evil only is endured. And that such anxieties have the effect of spreading death, as it were, over the whole extent of life, according to the beautiful language of the apostle, when he speaks of some "who through the fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage."

But, without dwelling on these obvious considerations, what does it matter, after all, where, or in what circumstances we die? Die where we may — we cannot be beyond the reach of the Redeemer's protection! Nay, the fact that he has in his own hand the key of death, is a proof that he is present with us, and that he is thinking of us, in whatever place, and at whatever time death may overtake us; for there, where we die, he summons us; and it is ours to be ready and willing to depart at his call. This consideration should repress, not only the anxieties which we feel in regard to the future — but also the regrets which we are too apt to cherish respecting the bereavements with which we have already been visited. It is not less instructive and consoling, when viewed, in reference to the death of relatives and friends, than when it is considered in respect to our own prospect of death. For it teaches us, that the duration of each man's existence here is determined by the Redeemer; that it belongs to him to appoint a longer or shorter period to each, as he will; and in doing so, we have reason to be satisfied, that he determines according to the dictates of

infallible wisdom, although the reasons of his procedure must necessarily be to us, for the present, inscrutable.

We cannot tell why one dies in infancy, another in boyhood, a third in the prime of manly vigor, and a fourth reserved to the period of old age; and above all, why the most promising in talent and character, and the most useful in their several stations, are taken away — while others of inferior worth are often left behind. But suffice it for us, that this happens not by chance, neither is it the result of caprice or carelessness — but flows from that unerring wisdom, whose counsels are formed on a view of all possible relations and consequences, whether as to the visible or invisible, the present or the future states of being. The power of death being in the hands of the Redeemer, the duration of human life is, in every instance, determined by him. And none, therefore, ought to entertain the thought, either that death is, in one case, unduly premature — or, in another, unduly delayed. None live, either for a longer or for a shorter period than infinite wisdom has assigned to them. Reason teaches, that to his appointment we must submit, however unwilling — it being irresistible, and far beyond our control. So, as Christians, we should learn to acquiesce in it cheerfully, as the appointment of one who cannot err. That the determined hour had arrived, is a reflection that should serve to banish every useless regret — but that this hour was fixed by one in whose wisdom we confide, and of whose interest in our welfare we have the strongest assurance — is a thought which should not only induce resignation — but inspire comfort and peace.

For, when death does seize any of our friends, whether in the ordinary course of disease and decay, or by violence or accident — how consolatory to the mourning relatives is the thought, that it came at the bidding of the Savior, and that it has not arrived without his sanction and appointment! Otherwise, we might be apt to reflect, with unavailing regret — on certain remedies whose virtues might have been tried; certain physicians high in professional reputation, who might have been consulted; or to dwell, with painful self-reproach, on certain accidents that might have been prevented, and injuries which timely care might have cured. The mind will often busy itself with such reflections after the loss of a near and dear friend; but the very intensity of feeling which is thus called forth, is a sufficient proof that any carelessness or negligence that may have been manifested, was far, very far, from being designed or willful. And although, where criminal negligence has been shown, no doctrine, however consolatory, can prevent regret, or should repress feelings of penitential sorrow. Yet, in other cases, where the heart bears witness to its own interest in the beloved object, the doctrine of Christ's absolute command over the keys of death, and the consideration that our friend was summoned away by a deliberate act of his sovereign wisdom — may well assuage the grief which such reflections on the commencement, progress, and treatment of the disease, are accustomed to awaken in the most sensitive and affectionate minds.

While this sublime statement should banish, or at least mitigate, the anxieties and regrets which we sometimes experience, in reference to the events of the present life — inasmuch as Christ's power over death implies a corresponding power over life and its affairs — it is equally fitted to fortify our minds for the last struggle, since it assures us that Christ will then be present with us. In the very article of death, it gives us comfort — for the Redeemer has the keys of death! Then he presides over that dark passage which leads from this world to the next; his power does not terminate with our present life — it extends from the world which is smiling in the cheerful light of day, to that mysterious passage which lies amidst the sepulchers of the dead, and which, to our

imperfect vision, is shrouded in impenetrable darkness. We know not the secrets of that passage. We cannot know what it is to die. The mind may then have views and feelings of which it is impossible for us at present to form any conception — for who shall attempt to describe what may be passing in the soul when the tie that binds it to the body is breaking, and nature is undergoing death? And what renders that scene still more solemn is, that we die alone — alone we enter on the dark valley. Friends and family may stand around our couch, and watch the progress of death — but they cannot accompany us, neither are they sensible of what we feel, nor able in any way to help or deliver us. The spirit departs alone; and in that solemn hour of separation from human fellowship — in that solitude of death, when, placed on the verge of the invisible world, we know that all behind must be forsaken, and are ignorant of what may meet us as we advance — Oh! how consolatory to reflect, that death itself is subject to the Redeemer's power — that he watches over the death of his people, and keeps his eye, not only on the busy scenes of life — but also on the secret mysteries of death.

Yes, "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." There he is, where most we need a friend and comforter, standing at the gate of death, with absolute power over every enemy that can assail us, and with unquenchable zeal for our welfare. Dark, then, as the passage is, and unknown as are its dangers and pains — surely we may venture to commit ourselves into his hands, and to say with the Psalmist, "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil — for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me!" for, says the Apostle, "all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life — or death." But Christ has also the keys of the invisible world at large — all, without exception, are under his control. His kingdom on earth is but a small dependency, compared with his universal dominion in the invisible state, where already are congregated, of the human race, ten thousand times ten thousand more than are any where to be found on the earth's surface, besides the hosts of spiritual beings of whom we read in Scripture, as angels, elect or fallen, archangels, principalities, dominions and powers. Not one human spirit that ever lived on the earth's surface has been extinguished — they are all at this moment alive in one or other department of the invisible world — and, holy or unholy, happy or wretched, they are under the dominion of our Savior. And under the same dominion are placed all higher intelligences, fallen or unfallen, of whatever rank and in whatever station they may be. Could we form an estimate of the multitude of human spirits which must have passed into that vast region from our own world since the period of its creation — of the countless millions which every province of the earth, and every island of the sea, have yielded to swell the host of departed spirits — and could we, moreover, form any conception of the different orders of beings, purely spiritual, and the multitudes belonging to every order, together with their respective rank, and dignity, and power — could we conceive of the extent of that world, which is at once described as Heaven, the third heavens, and yet as stretching far above all heavens — then might we have some materials for forming an estimate of the grandeur and extent of the Redeemer's kingdom. But, unable as we are to comprehend a theme so vast in itself, and of which only a few glimpses are revealed in Scripture — surely it is consolatory to reflect, that whatever may be the extent of the invisible world — whatever the number, the rank, and the character of the various orders of its inhabitants — the whole of that vast region, and all these innumerable hosts, are under the dominion of him who was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," and who, as our Redeemer, has identified our interests with his own, by "dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification," and who is even now "at the right hand of God, making intercession for us." When we

come to enter on that spiritual world over which he presides, what reflection could so well support the mind in the prospect of such a destination as this — that, go where we may, we are still under the watchful eye of one who has given us the strongest assurances of his love? And may we not well believe, that, if we have trusted in him without being disappointed, while we sojourned in this remote province of his empire — then much more may we trust in his care, when we enter that invisible world where he is, and over which he reigns in the full manifestation of his mediatorial power and glory? As Christ has the key of the invisible world at large, so has he the key of each ward or department — the keys of both Heaven and of Hell. Has he the key of Hell? Then, knowing as we do, that there are rebellious spirits of great subtlety, and power, and malice, and that they are sometimes permitted to go about as roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour — we might have many an anxious fear, lest, in the dark hour of death, some such should be watching for our spirit, when it ventures alone into the invisible world. But "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" — to that death-bed the watchful eye of the Savior is directed; he can and will restrain the malice of our enemies; and his promise is, that "whoever believes on him shall never come into condemnation," and that "none shall pluck them out of his hand!" And has the Redeemer the keys of Heaven — that blessed asylum of purity and peace, where, in the midst of his redeemed, the Savior himself dwells? Then, in the hands of our best friend, one who is pledged to us by the sacredness of his Word, and by the shedding of his own blood — in his hands is the power of admitting us — and will he shut the door against us? — he who, for the opening of that door, descended from Heaven to earth, and whose prayer was and is, "Father, I will that those who you have given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory?" No, the door of Heaven is thrown open for the reception of his penitent and believing people. Even now is he "preparing a place for them in his Father's house, where there are many mansions." And thus will he receive and welcome them, on their departure hence, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world!" "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!"

## 01.09. Meditation 9

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### MEDITATION 9.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are those who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Revelation 7:13-17

When a thoughtful man considers the history of this world, from the creation downward to the present time, and reflects on the numerous successive generations of our race which have been born, and which have lived, and passed away — when he traces in the page of history the revolutions and wars, the schemes and enterprises, the discoveries in art and science, which mark its epochs — and considers that all the busy people which then thought, and felt, and acted, with so much intensity and interest, have long since been laid to rest — when he looks to the sepulchers in every land, where all nations and tribes are entombed; and, above all, when he thinks of the multitude that have been carried, one after another, from his own neighborhood to the grave, and that it now contains many of the members of his own family — all whom, in their age, he was accustomed in his youth to revere, and many whom, in their childhood, he knew and loved — he can hardly fail to be struck by the thought, that he is more nearly related to the departed than to the living; that the earth contains, within its bars, a much larger number of men than it bears on its surface; and that, while it is the abode of the living — it is, in a larger sense, the depository of the dead. Can a mind of any reflective power stop short at this melancholy point; or will it not entertain the question — What is the eternal state of the mighty congregation which lies below? What has become of those living and active spirits which once appeared on the arena of public affairs, and set the world in motion; or which, in the more quiet and secluded walks of humble life, awakened the interest of the domestic circle, and a small neighborhood of friends? Are these spirits still alive? Are they in a state of conscious existence? And, if they are, in what part of God's universe, and in what circumstances, are they now placed? The Bible answers these solemn questions. It declares, that not one spirit which has ever lived and acted on the earth has been extinguished — that every one is still somewhere, conscious of its existence, and sensible of its state. From the death of Abel, when the first human spirit passed into eternity, down to the present moment, when others are disappearing from the midst of us — has that eternal state been fast peopling from this earth. And what a multitude, then, of human beings must be there — the collective contributions of all ages, and of all lands — to eternal Heaven or Hell! For wise reasons, that thickly peopled scene is to us invisible. Were it disclosed to our sight, instead of being revealed to our faith, it might derange the whole economy of our present state of probation, and interfere with the operation of those

principles by which the characters of men are now tried, and according to which they will hereafter be judged. But God has made known to us, by evidence sufficient to command rational assent, the fact that such a state of being exists, and is to be expected hereafter. He has farther informed us, that it is divided into only two great departments, which are separated from each other by a great gulf, and that into one or other of these departments — into Heaven or Hell, every human spirit is admitted, according to its improvement or neglect of privileges on earth — according to the state of its character at the hour of death. At present, we are called to contemplate the inhabitants of Heaven — the few that have been saved in every age, already swelled into a multitude which no man can number, and yet to receive, from among ourselves and our saved children, an accession to their blessed society. The curtain which veils the invisible world from our sight is here drawn aside, and an innumerable multitude of holy and happy spirits, once tried like as we now are, are seen clothed in white robes, and, with palms in their hands, "singing the song of God and of the Lamb." The words of the elder, in describing these blessed inhabitants of Heaven, refer, first of all, to their past history; and this affords matter of comfortable and instructive meditation. Their past history connects them intimately with ourselves, for they were all sufferers: "These are those who came out of great tribulation." They constitute, therefore, a peculiar class in Heaven. The angels and seraphim have had no personal experience of sorrow — but these human spirits have tasted its bitterness. This must needs give a distinctive aspect to their class, and a peculiar tone to their feelings forever; for herein they stand distinguished from all other orders of being in the upper sanctuary — that they were once a suffering people. In this respect, too, while they are dissimilar to angels — all the redeemed are like one another! Kings are there, and peasants are there also; but each has entered Heaven through much tribulation, and there is not one of them that may not sympathize with every other, in reflecting on the past, as in enjoying the present.

Some of these blessed spirits were once in abject poverty, and their whole life was one continual struggle against poverty. Some were lodged in a weak and sickly frame, or subject to painful paroxysms of disease, which rendered life a burden. Others were the objects of cruel mockery and persecution, and had trial of bonds and imprisonments." Others being "destitute, afflicted, tormented — wandered in deserts and on mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." And all shared in the more common sorrows of life — strong temptation, frequent disappointments, painful bereavements, and finally, the agonies of death.

Yet there they are in Heaven. Tried like ourselves — like us often weary, beset by evil, by fear distracted, and ready at times to give up the struggle in despair, they were enabled to persevere; and "being found faithful unto death, they have received the crown of life." To the tribulations of the redeemed, the elder refers as an important feature in their past history — a fact so important that it was worthy of being noticed in connection with the weight of glory which they now enjoy. And that it is so will appear from the following reasons: Their tribulations on earth must sweeten to them the rest and peace of Heaven. The happiness of that state is frequently denoted by relative terms, such as rest, which implies previous labor; and victory, which implies conflict. And such terms suggest the contrast between their previous and their present state, by which the blessedness of the latter is enhanced. Never is rest more sweet, than when it comes after fatigue; nor peace than after the toils of battle; nor safety than after the hour of apprehended danger.

Now, here the weary traveler has reached his destination; the tempest-tossed mariner has entered his quiet haven; the danger is past, the warfare is ended, and their long looked for home is only the

more sweet, by reason of the numerous pains, and perils, and privations, which they endured by the way. In any case, the contrast between earth and Heaven must be great; even in the case of a king, the transition is a glorious one. But in some cases of severe affliction and protracted suffering, the change is, to our imperfect vision, more apparently great. Lazarus, old, diseased, and a beggar, was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; and must not his poverty and privations on earth have aided, by the force of contrast, the happiness of Heaven?

These tribulations are an important feature in the history of the redeemed; because, while they now serve to sweeten the rest and peace of Heaven, they were also a principal means, in the hand of God, of preparing them, in point of character, for its enjoyment. Not only by the natural effect of contrast does sorrow enliven succeeding happiness — but by sorrow as a means of moral discipline, concurring with other means graciously given — did God first lead them to turn to himself, and break up their fond attachment to earthly things, and woo their desires and affections towards Heaven. And by the same discipline of sorrow, continued as need required after their conversion, did he from time to time revive their heavenly hopes, and check their backslidings, and stimulate them onwards in the path of preparation — until they, were made "fit for the inheritance of the saints in light." The beneficial effect of affliction in preparing them for glory, is often referred to in the Sacred Writings; it is expressly declared that, "though at present not joyous — but grievous, their tribulations work out for them a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory" — and this they do, by "making them partakers of God's holiness." In so far as they conduced to this blessed consummation, they were worthy of being mentioned as an important as well as interesting feature in their past history, in connection with the blessedness of their present state; and doubtless, were the company of the redeemed to give utterance to their feelings, they still might, even amidst the glories of Heaven, exclaim like the believer on earth, "It was good for us that we were afflicted; for before we were afflicted we went astray — but now we keep your law." And as, in the experience of those who are already before the throne on high, tribulation has sweetened the blessedness of Heaven, even as it brought them to seek, and prepared them to enjoy it — so, surely, to us who are still in the valley of tears, no scene could well be more appropriately presented for our encouragement in every difficulty, and our comfort under every sorrow — than that, in which they who once suffered as we now suffer, and labored as we are called to labor, are beheld victorious over every enemy, delivered from every evil, and only the more blessed and the more happy, in proportion as their trials on earth were protracted and severe. Were it a company of angels, who never suffered, that appeared in this sublime vision, the encouragement to us were less, in proportion to the contrast between their history and our own; but when the spirits of departed men — the inhabitants of the same world, the partakers of the same nature, the sharers of the same trials with ourselves — are presented before us, arrayed in white robes, and with palms of victory in their hands — well may we thank God and take courage, assured, through their example, that "our labor shall not be in vain in the Lord." From their sufferings it necessarily follows, and it is obviously presupposed in the succeeding clause, that they were sinners. This, also, is an important and a distinctive feature in their past history. Unlike the angels of God, they were naturally depraved. Their affections were once entirely estranged from God and his service. The gospel was once to them as revolting as to others; and, perhaps, many of them lapsed, for a time, into infidel opinions, and questioned the existence of God, and doubted of their own immortality, and discarded alike the hope of Heaven and the fear of Hell! Nor did their depravity appear only in the disordered state of their moral feelings, or in their tendency to

unbelief; it was manifested in practical disobedience to God, whenever his will was contrary to their own in acts of intemperance, or dishonesty, or impurity; in the neglect of important duty, or in the commission of known and positive sin.

Yes, all these glorious and happy spirits were once in this guilty and depraved condition; and whatever of purity they now possess, was acquired by a painful struggle against the tendencies of their fallen nature. Every one of them, in looking back on their history while they lived in this world, may recollect a time when they were estranged from God, careless of his favor, and disobedient to his will. And these recollections, while they must fill them with profound humility — will also enhance, in their esteem, the magnitude and blessedness of that salvation which they now enjoy, and deepen the gratitude with which they celebrate its triumphant consummation. And were these glorious spirits once, like us, depraved and guilty, liable to the same temptations, agitated by the same passions, and opposed by the same difficulties with ourselves? Let us thank God, and from their example take courage; for, as guilty as we are, many as guilty are now in Heaven. If we are depraved — they were depraved also. If we feel every motion towards holiness to be a painful struggle against our nature — they felt the same. If we have reason to complain of the hardness of our hearts, and the instability of our purposes, and the frequency of our backslidings — they had the same occasion to mourn over theirs. Their sins, their backslidings, their penitential acknowledgments, their bitter complaints, their painful struggles, together with their final triumph over all — are recorded, and may well serve for the purpose, of encouraging us to persevere in the same path, which, however arduous, and however painful it may be — will conduct us, as it conducted them, to a scene of perfect purity and everlasting bliss.

They were sinful, but, "they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Being guilty and depraved, they had neither the inclination to forsake sin, nor the means of expiating it. And as by the law of their moral nature, and the external arrangements of God's government, sin was inseparably connected with suffering — they had no present enjoyment which could deserve the name of happiness, and the future offered nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment. Nor was it consistent with the principles of the divine government, or, at all events, with the purposes of the divine mind — to forgive sin, or to exempt sinners from suffering in any way which should have the effect of annulling the sanctions of the law, or which might even seem to dispense with its authority. But, while they were thus degraded and helpless, by a glorious device of divine wisdom and love — their sins were imputed to a substitute, by whom the penalty of the law was endured, and its requirements fulfilled, in their place, and on their account. And the law being honored and magnified by his obedience unto death — his sufferings were accepted as a atoning sacrifice for their sins. And through faith in Christ's atoning work, the guilty were invited to draw near to God as a merciful and forgiving father, and assured that they should receive mercy to pardon, and grace to help in the time of need. It was declared that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin;" and all, without exception, were invited to wash and be clean. A "fountain having thus been opened in the house of Judah for sin and for impurity," those who, convinced of their guilt and misery, repaired to it in the exercise of faith in the divine promise, are said to "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!" The effect of that blood, when savingly applied to the conscience, was twofold: it expiated and took away the guilt of past sins, whereby they were obnoxious to divine wrath; and it had also a moral effect in weakening their corruption, and renewing and sanctifying their characters. Its legal efficacy in the way of procuring

the pardon of sin is declared, when the apostle asserts, that "without the shedding of blood is no remission," and at another, "that we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot" — "blood shed for the remission of sins." And its moral efficacy, in renewing the character and promoting the sanctification of believers is asserted, when the apostle asks, how "much more shall the blood of Christ purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

We learn from Scripture, that wherever that blood has been effectual for these ends, it was savingly applied to the conscience by the Holy Spirit — and this he did by working faith in their hearts. As the blood of Christ was the objective ground of their salvation, so faith was the subjective means of their salvation. The Holy Spirit acted, as in every case he does act, in a way suited to their rational nature. By convincing them, in the first instance, of their sin and danger — he impressed them with a sense of their need of salvation. By enlightening their minds — he enabled them to perceive the excellency and suitableness of that salvation which was revealed and offered to them in the Gospel. By renewing their wills, he persuaded them to embrace it, and to appropriate it to themselves in the exercise of a simple faith. That faith, as it is the fruit of a divine and saving change, so is it the spring both of peace and of purity; and wherever it exists, it is ever found both to procure pardon, and to promote sanctification. No sooner, therefore, were they led by the Spirit to apprehend the necessity, and to aim at the attainment of salvation, in the way of God's appointment — than they were totally changed, both in their state and character, and they found that the blood of Christ served both to wash away the guilt of their lives, and the pollution of their nature. Their guilt was taken away, and their characters were renewed, at the same time, and by the same means. And hence, when it is intimated that "they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb," we are to understand that they had undergone that radical change which is denoted by the term conversion, and had, in consequence, been not only "justified," but also "sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." The blood of Christ, shed for the remission of sins, was the sole ground of their acceptance with God. That blood, sprinkled on their consciences, was the means of purging them from dead works to serve the living God. And to the efficacy of that blood are to be ascribed, not only all the peace and holiness which they acquired on earth — but also their exaltation to glory and their blessedness in Heaven. This is strongly intimated in the word therefore. "Therefore are they now before the throne of God." They did not rise to glory on the ground of their own merit, or by the strength of their own virtue. On the contrary, they were, like ourselves, "guilty, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." But feeling their own guilt and danger, they repaired to the cross of Christ, and in his blood, an atoning sacrifice for sin, and a ground of hope was presented, on which they reposed in the humble confidence of faith. "Therefore are they now before the throne!"

And, with mingled emotions of humility and gratitude, they cast their crowns at his feet, and ascribe "salvation to their God, and to the Lamb, forever and ever." The work of redeeming mercy, which was their song in the house of their pilgrimage, is still the theme of their song in Heaven. Not to themselves, but to the Lamb, do they ascribe the glories of their present state. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father — to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive praise, and honor, and glory!" "For you have redeemed us to God by your blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

Thus did these glorious and blessed spirits enter into Heaven, by that new and living way which Christ has opened up, and which he consecrated with his own blood. And why should we despair? Is not that blood as meritorious and as effectual as before? Is it less freely offered? Are we debarred from repairing to it? Is the Spirit less able or less willing to apply it? Has the fountain which was once opened in the house of Judah for sin and for impurity, been dried up or closed against us? Oh, no! If we perish, it is not because we have no access to that fountain — but because we are unwilling to repair to it! If we perish, it will not be because that blood has lost its efficacy — but because we will not try its virtue! If we perish, it will not be because Christ is unable to save us — but because we are unwilling to be saved. At this moment there is not one bar between any of us and Heaven, except our own unwillingness. Christ has opened a wide door and an effectual, into the holiest of all; he invites us to enter in. And, guilty and polluted as we are, he assures us that "his blood cleanses from all sin," and that, believing and trusting in that blood, though "our sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson — yet shall they be as wool."

## 01.10. Meditation 10

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### MEDITATION 10.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand!" Psalms 16:11 When viewed in reference to our everlasting prospects, these words may be regarded as descriptive of the perfection of that happiness which is in reserve for us in Heaven. To perfect happiness, two conditions are essential:

First, that in point of amount, it be adequate to satisfy our capacities and desires.

Secondly, that in point of duration, it be so permanent that at no future time it shall forsake us, and that our comfort, while it lasts, may not be diminished or disturbed by the fear of losing it. In the future happiness of believers, both of these conditions are secured; in its amount, it will be adequate to fill all our capacities of enjoyment, "You will fill me with joy in your presence." And in its duration, it will be permanent, "with eternal pleasures at your right hand!" The fullness of this happiness will consist in its satisfying the desires, and perfecting the capacities of our immortal nature. And if we would form a right estimate, either of its quality or its amount, we must take a comprehensive view of all the capacities with which that nature is endowed.

Man may be considered in several distinct aspects — as a SENTIENT, or an INTELLECTUAL, or a MORAL, or a SOCIAL, or an ACTIVE being. In each of these aspects, certain capacities belong to him — and it is on the filling and perfecting of all these capacities, that his highest happiness depends. It is not enough that one class or order of his capacities are satisfied, if the rest be neglected, or denied their proper gratification. For, although they may be considered distinctly, they do not exist separately — but in a state of combination, and from their combined perfection and satisfaction alone, can man enjoy all that such a creature is capable of.

It is not enough, whatever the sensualist may say, that our capacities of sensual pleasure be gratified, to the exclusion of the higher and nobler enjoyments that are peculiar to our rational and moral nature. Every object around us may be such as to minister delight to the eye and the ear — yet, in the reign of intellectual ignorance, or in the play of unhallowed passions — there may be a Hell within. Nor is it enough, whatever the stoic may say, that the mind should be well ordered, and the passions tamed — for, by the constitution of our nature, we are both sentient and social beings, and, as such, we depend for the perfection of our inner happiness on the circumstances of our external condition. Nor is it enough, whatever the philosopher may say, that the intellect be highly cultivated, and the mind stored with knowledge. This is good — but insufficient for our perfect happiness, unless, along with it, we have hearts filled with every moral feeling, society in harmony with our taste, and such external accommodations as may conduce to our comfort.

It is not in one of our capacities being filled, then — but in all of them being full, that our happiness consists. And what the Bible affirms, is that our condition in Heaven will be such as to secure the

perfection of every faculty, and the satisfaction of every desire. The SENTIENT nature of man will then be perfected, and surrounded with circumstances fitted to minister to its enjoyment. Much of our happiness depends on the state of our sentient nature, and still more is derived through means of it, from the impressions made upon us by the scene in which we live. In its present state, our bodily frame is, in itself, imperfect. It is vitiated by disease, liable to frequent derangement, and easily overcome by fatigue. And he who sums up the emotions which may be traced, directly or indirectly, to the state of his material frame, will easily discover how very large a share both of his happiness and misery flows from this source alone. The difference between the enjoyment arising from a state of vigorous health, to which every, even the most ordinary element of nature, ministers gratification, and the misery arising from sickness or disease, which interrupts every mental exercise, and tinges every object with gloom — is so great, that for health, men would esteem it a cheap purchase to exchange all the business, and wealth, and honor of the world. But as great as is the difference between these two states of our sentient nature on earth, the difference will be still greater between even the most vigorous and healthy body here, and the state of our frame in Heaven. There, our sentient nature will be made perfect; freed from every tendency to disease or decay, and from every accidental evil. "It is sown in corruption — it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor — it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness — it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body — it is raised a spiritual body." "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore!" "There shall be no more pain, neither crying nor tears; but God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes!" In whatever scene a body so constituted might be placed, it would be incomparably more conducive to happiness, than the finest scene could be to a diseased or disordered frame. But, while happiness will spring from the healthy and perfect state of our sentient nature itself — we are taught in Scripture that the external scene, from which it will derive its impressions, will be adapted to its state, so as to minister to its enjoyment. We read, not only of a new body, "but of a new Heaven and a new earth," "where there shall be no more curse." The present world, as beautiful and varied as it is, is but an imperfect specimen of creation; for God cursed the ground for man's sake, and the whole creation groans and travails under it. But if this world, so cursed, is yet so beautiful — then what must Heaven be, the immediate residence of God! No human eye has rested on such a scene; it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive what God has prepared for those who love him. In speaking of Heaven, the sacred writers seem, as it were, to labor for expressions, and by heaping together every figure descriptive of earthly grandeur or beauty, to convey to our minds some sense of its glory. The new Jerusalem is described as a city, "its foundation laid in precious stones, its walls of jasper, its gates of pearls, its streets of pure gold, like transparent glass." At another time it is spoken of as "a priceless inheritance — an inheritance that is kept in Heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!" The scenery, the music, the living fountains of Heaven, are rather mentioned than described. But we may rest assured that it will furnish ample gratification to every capacity of our sentient nature, in so far as the capacities of that nature shall survive the death of our material frame. As an INTELLECTUAL being, man is capable of a still higher happiness. Knowledge, in all its various forms, is the object of his mind. And Truth, immortal, imperishable Truth, is the proper sustenance and solace of his mind. By this capacity, he is raised immeasurably above the rank of mere sentient beings, and takes his place among the intelligences of Heaven. But here on earth, this source of pure and lofty enjoyment is imperfect, partly by reason of the defectiveness of vision and the blindness of understanding which have

followed as a consequence of sin. Partly, also, by reason of the prejudices preventing the full view and the free admission of truth, which spring from the disordered state of his passions, and the defective nature of his educational discipline. Partly, also, by reason of the necessary conditions of his present state, in which he must walk by faith and not by sight, and is prevented by the necessity of daily toil, and by the numerous calls of appetite or business, from improving to the uttermost even those means of knowledge which are within his reach. But in Heaven, all these defects and obstacles will be removed. His mind being then disengaged from the contact of a gross earthly body, and fitted with a new and spiritual one, will be aided by it, rather than, as now, hindered in the search of truth. His moral nature being restored to order by the eradication of every unholy passion, will leave his intellect to act in freedom and unfettered, while the subjects of thought will be presented in all their reality and vastness before him, and those things will then be disclosed which are now concealed.

God and his works, both in the wide domain of creation, and in the boundless course of providence, will furnish ample scope for his inquiries. New associates, with knowledge acquired in other ages, and perhaps in other worlds — will be found at once to stimulate his diligence, and to enrich him with information. And the human mind, thus situated, seems to have no limit to its advancement — but a prospect of endless progression in the acquirement of Truth. As a MORAL being, man is capable of intense misery, or of refined enjoyment — according to the nature of those feelings or passions which prevail in his bosom. Anger, wrath, malice, lust, envy, jealousy, revenge — these elements of unholy passion make the human heart an inward Hell, and deprive him of the power of enjoying either sensible or intellectual gratification, blasting prosperity, and making life itself a burden.

But, on the other hand, when the mind is filled with love — with love to God, with love to others — when the heart is pure, the will resigned, the temper meek — these are the elements of a happiness, which, as being interior to the mind itself, no outward happenstance can destroy — they are the springs of perennial peace. This moral happiness may, like the enjoyments formerly mentioned, be tasted on earth; but here, like them also, it is imperfect, even in the maturest believers. The remains of indwelling sin, the roots of bitterness, are still in the heart — and the graces of the Christian character, although implanted and watered by the Spirit, are weak and sickly. But in God's presence, this joy will be full. No evil passion shall enter Heaven along with us. Into that high sanctuary, nothing shall enter that defiles, or works abomination. It is an asylum for pure and holy spirits — the spirits of just men made perfect. Not the prevailing power only — but the very presence of sin shall be abolished forever. That is a great change which takes place on earth when a sinner is converted unto God; when his eyes are first opened, and he is turned from darkness unto light, delivered from the bondage of corruption, and brought into the moral liberty with which Christ makes his people free. That is a great change — for the dominion of sin is then, for the first time, broken, and, from being the servant of Satan, the convert becomes the servant of God. By that change he is translated from a state of guilt and condemnation — into a state of grace. But another transition is necessary to perfect his blessedness — he must be translated from a state of grace into a state of glory. In the former, his sanctification is imperfect, his moral affections are as yet but feeble, frequently interrupted in their exercise, and their happy influence impaired by the remains of indwelling sin. The believer is engaged, while he lives here on earth, in a continual conflict with his own corruptions, and with the power of moral evil on every side of him.

But that conflict ends with death — then the very being of sin in his soul will be destroyed, and, released from all the fetters by which he is now bound, and from all the obstacles by which his progress is now retarded — he enters on a career of uninterrupted and perfect holiness. "He shall be presented faultless and blameless before the presence of his God, with exceeding joy!" "Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it, and present it to himself a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing!" The completion of our sanctification, the absolute perfection of our moral nature in Heaven — will be, in itself, one of the chief sources of our happiness as well as a means of qualifying us for the enjoyment of all the other springs of comfort with which Heaven is filled.

There is a vast difference between the state of believers on earth — and their state in Heaven; between sanctification begun through grace — and sanctification perfected in glory.

Here on earth, holiness appears as in its first dawn, like the morning twilight gradually progressive, indeed, and the harbinger of "perfect day" — yet still dim and obscure, and frequently overspread with clouds. But in Heaven, it shall shine in meridian splendor — a sun without decline.

Here on earth, the power of indwelling sin, although broken, is not destroyed; the growth is checked — but the roots remain deep in the heart. But in Heaven, not only the reign of sin — but the presence of sin shall be abolished, and every lust shall not only be repressed — but eradicated forever!

Here on earth, from the constitution of human society, and the circumstances of human life — the believer is surrounded with temptation, and apt to be either terrified, or ridiculed, or seduced into sin. But in Heaven, no temptation shall be presented, but, on the contrary, every influence from without shall be favorable to the stability and progress of holiness.

Above all, here on earth, the believer, while he is in part transformed into the image of Christ, by the partial and obscure views which he is enabled to obtain of his glorious character — yet as he "sees only through a glass darkly," Christ's image on his soul is imperfect, in proportion as his knowledge is defective. But in Heaven, "We shall see Him face to face," and "when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

It is one of the sublimest doctrines of Scripture, that men may become like to God himself, in point of character. And can we anticipate such a result, without seeing that it is the highest perfection of our moral nature, and a source of the most exalted satisfaction and happiness? "I shall be satisfied, when I awake in your likeness," says the Psalmist. Satisfied not until then, for our nature is not perfected, nor its high capacities filled, if we rest short of this. But then, satisfied to the full; for what higher attainment, or what nobler happiness, can any created being desire, than a character conformed to the character of God!

While these views of the character of the redeemed address a very solemn warning to those who are still disposed to cherish their evil passions — they are fitted to encourage and comfort the minds of believers, whose chief burden, while they remain on earth, is the power of indwelling sin. For it assures them, that each of them will then be perfect — perfect up to the full capacity of their moral nature. And how cheering is it to the man who is daily struggling against his corruptions — to know that his struggle will end in victory! How animating to him who is daily mourning over his backslidings — to know that he will soon be confirmed in a state of unchangeable integrity! And

how consoling when he looks on his best righteousness here as "filthy rags" — to anticipate the time when he shall be arrayed "in white robes!" And it adds to his consolation, that all around him will be equally holy — that, amidst that innumerable multitude, not one envious, nor uncharitable, nor sensual, nor rebellious spirit, shall be found! Not one who will ridicule his principles, or seek to seduce him from his piety — but all shall be of one heart, and of one mind, and mutual helpers of each other's holiness and joy. And how consoling, even now, to those who have lost near and dear friends, is the reflection, that if they were prepared for their departure — they are already placed beyond the reach of many evil influences to which they were here exposed, and admitted into a company of the holiest, and best, and happiest spirits in the universe! Had we been called to leave them behind us in this world, our anxiety must have been great as to the influence of that mixed society, and those evil examples to which they would be exposed after our departure. But there, they shall meet with no unkindness; no harsh word shall disturb their serenity; no deceitful friendship wound their feelings; no seductions sap their principles — but, being received and welcomed by "the just made perfect," they are safe up in Heaven.

And, finally, if we can discern in our own spirits any evidence of sanctification, let us cherish it as . . .

the first dawn of that holy light which shall issue in everlasting day;

the springing blade which shall blossom in Heaven;

the pledge of the perfection of our nature;

the first faint beginning of that character which shall be perfected on high.

Oh! with what reverence should a Christian regard his own soul, if it be now putting on the robe in which it shall appear before the throne, and how careful to guard that principle of grace within him, which is the germ of future glory! As a SOCIAL being, man is dependent on the society with which he mingles for a very large share of his personal happiness. By sympathy, he is so connected with others, that he must often weep when they weep, and rejoice when they rejoice. By this natural instinct, he shrinks from the contemplation of extreme suffering, and feels his happiness increased by the happiness of those around him. And, by his moral nature, the believer is disqualified from enjoying the company of the wicked, and yearns after the fellowship of those who have kindred principles and feelings with his own. This is the ground of that strong love which, notwithstanding their petty differences, exists between all the sincere disciples of Christ on earth. But here on earth, the enjoyment of Christian fellowship is marred by various causes, arising from the imperfection both of our present condition, and of our Christian graces. Partly by the diversities of opinion which flow from the limited range of our present vision, or the undue influence of prejudice. Partly by the difficulty of discovering the true followers of Christ in the midst of so many nominal or false professors, and the suspicion, or at least the caution, which frequent disappointment, in this respect, is fitted to inspire. Partly, also, by the obstacles which the necessary business of life, or the established distinctions between different classes of men, interpose to that free fellowship on which the enjoyment of society depends. And, most of all, by the weakness of love, both on our part, and on the part of others. But all these impediments to social happiness shall be removed in Heaven. There, our little prejudices, whether against people or parties, shall disappear. There, we shall be in no danger of misplacing our confidence, or of being deceived by hollow professors —

but "we shall know, even as also we are known." There, if there is not a perfect equality in point of capacity or dignity, there will at least be no pride on the one hand, and no envy on the other. And there, above all, love — pure, generous, unselfish love — which is the cement of all happy society, shall burn in every bosom, and prompt every word and action.

Oh! blessed season, when the strifes of this lower world shall cease, and be forgotten — and when, superior to every prejudice and passion, we shall dwell as brethren together in perfect love and unity!

And, consider how perfect that society will be, in which no ungodly, or ungrateful, or treacherous person shall be found — but in which we shall hold converse with all the wisest and holiest men who ever existed on the earth — with the patriarchs, and prophets, and saints of old — with the apostles, and confessors, and martyrs of our faith — with the reformers, and witnesses for God's truth, in all nations and ages — with every man that ever loved Christ, throughout the whole world.

Other orders of intelligent beings will also be there — angels, archangels, seraphim and cherubim — ministering spirits, who, while we sojourned on earth, watched over us as the heirs of salvation, rejoicing with joy in the presence of God at our conversion. How shall they rejoice with us, on our introduction into glory!

Such society, so free from every intermixture of base alloy, and so replete with the means of highest instruction, and with the spirit of loftiest principle — shall surely constitute one of the sweetest springs of happiness in Heaven! In reference to the society of Heaven, it is well worthy of being considered, that in it will be found the greatest, the wisest, and the holiest, from every nation and of every age. It is one of the chief glories of Heaven, indeed, that it is not confined to the great or the learned of this world — but neither is it exclusive of them. While every humble and simple-hearted Christian will be admitted, however limited may be his attainments, and however undistinguished his name; and while, unquestionably, the grand distinction of their character is that which is common to them all — namely, their resemblance to God in the moral dispositions and affections of their hearts — yet it is surely an interesting feature in our future prospects, that in Heaven we shall meet with those great, and wise, and holy men, whose names are recorded in sacred history, and whose example has been thought worthy of being held up for our encouragement and imitation in the house of our pilgrimage.

It is specially mentioned by our Lord himself, that when Lazarus died he was carried by angels into the presence of Abraham, the father of the faithful. And what Christian does not feel his spirit elevated and cheered by the prospect of meeting, not only the venerable patriarchs and prophets of the Jewish Church — but the apostles and first disciples, the confessors and martyrs, who in every age have witnessed a good confession, and in every land bequeathed their heroic example as a legacy to the Church of Christ?

Heaven is the asylum, the home of all these mighty and noble spirits. They appeared at intervals, and were often widely separated on earth — but they are now met in that holy place, to which, however unworthy, we also are invited to aspire. But not less interesting is the prospect of finding among the society of Heaven, the pious relatives and friends whom we have lost on earth. That is indeed a transcendent vision, which paints the saved on earth, as perfected in Heaven — and yet not more transcendent than true. For the apostle, designing to comfort the brethren respecting

those who are asleep, points to their meeting again and spending an eternity together in Heaven, as a reason why believers should not sorrow for the dead as those who have no hope. "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words!" 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 As death does not destroy — but is rather the occasion of perfecting, the essential faculties of human nature; and as, among other faculties, we learn from various intimations of Scripture that memory will be preserved — we cannot doubt that friends will remember and recognize each other in Heaven. And, oh! what joyful congratulations must then be interchanged between parents and children, brothers and sisters, friend and friend — who have mutually prayed for each other on earth, and often feared for each other's welfare — when, victorious over every enemy, and having surmounted every difficulty or danger, they shall meet around the throne in Heaven! Here, what deeper emotion can swell the heart of a Christian parent, than that which arises from the first, though faint, dawns of grace in the bosom of a beloved child? But as deep as is the joy of such a parent — he is depressed by the thought that the heart of his child is deceitful, that he is surrounded with snares, that soon he may be left alone in the world, without the benefit of parental care or counsel; and that, like too many others, he may make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and in belie the promise of his earlier years. But if the dawn of grace creates joy — then what must be the joy of meeting that child in glory; especially when it is considered that, henceforth, no temptation shall assail, and no enemy disturb his principles or his happiness forever! If, on earth, a parent welcomes his child on his return from a long and perilous voyage, with feelings too big for human utterance — then what shall be the joy of that welcome with which he shall be greeted on his arrival in Heaven, by those friends who are there before him, and who had often fasted, and wept, and prayed — even while they could as yet scarcely venture to hope, for his salvation!

But, besides the multitude of human spirits with whom the redeemed shall enjoy happy and congenial fellowship, their society embraces several other orders of intelligent and holy beings, who shall there mingle with them, and enhance their happiness. We find in the context that the angels and seraphim are engaged in the same act of religious worship with the redeemed from the earth. When the redeemed sing the song of God and of the Lamb, saying, "You are worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for you were slain, and have redeemed us to God by your blood," the apostle adds, "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and honor, and glory." And as they are represented as engaging in the same services in Heaven, so we have reason to believe that the redeemed, while they were on the earth, were the objects of their interest and care. It is emphatically declared by our Lord himself, that "there is joy in Heaven among the angels of God over one sinner that repents;" that "the angels desired to look" into the mystery of man's redemption, and were employed, in various ways, in the course of its application, as "ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who should be heirs of salvation." Did they rejoice over one sinner when he was converted — and with what joyful welcome, then, will they receive him when he arrives in Heaven! Did they minister to him on earth as an heir — and will they stand aloof from him when he enters on the possession of

his inheritance? It cannot be! And what gives a peculiar value to their society, is, that they have been for ages, and perhaps in very different parts of the universe, gathering knowledge of God and of his works, to which, on earth, the redeemed had no means of access — but which shall be imparted to them in Heaven. And how much their higher knowledge must add to the information of men, cannot require to be proved.

Here, then, is a glorious prospect opened up for us, a prospect into the invisible world — a world peopled with pure and happy spirits ready to receive and welcome us into their blessed society. Yes, we are called to come "unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of the church of the first-born, which are written in Heaven, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to God the Judge of all." How should such a prospect raise us above the sordid cares, and base ambitions, and degrading fellowships of the present world! Let us feel ourselves to be citizens of a nobler state, members of a purer society, and heirs of a better inheritance hereafter! And if at times we are despised — if our names are unknown, or known only to be ridiculed by men — if we are poor and insignificant in comparison with many around us — let the prospect of our admission into the society of Heaven, inspire us with a just sense of our dignity as immortal beings, and preserve us both from abject thoughts, and from degrading subserviency.

Man is an ACTIVE being — and some suitable employment for his active powers seems to be essential to his perfect happiness. This will be supplied by the services of Heaven. We find from Scripture, that in such services the angels themselves are employed — sometimes around the throne on high, an example of which we have in the account given of their worship and adoration; sometimes on missions to distant parts of God's dominions, an example of which we have in their ministering to believers on earth. It is presumable that men, being qualified for similar services, will be similarly engaged, as without such employment, some faculties of their nature would be unoccupied, some graces of their character unexercised, and some of their capacities of enjoyment unfilled. But then, there will be a vast difference between the nature of their employments on earth and in Heaven. On earth, their faculties are, in a great measure, engrossed with such labors as are necessary for the mere support of physical life; and although, even in a state of innocence, man was placed in the garden to dress it and to keep it, the extreme amount of labor which is now imposed on us for this end, is the effect of that curse which was denounced against sin, "cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow shall you eat of it all the days of your life." But for this curse, a much smaller amount of labor might have sufficed for the mere support of life, and our faculties might have been left free to engage in higher pursuits.

It is true, that this curse was wisely and mercifully imposed — and is wisely and mercifully converted into a means of preventing the much greater evils which must have ensued, had man, fallen and wicked, been under no necessity to labor, or had he been even comparatively idle. For, with disordered passions, such relaxation might have accelerated the growth of depravity, which is checked by the hard necessities of our present state. But in Heaven the reason of the curse being removed, the curse itself shall be withdrawn, "there shall be," says the apostle, "no more curse." It follows, there shall no longer be the same necessity for hard and unintermitted labor, with the view of procuring the mere necessities of life. And thus the faculties of man, disengaged from inferior pursuits, shall be left free for higher and more suitable employments — for the acquisition of knowledge, for the study of God's works and ways, and for such services as God may be pleased

to require at his hands. What these services will be, we cannot at present determine. But we may rest assured that they will be suitable to the dignity and greatness of the immortal mind, and will mainly consist in acts of homage to God, and beneficence to one another. The redeemed shall "serve him day and night in his temple." In one sense, indeed, it is said that there is "no temple in Heaven," because, in so far as they were of the nature of means, the gifts and services of the church on earth are superseded and set aside, when the grand end is attained in Heaven. Hence, the apostle declares, that "prophecies shall fail, and tongues shall cease," there being no farther occasion for such means, when they have accomplished the object for which they were designed. And knowledge also, such knowledge as we have on earth, shall vanish away in the perfect vision of God. But religion is not only a means — it is, in itself, an end — the chief end, the very perfection of our nature. And religion being not a passive but an active principle, must needs have its appropriate exercises and expressions forever. If penitential confession shall no longer be made — it shall only be superseded by songs of praise. If the ordinance of preaching, and the use of the sacrament shall be abolished — it is only because no one shall need to teach another, saying, "Know the Lord, for all shall know him, from the least even unto the greatest." The exercises which are appropriate to religion as a means of preparation for Heaven, shall cease — but the services which are essential to religion as a living and everlasting attribute of human nature, shall continue forever.

Heaven, then, will perfect all the faculties and fill all the capacities of the human soul. And whether we view him as a sentient, or an intellectual, or a moral, or a social, or an active being — man will find, that "in God's presence there is fullness of joy."

It must never be forgotten, however, that, perfect as the constitution of our nature, and ample as the external means of its gratification shall then be — our chief happiness must be derived from God himself. No other object can fully satisfy his people even in Heaven.

He is their portion, and it is in the enjoyment of God as their chief good, aided, as that enjoyment will then be, by full manifestation on his part, and free communion on theirs — that their everlasting blessedness shall mainly consist. He is the object of their supreme love; and as they perceive more and more of the excellence of the divine character — they will love and delight in it the more. And thus shall they reach the chief end of their being, the very highest perfection of their nature, which consists in "glorifying God and enjoying him forever!" For this end they shall be placed in the most favorable position, "they shall stand before the throne of God" — in "his presence" — at his "right hand." At present, clouds and darkness are round about the throne — we walk by faith, not by sight. But then, we shall behold what has heretofore been disclosed only in rare and imperfect visions to some of his inspired ministers.

What Micaiah beheld, when he said, "I saw the Lord sitting upon his throne, and all the hosts of Heaven standing on his right hand and on his left" — and what Ezekiel beheld, when he said, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory!" — and what Daniel beheld, when he said, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of Heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his

presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" — and what John beheld in Patmos, when he said, "I was in the Spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in Heaven, and one sat on the throne." "And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne;" — all this, which heretofore has been but darkly disclosed in visions, and much more, even "the unutterable things" of which the apostle speaks, shall be laid open — to every one of God's people in Heaven.

We cannot form an adequate conception of that beatific vision, nor of the manner in which God's glory shall then be displayed. But Heaven is everywhere in Scripture represented as, in a peculiar sense, the place of Jehovah's residence. And, in comparison with the view of the divine glory which they shall enjoy in his immediate presence, the apostle declares that, on earth, believers see only through a glass darkly — but then they shall see face to face, and know, even as also they are known. In that sanctuary of the universe — God's glory will be visible as was the Shekinah in the temple of old.

There is reason to believe that, in more than one of the visions already referred to, it was the mediatorial throne which the prophets saw, and Christ who appeared on it. Heaven is the place of his residence, and there "every eye shall see him!" And who that loves the Redeemer can contemplate the prospect of being admitted into his immediate presence, without the deepest emotions of holy joy! Do we think that those were highly privileged who accompanied with him on earth — who looked on his benignant countenance — who listened to his gracious words? And shall we not look forward with exultation to the prospect of spending an eternity in his presence! "The Lamb which sits on the throne shall feed them, and lead them unto living fountains of water!" Do we, in a foreign land, dwell with melancholy fondness on the recollection of a beloved friend at home; and, as the time of our necessary absence draws near its close — do we, with exulting hope, look forward to the prospect of meeting him, and think little of the danger of the voyage which shall bring us near to him? And why should we not, in this foreign land, remember our home in Heaven, and our friend and benefactor there, and surmount the fear of that passage through the swellings of Jordan, which will bring us into his immediate presence, and leave us with him forever? On earth our hopes may be disappointed — our friend may be changed — or, before we arrive, disease and death may have done their work, and where we hoped for a cheerful welcome, we may find his house desolate and deserted. Or, even should we find our friend — yet, the first happy meeting past, our joy is chastened by the thought that it cannot last — we may perceive the symptoms of growing decay, the omens of speedy death. But Christ cannot change — his affection for us can suffer no diminution — and once admitted into his presence, we "shall forever be with the Lord." But full as this joy may be, and adequate, while it lasts, to satisfy every capacity of our nature — its worth would be materially diminished were it transient or fleeting, for then the prospect of losing it would be fraught with a regret proportioned to the value which we set upon the possession of it. Were the spirits of just men made perfect ever so happy — yet the thought that such happiness might pass away, would of itself, sadden them. There is no room, however, for such sad forebodings in Heaven. There, happiness is not less permanent than complete, "these pleasures are for evermore." This is a grand characteristic of heaven — it is a constant, unchangeable, everlasting state! On earth, riches may take to themselves wings and flee away,

and the possessor may be left in the desolation of poverty. Fame may be blasted by our own indiscretion, or by the malice of others, and leave us to dishonor and shame. Friendship may be broken up by internal divisions, or by successive bereavements, and leave us in the world friendless and alone. Our beloved occupations may fail us, or we may become unfit for them. And, even were health, and fortune, and fame, and business, as every day's experience shows them to be transient — yet we have the absolute and unerring assurance, that they must terminate at death. But eternity is an attribute of Heaven. There, life will be everlasting, and everything that renders a life in Heaven desirable, will be everlasting too. Our rational nature will never decay — nor our intellectual vision grow dim — nor our moral nature become disordered — nor our society be reduced by disease or death — nor our employments come to an end. Eternity is inscribed on them all! And who can conceive the magnitude of eternity! Had we lived from the creation downwards to the present time, or had we an assurance that, from this hour, we should continue to live onward until the earth should be no more — these large intervals of time would seem to afford scope for much experience and enjoyment. But what are these, or any other measures of time — when compared to eternity! The vast idea is too great for our limited comprehensions, while we are so constituted, that we cannot comprehend the idea of infinity, whether in regard to space or time. We can only apprehend it faintly, by means of inadequate comparisons. Who can think of a million of years, or a million of centuries, without awe? But, after a million of years, or a million of centuries, shall have passed away — eternity will be still before us! Oh! how sublime, when our prospect is an eternity in Heaven — how unspeakably dreadful, if our prospect be an eternity in Hell!

Let us, as the disciples of Christ, think much on our everlasting hopes, and never forget, amidst the cares, and distresses, and drudgery of the world — that we have immortal spirits within us, and a glorious inheritance before us. This will animate us to persevere in the Christian course, unseduced by the temptations, and undeterred by the ridicule of the world. It will give to the poor man an ennobling estimate of himself, such as may preserve him from debasing habits, or a servile spirit, and will cheer the toils and troubles of life, with a consolation which the worldling never knew. The exceeding glory of this prospect, indeed, is apt to stagger the faith of many who, feeling their own insignificance, and deploring their own vileness, can hardly believe that such a destiny awaits them. But is the predicted glory more wonderful than what God has already wrought? Is it more wonderful that we should be exalted to Heaven — than that the Son of God should have descended from it? His humiliation being the groundwork, can we wonder at the glorious superstructure which shall be reared upon it? Nay, is not some such glorious result necessary to render that complete and credible, which has already been done? For what worthy end was the sacrifice of Christ offered, unless some grand result of that sacrifice remains yet to be revealed? Heaven is but a suitable sequel to the scheme of redemption! — a scene of glory bearing a due proportion to the work of Gethsemane and Calvary! — an end that shall at once explain and justify the marvelous means by which it was accomplished! Does such a glorious place exist anywhere in the universe of God! Are we called to aspire after it — and is it possible for us to reach it? Nay, is it an inheritance already secured for us — and our great forerunner gone to take possession in our name, and to prepare it for our reception! Then, why should we be cast down or dismayed? Are the trials of life, or the terrors of death, to be compared with the exceeding weight of glory which is about to be revealed? Shall we sink or falter by the way, when we know that we are journeying to a land of everlasting rest, and shall soon reach our eternal home? Shall

the dark valley of death affright us, when we see beyond it the fields of immortality smiling in the verdure of eternal spring? Destined as we are for Heaven, shall we grieve or murmur that the earth is not found to be a suitable resting-place for immortal beings, and that God checks every tendency to rest here, by sharp afflictions and severe disappointment? God forbid!

Heaven seen even in the distance, should allure us onwards — and its glorious light should cast a cheering ray over the darkest passages of life. Nay, not only should the hope of Heaven prevent us from complaining of the afflictions of life — but the thought that these afflictions are even now preparing us for that blessed state; that they are ordained as necessary and useful means of discipline to promote our progress towards it; that they are the furnace by which the dross is to be purged away, and the pure ore fitted for the Master's use in the upper sanctuary — should reconcile us to humble submission, should make us grateful, that such discipline being needful, it has not been withheld. This should lead us to pray earnestly that it may be so blessed for our use, as that we shall in due time be presented faultless and blameless before the presence of God's glory, with exceeding joy.

It concerns the Christian while he sojourns in the valley of tears, to be much engaged in meditating on the prospect of a blessed immortality — since this subject, when suitably improved, may conduce both to the stability of his principles, and the settlement of his peace. The hope of Heaven is, either directly or indirectly, the source of all the happiness which the believer enjoys; for, says the apostle, "If in this life only we had hope in Christ, we were, of all men, most miserable!" The hope of Heaven is his best support under sorrow, for never does sorrow appear more light than when viewed in connection with "an eternal weight of glory!" The hope of Heaven is the grand motive to a persevering warfare against sin, and a diligent pursuit after holiness, for, "if the dead rise not" — then why should he not follow the example of those who say, "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" The hope of Heaven is the source of abundant fruitfulness, for "then is he steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord — when he knows that his labor shall not be in vain in the Lord."

Heaven is the perfect state of the Christian, both in respect of character and happiness. Heaven is the consummation of all his toils — the finished model of that excellence, after which, amidst all the darkness which now obscures his vision, and the temptations which try his virtue, and the sorrows which chequer his course on earth — he still aspires. And surely it is well that he who has begun the race — should keep his eye fixed on the goal; that he who has begun the combat — should encourage himself by the glory of the coming triumph; and that he who, in the midst of sin, has formed the lofty conception, and cherished the pure love of virtue — should behold that virtue victorious, and frequently turn his thoughts to Heaven, where, whatever is pure, or peaceable, or lovely, is embodied in the grand result of his present labors, and where the highest perfection of holiness is combined with the noblest kind, the largest measure, and the most enduring certainty of blessedness!

He who, amidst the imperfections of humanity, aims at perfecting his rational and immortal nature, and seeks to find, in the elevation of his moral sentiments, a source of pure and lasting enjoyment — may well be encouraged by the thought, that others, equally guilty and helpless, have succeeded in the same noble enterprise before him. And he who, in prosecuting this grand design, is apt to be discouraged by finding himself in a small minority on earth, may well draw

encouragement from the multitude, which no man can number, who are around the throne of God. Already have they weathered the storm and reached their destination — and, oh! it is cheering, when we are struggling with the storms and billows of this mortal life, to think, that whatever troubles may arise to distress the faithful, and to endanger the Church on earth — already the greater portion of the Church is safe up in Heaven; and that soon, very soon, if we persevere, we shall be added to their number, and welcomed as their "fellow sufferers and fellow conquerors on high!"

## 01.11. Meditation 11

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### MEDITATION 11.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50

"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 That the souls of believers are made perfect at death, is one of those delightful doctrines which Scripture clearly teaches, and of which a revelation from God alone could give us full assurance. That the soul is not destroyed when the body is dissolved — that it survives the decay and wreck of our physical frame — that our rational and moral faculties are neither benumbed into a state of insensibility, nor suspended in their exercise, by that solemn event which terminates our connection with the present world — but, on the contrary, our souls are freed from every encumbrance by which their exercise had here been cramped or interrupted, and translated into a state wherein they shall continue to expand, and act with greater vigor than before. These are some of the sublimest truths of Scripture, and they open to us a prospect which has no limit — the prospect of an eternal existence — a never-dying consciousness, which, as it feeds an elevating hope respecting the future, so it should teach us now to entertain a reverence for ourselves, as beings over whom death itself shall have no permanent power.

It is true, we must submit to that humiliating method of departing out of this world, which God has imposed as the wages of sin. We enter not on eternity as by a "triumphal march," but through suffering, and agony, and shame. The body is dissolved, and decays, and it must be interred in the dark and lonesome grave — but our nobler nature, the soul, survives. Looking on the agonies of dissolving nature, or on the dreary stillness which follows, we might have supposed, that here was a final period of conscious existence — that all was over with the busy, active, and restless spirit, which, for years, had fluttered amidst the cares or pleasures of the world. But no, that spirit is not dead, it is only departed, and will appear again on another scene. In reference to believers, the apostle distinctly affirms, that death only makes a change in the residence or abode of the never-dying soul; that heretofore it was at home in the body and absent from the Lord. But at death, the same soul is absent from the body and present with the Lord. And grounded on this fact, he expresses a preference for the latter state, the state which shall come after death, for this reason — that, in our present condition, both our character and our happiness are alike defective; whereas, in our future one, both our character and our happiness shall be better and more secure.

Now, this implies, that such a change takes place at the hour of death, as is fitly denoted by the difference between an imperfect and a perfect condition — and as is sufficient to warrant a desire on our part, to enter, even though it is by death, on that more perfect and glorious state. We must experience it before we shall be able to describe the change which the soul undergoes at the hour of its departure from the body. But there are two considerations which may help us to see that there is a great change, and that, in the case of the believer, it is an enormous change for the

better. The first is, that so long as the soul is united to the body, and dwells upon the earth, it is in a situation which subjects it to great difficulty, and exposes it to numerous temptations and trials. The mere presence of the body, with all its numerous wants and weaknesses, and with the instincts and passions which a physical existence implies — the remaining power of indwelling sin, or that law in the members which wars against the law of the mind — the presence, too, of an evil world, which exerts an unfavorable influence on the spiritual life — and above all, the necessary conditions of our present state, as these are described by the apostle, when he says, "we walk by faith, and not by sight" — and again, "when we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord" — these evils or defects, which cleave necessarily to the believer in his present state, and by which his spiritual progress is impeded, and his spiritual comfort impaired — are, all of them, removed by death, seeing that then the soul is emancipated from the body, delivered out of an evil world, and no longer retained in a state of absence from God! From these it is delivered; and that is one important consideration. The second is, that the soul is placed at death in another state, as favorable to its holiness and happiness as the former was unfavorable. It is present with the Lord, says the apostle, and no longer walks by faith — but faith has been converted into vision. All the realities of the spiritual world, formerly believed in on the testimony of God — are now disclosed to it, and its own sensible experience is superadded to the evidence hitherto enjoyed. This is the clear import of the passage. Believers may, indeed, be said to excel other men in the present state, inasmuch as, while others walk by sight of things now seen, believers walk by faith of things unseen. But departed believers do, in like manner, excel those presently on the earth, seeing that while the latter walk by faith and not by sight, the former have something more than faith itself, they have a personal experience and observation in that better world, of those things which we only believe. And hence the apostle, contrasting the present with the future state of believers, says, "Now we see through a glass darkly — but then face to face. Now we know in part — but then shall we know even as also we are known. When that which is perfect is come — then that which is in part shall be done away." This change in the condition of a believing soul, may well serve to account for its being now made perfect; and hence, we read of "the spirits of just men made perfect;" and of those who, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are now before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; who hunger no more, neither thirst any more — but the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, feeds them, and leads them unto living fountains of water, and God wipes away all tears from their eyes!

Let it be carefully observed, however, that the apostle is speaking here of true Christians who had undergone the great initial change of regeneration, and in whom the work of sanctification had made some progress. In reference to them he says, that what had hitherto been imperfect in their state and character — is made perfect by their translation out of this world into another and a better world. But death is not a means of conversion or of sanctification in itself, and can have no effect in ridding those of their corruptions who have cherished them all their lives long, and who die impenitent and unpardoned. The death of the body has no efficacy in destroying the ruling principles of any human soul — it only changes its situation, and leaves those principles to develop themselves more freely and more fully in eternity. And hence, while a converted and sanctified man will find himself, after death, relieved from various encumbrances which had marred his spiritual progress on earth, and furnished with new and better facilities in Heaven — an unconverted man, although absent from the body, will not, on that account, be present with the Lord; but "being banished from his presence," and given over to the society of reprobate spirits —

his wicked character will still cleave to him, and the bitterness and hopelessness of his condition will mainly consist in his being left, through eternity, just as death found him — the willing and wretched slave of his own lusts! The apostle's language clearly implies that the souls of believers do immediately pass into glory. Their disembodied state, it is true, differs widely, both from their condition on earth, and from their ultimate condition after the resurrection. Their bodies are for a season laid in the grave, and shall rest there until the trumpet shall sound and the dead be raised. Their full and perfect redemption shall not be realized, until soul and body shall come together at the judgment of the great day. But what we affirm is, that even their disembodied state, differing, as it unquestionably does, both from their previous and their ultimate one — is neither a state of insensibility, nor a state of indecision, nor a state of probation and trial; but that, immediately on their leaving the body, they become sensible of their condition, and are admitted to partake of those pleasures which God has prepared for them that love him. With what organs they are furnished, in what form they live, or whether any new form is bestowed upon them — is nowhere clearly pointed out in Scripture; although, from the case of Moses and Elijah, who appeared visibly along with our Lord on the Mount, as well as from the souls whom John saw under the altar in the Apocalypse, and the vision of Lazarus and Abraham, represented in one of the parables — it may be presumed that some visible outward form is given to them. But whatever opinion may be formed on these speculative points, and respecting which, as being speculative, Scripture gives no very explicit information. Yet the great fact is revealed, that their state is fixed and settled from the hour of each man's death; that they are sensible of that state, and derive from it a measure of happiness far transcending any which the maturest Christian can either enjoy or hope for upon the earth. This is conclusively established by the apostle's language. His statement is, that so long as a believer is "at home in the body, he is absent from the Lord." He represents "presence with the Lord" as immediately following our departure from the body, otherwise there could be no ground for the preference which in this and in another passage the apostle expresses. Comparing his state on earth, with that which would follow immediately on the death of the body, he says, "we are willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." And again, "I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better."

It is evident that there could have been no ground for the apostle's hesitation in this matter, on the supposition that his death was not to be followed immediately with glory. If, after death, we were to remain in a state of insensibility until the resurrection, then out of a regard to his own happiness, and from the strong desire which he felt to be useful to the Church on earth — he must have been anxious to protract the term of his mortal pilgrimage; and no reason can be assigned for his preferring death to life, which is not based on the supposition, that death would afford an immediate introduction into the presence of God and of Christ. And accordingly, thus he speaks of it, "absent from the body, and present with the Lord" — "to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better!" His words not only intimate, that believers are at death made perfect, and that they do immediately pass into glory — but he declares his willingness to depart, "we are willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." The apostle does not quarrel with the present life; he was neither discontented with the world — nor reluctant to remain in it. On the contrary, in stating his willingness to depart, he is careful to intimate his entire acquiescence in the disposal of Providence, as to his living or dying. He draws a comparison between his present and his future state, not as between a bad and a good — but as between a good and a better. He prefers Heaven — but is not discontented upon the earth. He would rather be absent from the

body and present with the Lord. But so long as God had work for him to do, he was prepared, in the spirit of meek, and patient, and resigned submission, to say with Job, "All the days of my appointed time I will wait, until my change comes." In like manner, in the parallel passage, having expressed his desire to depart, he adds, "nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you; and having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all, for your furtherance and joy of faith." What nobler attitude can a rational spirit assume, than that in which the apostle appears in these passages — when, with a calm and comprehensive eye, he seems to survey the whole prospect which lies before him, as an immortal being, and seeing it divided into two parts of very unequal magnitude — the one, a short span of time — the other, the vast expanse of eternity — regards time as the youth, and eternity as the manhood of his being; the present life as the season of duty and preparation, in which he must be disciplined and trained; and the life to come, as the season of matured wisdom and perfect enjoyment; the earth as the antechamber of Heaven, and death the mere portal which opens between the two. And while he longs for Heaven, and feels the trials of his present lot, he is, nevertheless, patiently submissive to God's will, in the assurance, that so long as he is continued here, God has work for him to do, and that, sooner or later, all his trials shall terminate in victory, and all his labors in a glorious reward! In explanation of the apostle's preference, let it be observed, that his language does not imply either that he made light of death, or that he had no dislike or aversion to it considered in itself. There is, indeed, a slavish fear of death, through which some are all their lifetime subject to bondage, and from which the apostle was delivered, as it was the Savior's design to deliver all his disciples. But there is a natural fear of death, which is, in some sense, a necessary attendant or result of the great primary law of self-preservation — a law, which, like every other ordination of God, bespeaks the wisdom and goodness of him by whom it was established. Had we no aversion from suffering, and no fear of death — we might rashly or carelessly expose ourselves to such danger, and incur such calamities as would abridge our term of existence, and send us prematurely out of this state of being. Nor is this all; it is hardly possible to conceive how much God's moral government would suffer, were that natural law reversed, whereby pain and suffering are made sensible and alarming evils. For, were men less averse than they now are to suffering or death, the wicked would be less restrained by fear, the righteous less benefitted by discipline and chastisement — the law would lose the natural sanctions by which it is now enforced, and sin would be exempt from many powerful checks to which it is now subjected. Hence, as it would materially impair the efficacy of his moral government, and interfere with the first great law of our rational nature — we cannot suppose that it was God's design in the Gospel, far less that it is absolutely essential to our salvation, that the natural fear of death should be totally destroyed, or exchanged for stoical apathy and unconcern. And for such fears, therefore, in so far as they arise out of the law of nature, and are consistent with right reason — we are bound to make every allowance, especially in the case of the timid disciple. In point of fact, the apostle does not make light of death, either as in itself an inconsiderable matter, or as of trivial importance — when considered in connection with its consequences. In itself, he knew it to be an evil and a bitter thing to die, and hence he speaks of it as an enemy, "the last enemy which shall be destroyed is death!" And, in its consequences, he knew that it would, on the one hand, separate him at once from this world, the scene of his beloved employment in his Master's service, and of his sweet fellowship with his Master's followers. And, on the other hand, death would introduce him into a world of spirits, known to him as to us, only by the hearing of faith, and to which he was yet a stranger. An event so painful to

flesh and blood, and so trying even to the faith and hope of a believer, could not be regarded by the apostle with indifference or unconcern. Nay, had it been so considered by him, that very circumstance would materially impair the force of his statement. For it had been little to say, that having no fear of death, no shrinking from death, he was willing to depart; but the force of his expression depends on this, that while, like other men, he had a natural fear of death, his faith was such as to surmount and overcome that fear, and to make him rejoice in the hope of glory.

Paul felt, as we feel, that, in itself, death is a fearful, and a dark and a dreary passage. He does not speak of it as an event to be chosen or desired for its own sake — but he says, that, when viewed as the gate into Heaven, death stands connected with a prospect which reconciled him to its terrors. And by how much the fears of any believers respecting death are the more sensitive and overwhelming — just so much the more should we admire the power of that religion, which has enabled many a timid disciple to rise above his fears, and to take his flight to Heaven on the wings of Christian hope.

There are many reasons why we, too, should be willing to depart. The chief reason that is assigned by the apostle is, as we have seen:

the necessarily imperfect state of believers, so long as they remain in the body;

the necessity of walking by faith, and not by sight;

the absence, in one sense, of their glorified Lord;

as also, the presence and remaining power of indwelling sin.

If, at death, we shall be freed from all these defects and encumbrances, and if we are now really born again, so as to have a taste and relish for spiritual perfection — to what can it be attributed that we are so unwilling to reach our home in Heaven, except to the weakness of our faith and hope? Many of us may find a ground for deep humiliation before God in this matter, seeing that he who searches the heart, may even now observe much reluctance on our part to leave the body, and little or no desire to enjoy His immediate presence. And, as this can only be accounted for by referring it to the weakness of our faith, or to the lack of a well-grounded hope — so it will be found to be generally associated with an undue attachment to the world, and an aversion to part with all for God.

We shall not call in question the reality of any man's religion, merely on account of such feelings — for many of God's people are often in heaviness through manifold temptations, and they cannot always speak in the apostle's language. But surely they will not rest contented in a state which renders the thought of death a bondage, and the prospect of entering into Heaven painful or depressing to them! They will seek to be resolved as to their saving interest in the gospel, and will give all diligence to make their eternal prospects sure. It will be their sincere desire and endeavor to attain to the confidence, and to cherish the spirit of the apostle.

It is both their duty and their interest to do so. Their duty, as the professed followers of him "who is the resurrection and the life, who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality clearly to light." And their privilege, since nothing can be more blessed than that habit of believing expectation, which will reconcile them to whatever God may be pleased to appoint. And nothing, on the other hand, is more wretched, or less befitting their profession, than that restless

inquietude, that apprehensive alarm, that surprise and consternation, which the sudden prospect of death, or even its slow but sure advance towards them — awakens in the mind, when it is still uncertain as to its future prospects; or yet more wedded to the world, than wishful of Heaven.

We should be always ready — ready not only as having a saving interest in Christ — but as having a realizing faith in him, a watchful expectation of his coming, and a joyful welcome to him when he comes — we must not only have lamps — but oil in our lamps. And, if we would not be taken by surprise, we must neither slumber nor sleep. For our direction in this matter, let us remember that the apostle's willingness to depart arose out of, and stood connected with, an assurance of his personal and saving interest in the scheme of grace, "we are confident, and willing to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." This confidence at once explains and justifies his willingness to die. With such a confidence, it is not astonishing that he should express a desire to depart. But, while destitute of this, it is not to be expected that any human being will calmly contemplate death without apprehension, or encounter it without reluctance.

There can be no doubt, indeed, that every sincere believer who reposes his trust in the Savior, is, in all essential respects, prepared for death and its outcomes; and that his faith, however weak and wavering, will infallibly secure for him the reward of a blessed immortality. Wherever true faith exists and obtains the pardon of sin, and a sure title to an inheritance in Heaven — in the same proportion in which faith is active and influential, it prepares him also, in point of character — for the services and enjoyments of that sacred asylum of piety and peace. In so far, therefore, as his mere safety is concerned, every sincere Christian is prepared for death, even though, for a season, he should be in heaviness through manifold temptations; or unable, by reason of weakness, to speak in the strong language of assurance or triumph. Christ "will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." But while, in respect of mere safety, all true believers are prepared for death and its outcomes — there is, in respect of sensible comfort, great diversity among them, according to their different degrees of faith and hope. Many are so weak in faith, that the prospect of encountering death, and of entering on the world of spirits, is fraught to them with unnumbered terrors! Their lives are spent in fearful apprehension of that event, which, nevertheless, they know to be inevitable — health and prosperity are embittered by the thought of it, and, when disease comes, it comes attended with numerous desponding anticipations, and foreboding fears.

There is reason to believe that not a few of the serious and sincere disciples of the Savior are subject to these fears; and, in their case, even the watchfulness which our Lord enjoins, is the means rather of increasing than of mitigating their distress — since, where a watchful expectation of death is exercised, without the enjoyment of a settled peace of mind and a lively hope — it tends much more to exasperate than to appease the anxieties which the thought of death is fitted to excite. The only sure antidote to these distressing feelings, is the confidence which the apostle expresses — a confidence of his personal interest in the salvation of the cross, in virtue of which he could look forward to a building of God, "a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," as his own, by sure title and promise, after the death of the body.

Nothing can be more certain, than that here, as elsewhere, in his precious writings, the apostle expresses a sure hope of a blessed immortality, and that he does so, with no exclusive reference to his own case — but in the name of believers in general, to whom the same promises were

addressed as to himself, and in whom, although it might be in different degrees, the same faith had been wrought. Nor can it be doubted that this confidence is a very high and precious privilege — that, if attainable, it is in the very highest degree to be desired; and that being, in some sense, the natural fruit of an active faith, and the nourishment of a lively hope. The Christian is not only living far below his privileges, as a child of God, when he rests satisfied without this attainment — but is thereby showing that his faith is neither so active, nor his spiritual desires so strong, nor his love to God and to Heaven so lively, as they ought to be. That no man can be a genuine believer, or that no man will be saved, unless he can adopt the language which is here used — we will not affirm. But while the desponding and fearful ought not to be driven to despair, surely it is well that they should be admonished of their remaining imperfections, and urged to aim at a privilege, which they will not deny to be a valuable one, and which the Gospel declares to have been enjoyed by others before them — and that they should be affectionately reminded that, besides being a blessed privilege, it is also a commanded duty, to "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure." The apostle states, in the preceding verses, the grounds or reasons of this confidence: "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord." As it is by the work of the Holy Spirit that believers are wrought, fashioned, polished, and prepared for the upper sanctuary — so the fruits of the Spirit, being the evidence of a saving change, are at once the reasons of present assurance, and the pledges of future glory.

Hence, it is said, "the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God; and, if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ." And how does he thus bear witness? Not by revealing any truth which is not contained in Scripture — but by enabling them to embrace the truth of Scripture, and to appropriate its promises to themselves. Not by a secret voice, assuring them that their names are in the book of life — but by first producing in their souls, and then enabling them to perceive — those marks of saving grace, which will terminate in glory. But such a change may have been really wrought, and yet there may be seasons in the lives of sincere Christians, in which they cannot so clearly discern the evidence, as to derive comfort from the persuasion, that they have been converted; seasons of spiritual darkness, when their views are clouded, it may be, by unbelief; or seasons of backsliding, when they have reason to mourn over resolutions which have been forgotten, vows that have been broken, and obligations, both of duty, and of gratitude, which have been shamefully violated; or seasons of spiritual insensibility, when they have so far fallen from the state of spiritual health, as to be almost tempted to question whether they have ever been quickened into spiritual life. At such seasons, it is not astonishing that they cannot, with a good conscience, use the language of the apostle. But as dark as their present state is, it does not follow that they are shut out from hope. It is true that they cannot discern, in their own troubled spirits, those marks of grace which are the evidences of conversion, and the pledges of glory; and we cannot, therefore, in these circumstances, direct them to look inward on the frame of their own spirits, with any hope of their thereby obtaining relief. No, but we can, and we do, bid every downcast believer to look out of himself — to Christ's cross, and to God's mercy-seat! And we do so with the greater confidence, just because he has been brought to feel that he has nothing else to depend on.

Supposing all his fears as to his present state to be well-grounded, nevertheless, to him, be he converted or unconverted, the chief of sinners or the weakest of saints — to him, whatever is his character, and however dark his prospects — we point to Christ's cross, as a refuge to which the most miserable is welcome to flee, and from which, never was the poorest penitent sent empty away. Let him not continue to brood over the darkness of his own soul — but, knowing it to be dark, let him turn his eye upward to the Sun of Righteousness, which has arisen upon him with healing in its beams, and which, notwithstanding all the gloom which hangs around his spirit, is still shining clear and serene in Heaven.

Let him look to Christ's cross and to God's mercy-seat — and thence may he draw, in the exercise of a simple and confiding faith, that assurance of God's love, and that peace of conscience, which will enable him to surmount the terrors of death, and to look forward with humble hope to a time when, no longer seeing through a glass darkly, he shall see face to face, and know even as also he is known. This was the first ground of the apostle's confidence — he heard Christ's invitations and promises, he embraced them, and thereafter his experience of God's faithfulness confirmed his faith and animated his hope. At one time he had as little to comfort him in the prospect of death as any among ourselves — but he attained to confidence by the exercise of a simple faith. Let us aim at the same attainment by the same means. That this confidence is a highly desirable state of mind at all seasons — but especially in the near prospect of death — will not surely be denied by any one, who, awake to the solemn nature of that change, and the eternal consequences which flow from it, will only ask himself the question — whether it were best to die in doubt or in hope — to be distracted at that solemn hour by the thought that, after all, he may be in the wrong path — or to be firmly assured, on grounds of rational conviction, that he is safe? Who would not wish, at that hour, to know, and to know assuredly, that he is in a state of peace with God — that he is an heir of Heaven, and not of Hell?

Or, could anything be more terrific than to encounter death at the hazard of appearing before the judgment-seat unprepared? We must make up our minds, and arrive at some certainty on this matter. If we wish that our last moments may be undisturbed by misgivings, and that we may descend into the valley of death with serenity and composure — Oh! let us not leave the task of winding up our accounts to that hour which will bring with it enough for us to think upon and to do, without being burdened with a long arrear from the past. Let us now, and each day as we pass on to our final reckoning, examine and try the foundation of our hope. Let us, once for all, satisfy ourselves as to the path which we should choose, and let it be that path in which we shall be content to meet death when it comes.

Having chosen the right way, let us go right on, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left. Setting our faces steadfastly to go up to the Jerusalem above — let us seek to enjoy, more and more, the love of God, and communion with him; to become more submissive to his will, and more conformed to his divine image. For then, and then only, may we be both prepared for Heaven, and assured of our inheritance there. And we shall be happy, either in his service here, or in his presence hereafter — if, only walking in the path of sanctification, we have "the pledge of his Spirit" in our hearts.

## 01.12. Meditation 12

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### MEDITATION 12.

"This is my comfort in my affliction" Psalms 119:50 "It any among you afflicted? Let him pray!" James 5:13 The Bible opens a spring of comfort for the afflicted, by giving them free access to the throne of grace, and inviting them to enjoy the privilege of prayer.

Prayer is, indeed, the Christian's privilege at all seasons; and never will he feel himself to be in a right or comfortable state, whatever may be his outward prosperity, if he allows himself to neglect that blessed ordinance, by which fellowship is maintained between Heaven and earth, and fellowship enjoyed by the creature with the Creator. And he who, whether in prosperity or adversity, makes it his daily practice to go to the throne of grace, and in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, makes his request known unto God — will, from his own experience, bear testimony to the truth of the promise, that "the peace of God which passes all understanding, shall keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus." But while prayer is a duty incumbent at all seasons, and a privilege which the highest prosperity affords no reason for neglecting — it is, in many respects, peculiarly seasonable in the time of affliction.

Affliction is favorable to the spirit of prayer. For, wherein does the true nature of prayer consist? It consists in the desire of the heart, offered up to God — and what is better fitted to awaken earnest desire than the pressure of affliction? In the day of prosperity, when every need and desire of our nature is supplied, we may not be conscious of any very strong need for prayer, and are too apt to forget the fact of our dependence, in respect to the supply of our temporal needs. And even in regard to our spiritual necessities, we are prone, when surfeited with worldly prosperity, to become cold and lukewarm in our desires after the communication of divine grace, by which alone they can be supplied. Is there one Christian who has not experienced the deadening effect of uninterrupted prosperity on the spiritual desires and holiest affections of his nature? And if even Christians are too often lulled to sleep by its influence — how much more may those be cradled into profound forgetfulness of God, who have never known the necessity, nor made the deliberate choice, of a better and more enduring portion? But when their prosperous course is broken by severe affliction, the minds of both classes are brought into a new state; the Christian is then thrown back on the inward resources of his religion, and will then feel their necessity and value. And even in an unsanctified bosom, such strong natural longings will spring up, as may, under the blessing of God, lead the worldling himself to seek after a better portion than this poor world. In so far as affliction is the means of awakening earnest desire, and exciting a sincere feeling in the heart — it is favorable to the spirit of prayer; for that feeling, or that desire, if directed towards God, is prayer.

Again, prayer is an expression of our dependence on God. And it is in affliction that we are most sensible of our helplessness — it is by affliction that we are made to feel how little of what most nearly concerns our happiness is under our own control, and how absolutely our interests are at the disposal of a higher power. What, for instance, can impress the mind with so deep a sense of helplessness, as the pressure of disease in our own persons, which no human skill can arrest or

cure; or the gradual decay and final death of a beloved friend, at whose couch we watch by day and by night, and are only more and more confirmed in the conviction, that unless God interposes — vain is the help of man? In so far as affliction teaches us our dependence on God, it is favorable to the spirit of prayer; for why, in such circumstances, should we refrain from expressing that dependence which we feel, and acknowledging that helplessness which we cannot deny — especially when we know that God has a sovereign control over all events, and that, if we procure his aid, we obtain the benefit of unerring wisdom and almighty power?

Again, affliction is favorable to the spirit of prayer, because, when it is either sudden or severe, it is usually associated in the minds of men with a sense of guilt, and an apprehension of divine displeasure. We insist not on the reasons of it — but on the bare fact that such an apprehension is universally felt by those who are exposed to imminent danger, or plunged in deep distress. And that, by the constitution of our nature, such a connection is established between suffering and sin, as that the former cannot be, to any great extent, endured, without being accompanied with a deep sense of personal demerit and guilt. That such a connection does exist, is evident from the dreadful apprehensions which are experienced and expressed by the most ungodly and careless, when they are suddenly brought into imminent danger. Many will then tremble, and think of God — who cared nothing for Him before. Have we not seen a family, enjoying a long course of prosperity, and as unmindful of God and religion, as if they were ignorant that they had a God to worship, and souls to be saved; but when one of their number was suddenly seized by the hand of death — the whole of that mirthful household were also seized with religious fear, and none more anxious than they to procure the aid of a minister's consolations, and a minister's prayers! Have we not known a crude and thoughtless sailor, spending every hour of fair weather and prosperous winds in jovial mirth — night after night retiring to his cot without thinking of the God above, or of the Hell beneath him — and even, when the first gale arose that was to founder his ship, reckless of the coming storm. But when the crash was heard, and when, from the force of habit, the first word upon his lip was a curse — that oath died away into a prayer, when the foaming waters burst across the deck, and lashed him into the mighty deep! In Psalms 107:1-43, we find the tendency of affliction to produce prayer illustrated by many beautiful examples — as in the case of the Jews wandering in the wilderness, in a solitary way, hungry and thirsty, and their souls fainting within them. Or in the case of those who, by reason of personal distress, "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron, because they rebelled against the words of God." Or in the case of those who go down to the sea in ships, whose soul is melted because of trouble. In each case, it is added, "they cried unto the Lord in their trouble — and he delivered them out of their distresses."

It is true, that in all these cases, prayer may, in the first instance, be nothing more than the cry of nature in distress. The desires of such people may not, at the outset, be purely spiritual. And the sense of guilt which they experience, may be more characterized by the terrors of remorse, than by the tenderness of true repentance. Be it so; this does not hinder the usefulness of affliction, as a means in God's hand, of leading them to pray. God acts on the minds of men by rational inducements; and seeing that, in their natural state, they are dead to the influence of higher and more spiritual motives, he has recourse to their sentient nature. Their hopes and their fears are addressed in the promises and threatenings of Scripture — and their love of happiness, and aversion to suffering, are appealed to in the absence of holier principles. When God sends them

affliction, he appeals to their natural feelings. And the lessons which it is fitted to teach, are so many motives to a religious life — motives which, although, in the first instance, addressed to the mere natural feelings, and hopes, and fears of the sufferer — may, nevertheless, through these, arrest the attention, and reach the conscience, and ultimately renew the heart. The impressions which are made during a season of affliction, may be the result, in a great measure, of mere natural feeling — but they may, nevertheless, be the means which the Holy Spirit has chosen for the commencement of a saving change. And if they lead the sufferer to pray, they bring him under a new influence, whereby the rational feelings which at first prompted him, may gradually and imperceptibly rise into gracious and devout affections. At all events, let no sufferer be debarred from the throne of grace, because he is in doubt as to the spirituality of his affections, or depressed by a sense of guilt. Let him remember, that as a sinner he is invited, and that his present affliction is designed to induce him to pray. And should he still question his warrant or his prospect of acceptance, let him remember the words of the apostle to Simon Magus, "You are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity; but pray to God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you." In the case of backsliders, too, who have fallen from their first love, and have become conformed to the world — affliction is often sent as the most suitable means of reclaiming them from declension, and restoring them to spiritual health. This it does, by leading them to pray. Oh! how many Christians have had reason to acknowledge the blessed effect of affliction, in renewing their communion with God, and reviving their decayed devotion! Are there not many who can testify, from their own experience, that while they were prosperous, the spirit of devotion became imperceptibly more languid in their bosoms — that instead of frequently enjoying prayer as a delightful privilege, they were gradually losing their relish for it, and that when they did observe it, it was observed in a cold and formal manner; and that they were not sensible of the length to which they had proceeded in spiritual declension, until, by some severe stroke of affliction — they were thrown on the resources of a piety too decayed to afford them either support or consolation — and were thus, for the first time, apprised of a danger until then unperceived? Can they not remember what deep humiliation, what earnest desires, and what fervent supplications were produced by that affliction — and the precious discoveries which it enabled them to make? And are they not sensible, that it was in prayer they found their consolation — when, with their eyes opened to the reality of their condition, they besought the Lord with tears?

Indeed, one of the greatest benefits of severe affliction, in the case of God's people, is, that it awakens them to greater ardor and diligence in prayer. And such is the blessedness of communion with God, and such the elevating and sanctifying effect of earnest prayer, that were affliction productive of no other benefit — this alone might well compensate for all the loss which is sustained, and all the pain which is inflicted, even by the severest dispensations of providence. As affliction prepares the mind for prayer — so prayer relieves the mind in affliction.

Prayer is often the means of averting the evils with which we are threatened, and of delivering us from those under which we labor. Its efficacy, both for defense and delivery — is frequently stated in express terms, and illustrated by striking examples in the Sacred Writings.

It is recorded of Hezekiah, that when he heard the message of God by the mouth of Isaiah the prophet, saying, "Set your house in order-for you shall die, and not live," he "turned his face toward the wall, and prayed unto the Lord, and said, Remember now, O Lord, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in your

sight! And Hezekiah wept sore. Then came the word of the Lord to Isaiah, saying, Go and say to Hezekiah: Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears — behold, I will add to your days fifteen years." "And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs; and they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered."

Thus was a sore disease removed, and early death prevented by the efficacy of prayer; and Hezekiah had reason to sing for joy: "Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness." Isaiah 38:17-18 The history of the people of Israel affords many interesting examples of the effect of prayer in delivering from outward trouble, as well as of the tendency of affliction to impress the most careless with the necessity and value of prayer. These examples are thus beautifully referred to in the 107th Psalm: "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from the hand of the enemy. They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way — they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their souls fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble — and he delivered them out of their distresses. For he satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness." Again, referring to the grievous backslidings of that highly favored people, the Psalmist says: "They rebelled against the words of God, and despised the counsel of the Most High; therefore he brought down their heart with labor; they fell down and there was none to help; they sat in darkness and the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble — and he saved them out of their distresses!" And after referring to other examples of a similar nature, the Psalmist represents them as manifestations of a goodness which is ever ready to be exercised towards the afflicted, "whoever is wise and will observe those things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." Nor was the efficacy of prayer, in preventing or removing trouble, confined to the Jewish people, although they lived under a dispensation which was in many respects supernatural and miraculous. We are taught, on the contrary, to regard the examples which their history presents, as so many indications of the unalterable principles on which the general government of the world is conducted; and in so far as the point now before us is concerned, the same principle is recognized and embodied in a promise in the New Testament itself: "If any man is afflicted — let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord — and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he has committed sin, it shall be forgiven him." And in more general terms, our Lord has said to all his disciples, "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." "Whatever you ask in my name, believing, you shall receive." To this, many may be ready to oppose their own experience, and may be unwilling to admit the efficacy of prayer in preventing or removing outward calamity, when they remember with what frequency and earnestness they supplicated for mercies which were, nevertheless, withheld, and fiery trials which were, nevertheless, sent or continued with them. They may remember that, when threatened with bereavement, they wept sore, and besought the Lord to spare and restore the object of their fond affections; and yet, that he allowed disease to take its course, until it terminated in death. These facts, which no Christian minister will seek either to deny or to conceal, may have had the effect of staggering the belief of many in the efficacy of prayer. And where they have not had this effect, they may occasionally embarrass even the minds of believers, and overwhelm them with deep

anxiety — by suggesting the awful thought, that, since their prayers have received no direct answer, they must either not be of the number of God's people at all, or they must "have prayed amiss." But these conclusions are not warranted by Scripture, and they arise from a misapprehension, not so much of the promise annexed to prayer, as of the very nature of prayer itself. No prayer is scriptural, which does not express a desire in unison with the will of God. And where the purpose of God is, as in most cases it must be, secret or unknown to us — no prayer is scriptural in which the expression of our own desire is not limited by a holy acquiescence in his will. We are not entitled, for example, to pray absolutely that God's chastening hand may be withdrawn from us — or that the life of a relative may be spared — or that we may be blessed with worldly prosperity. All these desires, however natural and however strong, must be limited by, and subordinated to, the will of him who knows what is best for us, and who has graciously taken the management of our case into his own hands. This is strikingly implied in the very structure of that form of prayer which our Lord himself gave to his disciples; for it is a very remarkable fact, that the three first petitions of that prayer are expressive of a desire for God's glory, acquiescence in God's will, and zeal for the extension of his kingdom. And it is not until after we have thus ascribed sovereignty to Jehovah, and cast ourselves absolutely into his hands — that we are permitted to broach one petition for our own particular interest, even to the extent of daily bread!

It is only, therefore, when our desires are in unison with the divine will, that we have reason to expect a direct fulfillment of our requests. And this consideration is fraught with much interesting instruction, and with great practical comfort in regard to the efficacy of prayer. For it assures us, that if we should happen to pray in a right spirit, but, from ignorance, should ask what is not really good for us — God will not take advantage of our ignorance or weakness, so as to visit us with a curse when we are seeking a blessing. There can be no doubt that, were every desire which we express in prayer to meet with a direct and literal fulfillment, the efficacy of prayer might, through our ignorance of what is really for our good, become a source of calamity rather than of comfort! As it is related of one who, being possessed of great wealth, and having an only son, and that son laboring under a very sore disease, and being repeatedly counseled to resign him into God's hand, and to acquiesce in his appointment, even should he be pleased to take him away — did, nevertheless, so far yield to his natural affections, as resolutely to refuse any act of submission, and could not bring himself to utter one word of acquiescence in such a result — and who, many years after, was seen dishonored and beaten in his old age, by that very son whom he was so loath to lose, and mourning, in the bitterness of his heart, over filial ingratitude and disobedience, as the heaviest curse of his grey hairs! But when our petition is limited by acquiescence in the sovereign disposal of Almighty God, even should we ask amiss — God will neither withhold what is truly good for us — nor give what he knows to be bad. And thus the omniscient wisdom of God is our security against the effect of our own ignorance, or weakness in prayer.

It is chiefly in reference to external comforts or privileges that we are ignorant of God's will and our own interest — for, on that subject, we have no revelation to guide us. But for spiritual blessings, in so far as these are necessary for the safety of the soul — we have a stronger assurance of an answer, in proportion as we have better evidence both of its being God's will to bestow, and of its being our best interest to receive them. It may be doubtful how far God will be pleased to grant, or how far it would be for our real welfare to obtain, exemption from outward trials or the uninterrupted enjoyment of worldly prosperity. But we know from Scripture, that the blessings of

God's grace are of such a nature, that he must at all times be willing to dispense them, and that we cannot pray for, or receive them, without being substantially benefitted. We have greater confidence, therefore, of a literal fulfillment of our petitions, when we supplicate the grace of a penitent spirit — than when we pray for a prosperous outward estate; since the former must, at all times, be an object of delight to God, and a real blessing to ourselves, whereas the latter may be fraught with danger to our higher interests, and may, therefore, by unerring wisdom, be withheld. In this view, also, our prayers may be really answered, although the special evil which we deprecate is, nevertheless, inflicted, and the good which we supplicate is, nevertheless, withheld. For what is our prayer? Why, that God would deal with us according to the counsels of unerring wisdom — and give or withhold according to his sovereign will. That being our prayer, it is answered, even though it should be by crosses. And, in this, God magnifies his grace, by bringing the substantial blessings which we need out of the unlikeliest means — nay, out of those very evils which we are most eager to avoid. We see, hence, not only that the prayers of his people are answered — but that they cannot fail to have their fulfillment. For the desires of their hearts are going forth in unison with the divine will, and that will is omnipotent! In these circumstances, however, the unbelieving mind will be ready to reason against the utility of prayer altogether, and to say that God's will, being omnipotent, must have its effect, whether we pray or not. But, by those who can entertain this idea, it is not duly considered, that prayer is in the moral world, what any other ordinary cause is in the physical world — a means established by God himself — a link in the grand chain of cause and effect, which not only comprehends both the physical and moral departments of his government — but combines the two, and establishes a very intimate relation between their several parts — a cause, in fact, which is not less regarded by God than any other secondary agent in nature.

It might, therefore, with the same propriety be affirmed, that God's omnipotent will must cause the predetermined harvest to spring up from the earth, without the agency of manual labor — as that God's will must cause the fulfillment of such of our desires as are in unison therewith, without the agency of prayer. And, be it observed, that even were we unable to obviate the difficulty, we cannot fail, at least, to perceive, that it is founded on a principle directly the reverse of that on which our Lord argued. For, so far from regarding the infinite knowledge, or the sovereign will, or the almighty power of God, as superseding the necessity of prayer on the part of man — he refers to these as the very ground and reason, nay, as the strongest motive and encouragement of prayer: "For your heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things." Were we to act on any other principle, we must virtually declare that we will not pray, unless we are allowed to dictate to God, or assured that our desires shall overrule the decision of omniscient and unerring wisdom!

Even when prayer is not effectual in averting or removing the evil which we fear or endure — yet it imparts to the believing mind the strongest of all consolation — that which arises from the persuasion that God's will is answered by the event, and that any other result would have been, in the judgment of His unerring wisdom, neither so good in itself, nor so beneficial to our real interest. If, when threatened with a painful bereavement, the Christian shall so far forget his duty and his privilege, as to omit prayer — after the event has occurred, he must, if he reflects at all, be distressed by the thought, that prayer might have been the appointed means, for anything he knows, of averting that heavy calamity — and that, having omitted the use of that means, he is now reaping the bitter fruits of his own negligence. But if he has made the threatened visitation a

subject of frequent and earnest prayer, and if he has been enabled, in the spirit of childlike submission, to commit the whole case into God's hand — then, even should the calamity befall him, he has the consolation of knowing that no negligence on his part provoked the interposition of God — nay, that the event was absolutely necessary, in the opinion of One who knows his whole condition and prospects, and who has taken the sole management of his affairs.

Thus did David act in the case of his child — and thus was he comforted: "The LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them. On the seventh day the child died. David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. 'Is the child dead?' he asked. 'Yes,' they replied, 'he is dead.' Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. His servants asked him, 'Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!' He answered, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.'" 2 Samuel 12:15-22

Thus also did Paul act in similar circumstances; and he records, as the result of his prayer, that the outward calamity which he deprecated was continued with him — but that it was greatly over-balanced by an enlarged communication of divine grace: "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Besides its effect in averting threatened calamity, or procuring positive blessings at the hand of God — prayer exercises a beneficial influence on the mind, and thus fits it for suffering, and relieves it when calamity comes. The degree of sorrow that is occasioned by affliction depends a great deal more on the state of mind in which it finds the sufferer, than on the amount of the calamity itself. The same trial which overwhelms one, may be sustained with composure and comfort by another, and that, too, although both are equally sensitive in their feelings. This difference depends on the preparation which they have respectively made for the event. If the one has been careless, while the other was thoughtful — and, above all, if the one has been negligent in fortifying his mind by prayer and supplication — while the other, under a deep sense of his liability to affliction, and his dependence on God, has betaken himself, in the exercise of humble trust and confidence, to the throne of grace, and has been enabled there to repose the burden of his anxieties on the Lord — it cannot but be that the latter will feel very differently from the former, when the event occurs. And that event, however calamitous in itself, will be the less overwhelming to him, in proportion as he was the better prepared to meet it, and the more accustomed to regard it in connection with the will of him, who is at once the God of Providence, and the hearer of prayer. And as prayer, offered up in anticipation of suffering, puts the soul in a right state of

preparation — so, by virtue of its natural influence, it has the effect of relieving the mind of those feelings, which severe calamity, when it does come, must, in all cases, in a greater or less degree, awaken.

Prayer before affliction, fits the mind for suffering.

Prayer under affliction, relieves the mind of its sorrow. So long as the feelings of the sufferer are restrained and pent up within his own bosom, they prey upon his internal peace. But when they find a channel through which they obtain utterance and expansion, their depressing power is mitigated, and the heart is, in part at least, relieved of its burden. Hence excessive grief is often mitigated by copious weeping — much more by communion with a dear and confidential friend — but most of all by prayer, which is the heart's communion with God, the best and nearest of friends.

Those who have witnessed the strong agony of grief, occasioned by some sudden and unexpected calamity, and have watched, with intense anxiety, its progress and results — can best appreciate the benefit of such outlets to human feeling; and they will testify, that as soon as the grief of their friend found vent in tears or in free conversation, they felt that the worst was already past. And, above all, if the sufferer retired to his chamber, and, on his bended knees, poured out his soul to God in the confidence of prayer — a calm serenity and composure ensued, which showed that the crisis was over, and that, too, although he may have prayed with strong crying and tears.

It may be difficult to account for the relief which a suffering spirit derives from the gushing of tears — unless it be resolved into a natural harmony between the physiology of the body, and the deep emotions of the mind. It may be difficult also, in some cases, to account for the relief that is derived from the mere utterance of the heart's fullness into the ear of another — unless it be referred to the principle of sympathy, whose law seems to be, "that it redoubles joys, and cuts griefs in halves. For, as there is no man that imparts his joys to his friend — but he rejoices the more, so there is no man that imparts his griefs to his friend — but he grieves the less."

But, whatever difficulty may be felt in ascertaining the reason why such outlets of feeling are so proverbially the means of relieving sorrow — surely there can be none in accounting for the relief which a pious mind experiences in unbosoming its sorrows in the very presence and ear of its Redeemer God. For there, at his footstool, who dare arraign the wisdom, or blame the rectitude, or question the sovereignty of him from whom affliction comes? In prayer . . .

the mind is brought into immediate contact with the Supreme Will;

the sovereignty of God is recognized and felt;

the wisdom of his dispensations acknowledged; and

the very misery which leads the sufferer to the throne of grace, is the means of placing him in a position in which he feels that he must adore the divine goodness, and trust in it still, notwithstanding all that has occurred — otherwise he has neither help nor hope. By the very act of bending the knee before his footstool, the Christian makes all these acknowledgments, and gives a practical expression of his confidence in God's faithfulness and love — he repairs to God as his friend — a friend that will not leave him nor forsake him. And if such acknowledgments are made,

and such feelings awakened, in the hour of prayer — is not his spirit thereby placed in the best condition for at once procuring the mitigation of his sorrow, and improving by the calamity which has called it forth?

It is, indeed, wonderful, how the mind clears up its views of God's dispensations, while engaged in prayer. At first, thick clouds may seem to darken his prospect, but, as he proceeds, streaks of light break through, and shine in upon his spirit, and, "while he sits in darkness, the Lord is a light to him." "While David kept silence, his bones waxed old, through his roaring all the day long;" while "he restrained prayer, his spirit was straitened;" but no sooner did he pour out his heart before God, than he "was compassed about with songs of deliverance." In such a case, much sorrow may still remain — but the bitterness of grief is past. The subdued and humble feeling which affliction is designed to produce, and by which it operates, in part, its beneficial results — will characterize the sufferer, long after the agony of grief has subsided into calm resignation. His soul will no longer resemble the troubled sea which cannot rest — but will be like "a weaned child." And this wholesome conversion of the excitement of violent sorrow into the mild virtue of suffering affliction with patience, is best produced by the agency of prayer.

Such is the natural and necessary connection between affliction and prayer: affliction prepares the mind for prayer — and prayer relieves the mind under affliction. But let it not be expected that prayer is to operate as a charm, or that it must be productive of instantaneous relief in all cases to the same extent. We have been speaking of the influence of prayer on the mind of a pious sufferer; one who has sincerely embraced the truth, and habitually lived under the control of the Gospel. The same effects cannot, at least in the same degree, or all at once, be expected to flow from a hasty recourse to God, when calamity comes on one who has long forgotten and abandoned God and his service. In such a case, the sorrow arising from outward calamity will be aggravated, in the first instance, by the consciousness of past neglect, even in a mind which has never altogether disavowed the Christian faith. And one of the severest struggles which affliction will awaken in the bosom of such a man, will be that between a sense of duty or of danger, on the one hand, which impels him to think of repairing to God for help — and a fearful misgiving, on the other, as to God's willingness to receive and welcome him, after such long and guilty estrangement. And even, should the former impulse prevail so as to make him bend his knee in God's presence — his heart will still be straitened by fear, or chilled by doubt, or stung with remorse — such as are unknown to the man whose heart has been enlarged and cheered by frequent communion with God, as a tried and constant friend.

Nevertheless, let not even the most guilty or negligent despair, or give up the effort, under the pressure of such feelings. Let them be well assured, that all guilty as they are — God is waiting to be gracious to them; that to them, not less than to others, is the warrant of prayer addressed; and that to them, not less than to others, is the warrant of prayer addressed, and the promise of an answer given; that at God's right hand the Redeemer himself is ready to receive their petitions, and to present them with acceptance; and that, for anything they know, the calamity which has befallen them was sent for the express purpose of awakening them to a sense of their guilt, in so long neglecting his worship — and of forcing them, when they would not be persuaded by gentler methods, to pray.

Before they adopt the desperate resolution of abandoning this privilege, it befits them seriously to consider that they may thus frustrate the very purpose of God in sending affliction. That if they give up prayer, they give up all help and hope. That nothing else remains for them but to endure sufferings, without being sanctified by them. And that if they will not pray when God chastises them, nothing on earth is likely to make them pray, until that hour shall come when prayer itself will be unavailing; and when, in answer to their importunate cry, "Lord, Lord, open unto us!" they will hear only these awful words, "I never knew you, depart from me — you who practice iniquity!" "But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke — I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you — when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke — they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes!" Proverbs 1:24-31 In addition to his own supplications, the mourner is exhorted to avail himself of the intercession of others. "Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise them up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." Part of the promise here annexed to prayer, was, we have reason to believe, peculiar to the times of the apostles, when some were endowed with the gift of healing; but while, in modern times, we are not warranted to expect miraculous cures — we are still encouraged to pray, in the assurance, that if it is really good for them, the sick shall be restored, and that, at all events, their sins shall be forgiven.

They are exhorted, in the first instance, to call on the office-bearers of the church, the elders. And surely it is a blessed task, the most blessed in which any man can be engaged, to pour into the wounded spirit the oil of consolation, to comfort those that mourn, to bind up the brokenhearted, and to make the desolate glad! But this privilege is not confined to the office-bearers of the Christian Church. The disciples at large are exhorted to comfort each other by their mutual prayers; for, addressing the whole body of the disciples, the apostle adds, "confess your faults" — not your private sins — but those faults by which you have injured or offended your brother, "confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another — the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." Where real religion prevails, there will be much profitable fellowship of this nature among the serious members of the church; and it speaks little for the state of religion in any place, where none but the minister can be found to pray by the bed of sickness or of death. But let it not be supposed by the people, that the intercessory prayer of others is to supersede their personal supplications — or that it will avail for their benefit while they continue to neglect their own duty. There is, I fear, much misconception — misconception approaching very near to superstition — in the minds of many on this subject. They seem to look on the prayer of a minister in the time of sickness, or at the hour of death, as nothing more than a decent observance, conformable to the custom of the country in which they live; or as a charm which is to operate apart from all other means of a moral nature — else, why is sickness allowed to take its course until insensibility ensues, before the minister is sent for? And why are a few words of prayer more eagerly sought than the instructions which he may deem necessary to arouse, or awaken, or convince the dying sufferer? The prayer of a minister is of no avail, unless it lead the patients to

think, and to believe, and to pray for himself. Prayer is a moral means, fitted to enlighten the mind and to soften the heart of the sufferer; but if no such effect ensues — it is practically useless. A minister cannot pray a man into Heaven against his will; it is by his own will being moved and going forth in earnest supplication, that the mighty change is effected. And let it never be forgotten, that while the apostle exhorts the afflicted to call for the elders of the church, the command is equally express, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray."

It sometimes happens, that when a member of a family is smitten with disease, and the symptoms are such as to awaken very serious apprehensions as to the result — the parents, or others in charge, refrain from requesting the attendance of a minister or elder, nay, are anxious to exclude all such from the sick-room, owing to a very mistaken delicacy which makes them afraid to show any symptoms of apprehension, lest the disease should thereby be aggravated, or the last moments of the sufferer disturbed. If such people are decided infidels, their conduct may be accounted for, although, like every other effect of infidelity, it is deeply to be deplored. But if they are professing Christians, how can we sufficiently reprobate the insensibility which would leave the helpless sufferer to sink unconsciously into the grave, without any means being used to prepare him for that eternity on which he must soon enter? Above all, what shall we say, if, besides excluding the minister from that death-bed, they have neither the kindness nor the courage to kneel down beside it themselves, and pour out their hearts in prayer? Oh! this cold, frigid, nominal Christianity, is as unsuitable to a death-bed as infidelity itself; and cheerless, indeed, is that household where the voice of prayer is not heard, even when an immortal spirit is leaving it for Heaven — or for Hell!

It is not the least of the many advantages attending the regular observance of family worship, that provision is thus made, beforehand, for this exercise, in such seasons of affliction as may be expected to occur in every household. And that, without any violent effort, or any departure from ordinary custom — parents, children, and servants, may unite together in prayer, on behalf of any one of their number that has been smitten by disease; that their benevolent affections are thus at once expressed and strengthened; and that, as disease advances to its consummation, their minds are gradually, and almost imperceptibly, prepared for the event.

And, oh! it is sweet to the sufferer that he is thus remembered! Especially, if a member of that household is smitten with disease, while he is at a distance from home, and suddenly brought to the gates of death — is it no consolation to him to be assured, that at a certain hour each day, father and mother, sisters and brothers, will remember him at the throne of grace? and is it not equally consoling to them, that, far as he is beyond the reach of their personal attentions, they can thus commit him to the care of an Omnipresent God! Is any man afflicted? Let him go this instant to prayer!

## 02.00. Improvement of Affliction

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Improvement of Affliction James Buchanan, 1840 "This is my comfort in my affliction — for Your Word has given me life." Psalms 119:50

"I would affectionately recommend this book to every Christian mourner, who desires to drink deeply of the refreshing streams which the Fountain of all Comfort — the Word of God, supplies; for it is from this sacred source the pious and talented author of this excellent work derives 'Comfort in Affliction,' which his pages so eloquently and attractively set forth." Hugh White

"To those who are acquainted with the high character for personal piety, theological attainments, and professional usefulness of the excellent author of these Meditations, it may be enough to state, that they are in every way worthy of that distinguished Christian Minister." Presbyterian Review.

"We have not read any work on the subject which equals it either in the substantial matter which it brings before the afflicted for their consolation, or in the variety of its details. Were we desirous, indeed, that Affliction should be properly understood and improved — we could not recommend any book so well adapted for both purposes as this. We earnestly hope that it will soon find its way into every Christian family." Scottish Guardian.

"We do not at this moment indeed remember any single work in which the deeply interesting subject of Affliction is considered in a greater variety of lights, and in all, is illustrated with so much vigor of judgment and felicity of expression." Christian Instructor.

"The utmost simplicity, combined with exquisite beauty and elegance of composition, the most natural and obvious — yet full and comprehensive views of revealed truth, characterize the volume." Church of Scotland Magazine.

## 02.01. CONSIDERATION

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### 1. CONSIDERATION

"In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity CONSIDER: God has made the one as well as the other." Ecclesiastes 7:14

There is a beautiful harmony between the Word and the Providence of God. When Providence smiles, the Word allows us to be joyful — when Providence frowns, the Word calls us to serious thoughtfulness. The scope and strain of God's revealed will, accord with the natural tendency and apparent design of His dispensations towards us. He neither requires us to rejoice in what is evil — nor to grieve for what is good. It is true, we are taught as Christians, to deny ourselves in the midst of outward prosperity — and to rejoice in the midst of tribulations. But it is only because self-denial in the one case, and joy in the other — are the proper fruits and manifestations of religious principle, and the means of promoting our highest ultimate good.

There is no such thing in the Bible as a disparagement of what is naturally good, or a recommendation of what is naturally evil — except in so far as these are, respectively, injurious or favorable to our true and lasting happiness. We are not required to take bitter for sweet — or sweet for bitter. But as prosperity, which is joyful in itself, may become ruinous to our spiritual interests — we are warned against its dangers. While we are taught that adversity, however bitter — is the wholesome medicine by which our spiritual health may be restored and preserved. In a word, the Bible regards each of these states chiefly as it respects their moral influence on our hearts. And while it admits that the one is joyful, and the other painful in itself — it teaches us that each has its peculiar dangers, and proper uses — and that in both we are to have a supreme regard to those great religious principles which alone can render prosperity safe, and convert sorrow into joy.

We are not to conclude, then, from the antithetic expression of the preacher, either that we may not be joyful in the day of adversity — or considerate in the day of prosperity. On the contrary, we learn both from the lessons and examples of Scripture, that God's people have much reason to be wary and thoughtful while they walk in the sunshine of temporal prosperity — and that even in the darkest night of adversity, it is alike their privilege and duty to rejoice. A long season of uninterrupted prosperity is accompanied with so many dangers; and productive, in many cases, of so much evil — that the disciple, who really regards the salvation of his soul as the one thing that is needful, will find that a holy seriousness of spirit, and a habit of thoughtful consideration, are essential to the right use and improvement of that condition, and to his preservation from the evils which are incidental to it. While, a season of uninterrupted adversity, if it is the blessed means either of commencing or of renewing his communion with God, of implanting, for the first time, in his soul, or of maturing and strengthening the graces of the Christian character — will be an occasion of joy, such as the world can neither give nor take away.

It is not prosperity and adversity, considered simply in themselves — but the presence or the absence of religion, in either case, that tells mainly on our present happiness, or on our eternal welfare. Without religion, prosperity becomes our ruin. While with religion, sorrow is turned into joy. But while this is the light in which these two states are for the most part presented to our view in the Word of God — we are nowhere taught to reverse the dictates of nature so as to regard prosperity in itself as evil; or adversity as in itself good. On the contrary, prosperity is declared to be a proper source of joy, and a strong motive for gratitude. While adversity is described as, for the present, not joyous but grievous. And accordingly, the duties which are peculiarly appropriate to each, and the exercises which they respectively require, are stated in express terms, and illustrated by beautiful examples. In prosperity, a cheerful gratitude, a bountiful charity, and self-denial, devoting all of God's gifts to his glory and the good of our fellow-men. In adversity, a resigned and submissive spirit, meek contentment, combined, not with an anxious care — but with a serious thoughtfulness, and a considerate regard of God's dealings towards us, such as may best qualify us for reaping the fruits of affliction, and enjoying religious comforts under its heaviest pressure. In the day of ADVERSITY we are called to serious consideration on many accounts. Without this, we are in danger of allowing God's dispensations towards us to pass away unimproved, and of forfeiting the precious benefits which they are designed to confer. The whole advantage of affliction depends on a due Scriptural consideration of it. It does not operate as a charm, nor are its wholesome effects produced otherwise than through the medium of our own thoughtfulness. In all His dispensations God has a regard to our rational nature, and addresses himself to the thinking principle within us. And it is not until that principle has been awakened into lively exercise, and directed to Scriptural views of divine truth — that we can either expect to enjoy solid comfort under affliction — or to be sanctified by means of it. It is only to "those who are exercised thereby," that affliction becomes the means of producing "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." And as on these accounts we are called to serious consideration of the day of adversity, as it offers many important and impressive subjects to our thoughts, some of which we shall now enumerate, with the view of directing you in your private meditations.

1. In the day of adversity, you should consider your adversity itself, not turning your mind away from it, because it is distressing to you, nor allowing your thoughts to dwell on more pleasing topics, with the view of forgetting what has befallen you; but steadily and of deliberate purpose, looking at your afflictions in all their real magnitude and probable consequences. This direction may at first sight appear to be unnecessary, as affliction, especially when it is severe, makes itself to be felt, and can hardly fail to command attention. To a certain extent this is true; yet we believe it will be found, that the mind is often unwilling to take a deliberate view of its afflictions; as a man on the eve of bankruptcy is too apt to shut his eyes to the fact of his danger — or as a man smitten with mortal disease is unwilling to be convinced that his recovery is hopeless — and the consequence of this is, that the mind is not suitably impressed by God's dispensations, nor qualified to derive from them the benefit which they might otherwise confer. The reason why we ask you to consider your actual condition, and especially the nature and probable consequences of your affliction, is, that so long as you refuse to consider it, or take only a partial view of it — you do not read aright the lesson which God has placed before you — a lesson which you cannot understand if you turn your thoughts away from it. And thus it is that worldly men contrive to frustrate the beneficial design of affliction in their own case, and seek to obliterate from the hearts of their friends the impression which it is fitted to produce. They have recourse to business, to

society, to change of scene, to frivolous amusements — with the avowed purpose of diverting their thoughts from afflictions which they cannot endure to think of with calm deliberation. And they are ever ready to prescribe to others the only remedy which they have tried for themselves. But should this advice be offered to any one of Christ's disciples, we beg him to remember that he has a remedy provided for him, of which the worldly man knows nothing — a remedy, whose efficacy depends not on affliction being forgotten — but on its being duly considered; a remedy, which so far from requiring a diversion of thought as essential to our comfort — acts through the medium of thought, and makes affliction itself subservient to our good. The Christian is not precluded, indeed, from availing himself of any benefit that might arise from change of air or scene, viewed simply as a means of relieving him, under God's blessing, from the physical weakness or disease under which he labors. This may even be his duty — a duty involved in the great law of self-preservation, and in attending to it, he may have a supreme view to the glory of God, his own spiritual improvement, and future usefulness in the world. But he is solemnly debarred from seeking relief to his soul by banishing the thought of affliction and death.

Oh! it is a dangerous error, it may be even a fatal error — to act on the supposition that we may lawfully seek relief by forgetting the calamities that have befallen us. These calamities are warnings addressed to us as rational beings, and, as such, they loudly claim our serious consideration. To have recourse to business, to society, to change of scene, or to frivolous amusement, in such circumstances, is to "despise the chastening of the Lord." It is to do violence to those feelings which affliction naturally produces, and which instinctively point to retirement and reflection as appropriate to our condition. And notwithstanding the favor with which this course is regarded by worldly men, it will be found to be opposed to the common sentiments of society, if it were pursued at those seasons when our sorrows are the most overwhelming.

If a husband were seen in the theater on the evening of that day which witnessed the death or burial of his beloved wife, or child; or if a man smitten with poverty were seen to join in the dance — would not the moral sense of the whole community be offended? And yet if the recipe is good for anything, it should stand us in stead in our greatest extremities. No! Adversity is a serious thing! It calls for solemn consideration. It never can be improved nor endured as it ought, unless we think of it, and learn the lesson which it affords.

View it in whatever light you please; consider it as a trial fitted to exercise your minds; or as a discipline designed to improve them; or as a chastisement for past transgression; or as a preparation for future duty — in every aspect in which it can be contemplated, it claims a thoughtful consideration. And, if this is refused, it will harden the heart, and all the more if it be superseded by the cares and pleasures of the world. Were no better remedy provided for the afflicted, or were the mind to brood over its sorrows while the remedy is unknown or overlooked — then, indeed, it might be our wisest course to seek diversion in the world. But a remedy has been provided; and the Christian disciple can well afford to look on his affliction in all its magnitude, without incurring the least hazard of troubling the springs of his comfort. If he falls into melancholy or dejection, it is only because he omits someone thing from his consideration which the Bible presses on his attention.

2. In the day of adversity, you should consider from whose hand it has been sent to you. It comes direct from the hand of God.

Intermediate agencies may have been employed in inflicting it:

a cherished family member may have been the messenger of disease;

a treacherous friend may have been the cause of bankruptcy;

an avowed enemy may have been the author of reproach and shame;

Satan himself may have been allowed to smite you. But through whatever secondary agency it may have been conveyed, adversity comes from God's hand!

"I form the light — and create darkness; I make peace — and create evil. I the Lord, do all these things." Isaiah 45:7 "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" Lamentations 3:38 "Shall we receive good at the hand of God — and shall we not receive evil?" Job 2:10

"Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" Exodus 4:11

"See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides Me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of My hand!" Deuteronomy 32:39

"The LORD brings death and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; He humbles and he exalts." 1 Samuel 2:6-7 "This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people . . ." Jeremiah 32:42 "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?" Amos 3:6 "For He wounds, but He also binds up; He injures, but His hands also heal." Job 5:18 From these and many other passages it is plain that temporal affliction is ascribed to God in the Holy Scriptures, and no one who acknowledges God's Providence at all, can fail to believe that the numerous calamities of human life are permitted, appointed, and overruled by the Supreme Governor of the world. This is a consideration of great practical importance, and should be seriously weighed in the day of adversity. For first of all, it assures us that our afflictions are neither imposed by a fatal necessity, nor produced by the uncertain vicissitudes of chance — but come forth from the hand of one who is infinitely wise and just and good.

Secondly, it is fitted to minister at least a certain degree of comfort, inasmuch as it demonstrates that we have the security of all his attributes against the infliction of greater or more protracted suffering than is required by the necessities of our case, and the rules of perfect justice and wisdom and love.

Thirdly, it teaches us in many of our afflictions, and those which it is indeed most difficult to bear, to look beyond, and to rise above, the consideration of the mere human agency by which they have been inflicted. I refer to such as are brought on us through the malice of our fellow-men, in regard to which we are too apt to alone consider the secondary agency through which they fall upon us — instead of steadily contemplating God as addressing to us, through that agency, the warnings and lessons which we need to learn and improve. Thus it is that this class of afflictions — comprising calumny and defamation, extortion, oppression, and such like — are too little improved, and, indeed, seldom fail to produce an exasperation of spirit, diametrically opposed to that submissive temper which other afflictions, recognized as coming more directly from the hand of God, are fitted

to produce.

Whereas, did we consider all afflictions, of whatever kind, as emanating from the unerring heart of loving Father — we would find, that even those which the hand or the tongue of man inflicts — are a wholesome discipline, and means of spiritual improvement.

And, finally, did we habitually bear in mind the consideration which I am now pressing on your attention, we should be the more disposed, and the better prepared for inquiring, with becoming earnestness, into the reasons which may exist for such dispensations, and the grand ends and uses for which they are designed. Let us remember, then, that every affliction, through whatever channel it may flow, comes to us ultimately from God's hand.

3. In the day of adversity, you should consider the causes and occasions of suffering in general — and especially, inquire into the causes and occasions of your own affliction at the present time. As to the general cause of all suffering, it is sin, and nothing else than sin. But for this accursed thing, there would be . . .

no affliction in the world,

no painful disease,

no abject poverty,

no hostile violence,

no death,

no damnation.

Sin is the root of bitterness — and no wonder that its fruits are bitter. Rest assured, that God has not allowed so much suffering to prevail in the world from mere indifference to its welfare, or from any disposition to cruelty. No! "God is love" — and your happiness is dearer to him than any other object — his own glory excepted. All suffering is designed to mark his holy displeasure against sin, and to vindicate the honor of that law which God, as the righteous governor of the world, has prescribed for the regulation of our hearts and lives. When viewed in this light, the sufferings which prevail to such a melancholy extent in the world, are fitted to deepen our conviction of the odious nature of sin. For when we reflect, on the one hand, on the infinite love of God, and his delight in the happiness of his creatures — and consider, on the other hand, how that, notwithstanding this love, God has permitted, nay, appointed so many evils to befall us — Oh! are we not sensible that sin, which is the cause of all suffering, must be, in his estimation, a most offensive and loathsome thing! When a warm-hearted and kind father, who finds his chief delight in the bosom of his family, lifts the rod, and smites his beloved child for no reason? Does not the very warmth of his love, when viewed in connection with the severity of his chastisements, demonstrate that he abhors the disobedience which imposed on him the necessity of doing violence to his own feelings, by inflicting pain on the object of his fondest regards? Just so it is with God. And his severe but beneficial and needful discipline, is a signal proof and manifestation of the hatred with which he regards transgression, seeing that for a time that displeasure seems to overcome all his delight in human happiness, and his reluctance to the infliction of pain.

But, in the day of adversity, the Christian disciple should not content himself with this general view of the cause of all affliction. He should inquire into the special reasons that may exist, in his past life, or in the present condition of his own soul — for God's dispensations towards him. He should consider "why the Lord is thus contending with him" — what root of bitterness there is still in his heart, or what cause of offence in his life, which can have called for the providential warnings and chastisements with which he has been visited. And, in short, whether any, and what cause can be assigned for his own personal and peculiar trials.

I am aware that, while all suffering proceeds from one general cause, namely, our inherent and actual sinfulness in the sight of God — yet it does by no means follow, that the special afflictions with which any one of God's people may be visited, can in all cases be ascribed to any particular dereliction of duty, and decay of personal religion; or that we are warranted to regard those who are visited with the severest and most protracted sufferings, as being, on that account, marked out as the greatest sinners. Absolutely not! Affliction is not dealt out in this state of probation on the principles of strict retribution; nor in the case of God's people, although, in some sense, it is still the consequence, is it to be regarded as the penal desert of sin.

God has other ends in view than merely to recall to their remembrance the sins of their past lives. He often sends trials upon them with the view of preparing them for future duty — of fitting them for more extensive usefulness — and of promoting, in general, their more rapid progress in the path of sanctification, and their fitness for a speedy translation to glory. Still, even when affliction is viewed in this light, as a preparatory discipline of the soul, it implies and presupposes certain defects in our character, which ought to be supplied — certain remaining corruptions which should be subdued. And, in most cases, the Christian disciple will be at no loss to discover, in his own state and character, many sufficient reasons for God's dispensations towards him.

Now it is of great importance that he should consider these in the day of adversity — that he should ascertain what are the defects of his character, and what are the special reasons of his present affliction, in order that, knowing the plague of his own heart, he may apply himself vigorously, and in right earnest, to the work of his high calling. Let him, in such circumstances, consider whether he may not have been gradually, and almost insensibly, falling from his first love — whether he has not become less spiritual in the ordinary frame of his thoughts and affections — whether he has not become, more than he once was, a stranger at the throne of grace, or more of a formalist in the exercise of prayer — whether he has not been neglecting some duty, or addicted to some self-indulgence, or in one respect or other exhibiting the marks of a decaying piety, or walking as a backslider from the Lord. And if, on making such an inquiry, he see cause to conclude that it is not now "with him as it was in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon him" — Oh! let him acknowledge the seasonableness of God's interposition — his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise of needful discipline — and his own sinfulness in provoking the Lord to anger, even though he is one of his own adopted and forgiven children.

Most assuredly he will feel, unless, indeed, he is one that "turns the grace of God into licentiousness," that the sins of God's people are in some respects more heinous than those of unregenerate men, who have never enjoyed the same privileges, nor made the same professions, nor offered up the same prayers. And feeling how much his sins are aggravated by the consideration of God's love, and his own ingratitude — he will regard God's chastisements as a

reason for the deepest humiliation of heart, for unreserved confession of sin, and for earnest prayer — not so much that his affliction may be removed, as that the cause of it may be taken away.

4. In the day of adversity, you should consider the design and end of affliction, or the uses which it is intended to serve. As it proceeds neither from blind necessity, nor from casual accident — but from the hand of your Omniscient Governor and Judge — so nothing can be more certain than that it is designed for the accomplishment of some great and useful purpose. Now the design of affliction is expressly revealed in the Word of God. He has condescended to explain the reasons of his dealings with you — and it is alike your duty and your privilege to consider and to concur in his declared design. The general end of affliction, as it is explained in God's Word, is the moral and spiritual improvement of believers — in other words, their progressive sanctification, and their preparation for glory. Oh! how important must the right use of affliction be, if it is intended to terminate in such a result. It stands connected with our everlasting welfare — with all that we can enjoy on earth, and all that we hope for in Heaven. But more particularly, the day of adversity is intended for our INSTRUCTION. The Lord's rod has a voice which speaks to us lessons of heavenly wisdom; and, therefore, we are required "to hear the rod, and Him who has appointed it." (Micah 6:9.) "The rod and reproof give wisdom." (Proverbs 29:15.) It presents to our minds many of the same great truths which are declared in Scripture — but which we may have overlooked, or failed rightly to understand — until they were pressed on our attention, and made the matter of our personal experience, in the day of trouble.

Thus, it teaches most impressively, that great Scriptural truth of the vanity of the world, and its insufficiency as the portion of rational and immortal beings. This is a truth which might almost be regarded as self-evident; yet it is one which is very slowly and reluctantly admitted by the young disciple, and which can only be effectually impressed on his mind, and unfolded in all its extent, by the experience of disappointment and sorrow. In the case of unrenewed men, the world is the only portion which is valued — the object of their supreme affections — the source of their highest enjoyments. When the day of adversity arrives, even they are made to feel that the world is a poor and empty thing — "a broken cistern which can hold no water." But so long as they know nothing of a better portion, they are glad to cling to it, notwithstanding all their experience of its worthlessness. If, however, at such a season, they have their attention directed to the better portion that is provided for them in the Gospel, their experience of the uncertain and unsatisfying nature of all earthly good is fitted to awaken their desires after that higher happiness, and those enduring riches, which belong to the people of God. And thus many an individual has been brought, by the discipline of sickness, and many a family, by bankruptcy or bereavements — to relinquish the world, and to seek God as their chief good. No new truth has been revealed to them; for they had often read in the Scripture, and heard from the pulpit, of the vanity of the world — but that which was then addressed to their understandings, is now impressed with power on their hearts. Their own experience has confirmed and strengthened the testimony of God. On the same subject — the day of adversity administers a wholesome lesson, even to God's own people, who, in some prosperous season, are too apt to attempt a compromise between God and the world, and to seek only a part, and that, perhaps, a small one, of their happiness in Him. They are ready, in such circumstances, to "settle on their lees;" and because "their mountain stands strong," or because "they have had no changes" — they have become more familiar with the world, less

conversant with God, and more wedded to temporal enjoyments, than befits the candidates for heavenly glory. But the day of adversity comes, and dispels at once the fond illusions by which they had been deceived. It reveals the world to their view in its true light, and they awaken as from a dream to the inbred and thorough conviction that all is meaningless and vanity! Poverty, disease, and death are employed, to teach them a lesson which they were slow to understand or believe when they read it in the Bible, or heard it declared from the pulpit, while as yet they had no experience of its truth. And as soon as they are thus thoroughly impressed with this practical conviction, they are prepared to rise above all worldly influences, and to seek with greater earnestness than ever, the enjoyment of God's favor, which is life, and his loving-kindness, which is better than life. In like manner, the day of adversity teaches us the great lesson of our entire and constant dependence on God. But a little while before, we were rejoicing in the midst of prosperity — our health was sound, our business prosperous, our families entire. But the sudden stroke has come which has smitten . . .

our bodies with disease,

our business with bankruptcy,

or our families with death. And that stroke has come from the Lord's hand!

Oh! in such circumstances, we are impressively taught . . .

that we are absolutely in God's power;

that all that we have is at His sovereign disposal;

that we depend on Him, day by day, continually for . . .

our personal preservation,

our worldly prosperity,

our domestic comfort,

for all, in short, that we desire or love on earth.

It befits us never for one moment to forget our obligations to him "in whom "we now feel more sensibly than we ever felt before, that "we live, and move, and have our being!" And finally, our experience of present suffering exhibits to us in a most impressive and convincing light, some of the grand leading principles of God's moral government. It demonstrates his holy determination that sin shall not pass by unpunished; and makes it as certain as any other fact in human history, that as a sinner, man is exposed to the righteous judgments of God.

These are some of the lessons which adversity, when viewed as a means of moral instruction, is fitted to inculcate and to impress with great practical power on our hearts. And when these lessons are duly considered, and, above all, when they are submissively embraced and acted on — the disciple will learn from his own experience the value of affliction, and admire the wisdom with which God suits his lessons to the most urgent necessities of his soul. The day of adversity is intended not only for our INSTRUCTION — but also for our REPROOF.

It is designed as a chastisement, to rebuke and humble us. The grand design of God both in his Word and Providence is to produce a genuine humility of heart. Many of his most solemn messages to us in the Bible are intended for this purpose — but the evil is, that pride is too apt to resist the application of these passages to ourselves. Nay, the more proud any man is, and the greater his need of being humbled — so much the more averse is he from this faithful application of God's revealed truth to his own soul. But in the day of adversity, the Lord takes the rod in his hand, and by singling out an individual or a family for his fatherly chastisement, he makes a personal application, as it were, of the truth to that individual or family, so as to make them feel that they are under his reproof and correction. Then many sins that had been made light of at the time of their occurrence, and which had perhaps escaped altogether from their remembrance, are forcibly recalled and pressed upon their consciences. The threatened judgments which, when heard by the ear merely, had failed to awaken their apprehensions — are now realized and felt to be certain as well as solemn, when they are actually suffering under the rod.

God's holiness and justice are now known to be active attributes of his nature, as well as essential attributes of his nature. And his moral government is felt to be at work in reference to themselves. Thus pride is slain, repentance awakened, and humility produced. God has applied the truth by the agency of the rod! And while they smart under his chastisement, they feel that it reproves them for sin, and that they dare not utter one word of complaint, or offer one plea in their self-justification. Thus God "has humbled them, and proved them, and shown them what was in their hearts." The day of adversity is designed for our probation and trial. It brings with it peculiar trials, which are fitted to test as well as to exercise the graces of God's people. Thus Abraham was tried, when he was commanded, apparently in direct opposition to God's covenant promise — to offer up his son Isaac. This was, in every point of view, a sore trial; it brought with it peculiar temptations to unbelief and disobedience, such as had never assailed the patriarch before. But he was strong in faith, giving glory to God — -and his faith and obedience were rendered only the better and more illustrious by means of his trial. So is it with the people of God, who are the children of faithful Abraham. God visits them with adversity, not merely with the view of instructing or chastising them — but for the purpose of trying and exercising their Christian graces. By means of such trial and exercise, these graces are strengthened and matured. For just as the bodily frame is more fully developed, and grows in vigor by means of active exertion — so the principles of spiritual life in the soul are improved and perfected by means of discipline — that discipline calling these principles into exercise, and thereby increasing their strength and vigor.

Thus, when a man who has long been weak in faith is visited with adversity — he is laid under a necessity, as it were, of having recourse to God in his straits. He feels that he has no other being on whom he can depend for support or help; and as one consideration after another presents itself to his mind, as to the all-sufficiency and faithfulness and love of his Lord — his faith acquires increasing confidence, and when he is weak he feels that he is strong. So with the man who, while he lived in the sunshine of earthly prosperity, may have been easily annoyed by trifling inconveniences, and reluctant to submit to them. But when he is visited by a signal and sore affliction, he is compelled, as it were, to recognize God's hand in it, and thus a holy resignation to the Divine will, and a submissive temper, are exhibited by him in his severest trials, such as he was unable to preserve in former times. These graces of the Christian character being called into lively exercise, and thus strengthened and matured. And oh! if this be the benevolent design, and

this the happy effect of affliction, how much reason has he to rejoice that, while his outward man perishes, his inward man is renewed day by day! And who that knows the unspeakable value of those heavenly graces which are thus invigorated and strengthened by affliction — will murmur at the discipline by which God seeks to call them into exercise, and to carry them onward to perfection. The day of adversity is designed as a means of preparation for the future which lies before us. This is an interesting aspect of our present trials. We are too prone to take a retrospective view of their causes and occasions — while we think little of their prospective design and results. But we ought not only to look back on the causes which may have rendered our afflictions necessary — we should also look forward to the events for which they are designed to prepare us.

I believe that affliction is often sent, not so much as a chastisement for past sins — but as a means of preparation for future duty. And for this end, it is most suitable and efficacious. It is a means of fitting us for future trials.

All the afflictions of life are not sent upon us at once, otherwise we should be in danger of being overwhelmed by them; but one is sent at a time, and this makes way for another, and prepares us for enduring it. The Lord, in his providence, follows the same rule as in his instructions: "He gives line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; according as the disciples are able to bear it." One affliction, duly improved, prepares us for enduring another, and deriving good from all.

There is great diversity, indeed, in God's methods of dealing with his different disciples.

Sometimes, by a sudden stroke, he visits a prosperous disciple with the heaviest calamity at first. And it is not astonishing if, thus unprepared by previous discipline, it should be felt to be almost overwhelming. But then, if such an affliction is at all improved as it should, it must serve, by its very magnitude, to suppress all repining, and to produce a meek and resigned spirit, under the smaller afflictions which may follow it. In other cases, the smaller trials are sent first, and one follows after another, until the disciple is prepared for enduring the heaviest of all. The mind that is in any measure duly exercised by the former — becomes, as it were, familiar with the principles which administer support and comfort, and is ready to have instant recourse to them, when the latter arrives.

Oh! how mercifully does God deal with his people, in thus adapting the method of his discipline to their respective circumstances — sending on one, who might otherwise fail to be awakened to his highest interests, a stroke like a sudden thunderbolt — and on another, whom such a heavy stroke might overwhelm, such preparatory minor trials as initiate him gently in the school of affliction.

Some may wonder that we speak of so many successive trials, and of the wisdom of God in making one affliction prepare the way for another — but it is even so in the experience of God's people. Affliction is not one act of chastisement — but a course of beneficial discipline, a series of preparatory trials leading on to the glorious consummation — for it is "through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom of God."

Adversity is a means of fitting us for future temptations. God, whose knowledge extends to all future events, sees that a disciple is before long to be placed in circumstances which will throw strong temptation in his way. And He also, whose knowledge extends to the secrets of the heart,

knows that, in the frame of mind which present prosperity has induced, that disciple would be ill qualified to resist these temptations — perhaps prone to yield to them. He must be called off from the world, and brought to his knees, and strengthened inwardly with strength in his soul. But so long as prosperity continues, this moral change, so essential to his future safety, is not to be expected.

Therefore, in the exercise of his unfailing love and faithfulness, the Lord takes him into his own hand, and visits him with affliction. The disciple is grieved, no doubt — but he is also humbled, and instructed and strengthened by this discipline — a new and more spiritual frame of feeling is produced — the truths of religion acquire a firmer footing in his mind, and a fuller ascendancy over his heart. And these truths, thus applied to his soul, furnish him with new and stronger motives — so that, when the hour of temptation comes, he is prepared, through God's grace, to meet it, and his very sorrows are his preservative from sin!

Oh! little do we know from what temptations we have been preserved or delivered by means of such beneficial discipline. How little do we know what we might have been, had we had fewer trials! The Christian disciple, who has been subject to protracted bodily indisposition, may be apt to wonder why he should be for so long a time kept in a condition which apparently hinders or impairs his active usefulness. But perhaps that very disciple had the seeds of vanity, worldliness, or intemperance in his heart, which the constant sunshine of prosperity would have caused to spring up and ripen — or he was likely to be placed in circumstances which would have tempted him to open sin. How thankful, then, should he be for God's restraining grace, even though that grace has operated through the discipline of sorrow — especially if he finds that, during his sickness, his spiritual health has been preserved and increased, while he sees many a prosperous professor, who has fallen before the power of that temptation from which he has been so graciously preserved!

Adversity is a means of preparation for extensive usefulness. That affliction, when it comes upon us either in the shape of bodily illness, or extreme poverty, or blighting calumny, unfits us for the active service of God — is the complaint which is usually made by those who are visited with it in the prime of life. While many an aged disciple, who is completely disabled by his infirmities, is apt to wonder why he is still preserved in life when his usefulness is apparently gone. But he, who considers that the greatest usefulness consists in glorifying God — will see at a single glance that there is no ground for such thoughts in either case. In regard even to present usefulness, and without reference to the future service for which affliction may be preparing them, they may glorify God as much by patient suffering as by active service, and may thus be in the highest degree useful to those who are around them. The mere consideration of their sufferings may impress many a beneficial lesson on the minds of others, especially of the young; while the active and consistent exercise of their Christian graces, in such circumstances, may afford an example of religion in its sustaining power — such as is admirably fitted to commend it to the acceptance of their friends. Thus, even the aged sufferer, disabled as he is from active duty, may be a powerful witness for Christ. And although he has no prospect of being restored to his former sphere of exertion — he is occupying with good and beneficial effect the post which the Lord has assigned to him.

If it is true, as unquestionably it is, that even an old blind beggar is not without his moral use in the world — then how much more certain is it, that the aged and apparently disabled believer is, even in his greatest infirmities, a blessing to his family and friends. For how can he be more useful to them, or how could he better glorify God — than by exhibiting, as he does in the hour of his greatest need, the worth and value of that divine religion which comforts him in all his tribulations, and smooths his path to the grave; nay, which enables him to rise above the love of life and the fear of death, and to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, and to bear his testimony to the love and faithfulness of his Lord throughout the whole course of his protracted trials! Such a man is not useless. Oh no! Though his limbs are inactive, his memory faded, all his faculties impaired — yet . . .

his moral feelings are strong within him,

his faith is firm,

his hope is heavenly,

his heart is full of peace and joy. And many others feel that the aged sufferer makes a deeper and more beneficial impression on it, than all the learning and eloquence of the schools. As an aged believer was accustomed to say, when reduced to extreme poverty, and wholly disabled by a paralytic stroke, "I often seem to myself and others to be a useless burden on the world — but I know and believe that God must have something yet to do by me or in me, otherwise I would not be here." But while the believer, during the time of his affliction, is really occupying a post of usefulness, that season is, in many cases, designed to prepare him for more extensive and successful exertion in God's service hereafter.

While the aged believer looks forward to Heaven as his only remaining sphere of service, the younger brethren may anticipate a restoration to health, and a course of usefulness on earth. And their present afflictions are designed and fitted to prepare them for exerting a higher and more beneficial influence over their fellow-men. This they do by their influence in promoting our personal sanctification; by deepening our impressions of the vanity of the world, and the value of the soul, and the magnitude of eternity; by enlarging our experience of the power of religion, and teaching us its unspeakable importance. In proportion as affliction serves to promote our personal growth in grace — in the same proportion it prepares us for future usefulness. Our capacity of glorifying God in all the ways of private or public duty depends on the condition of our own souls. If our souls have been improved by the discipline of adversity — our testimony to God and his truth, and our love and care for our fellow-men, will be proportionately more constant and more effectual than before. Thus the apostle refers to his own experience during his manifold afflictions, as having been a means of fitting him more fully for one important part of the Christian ministry. "Blessed be God," says he, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations — that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (2 Corinthians 1:4.) Everyone can feel the force of these words. The word of comfort comes with unspeakably greater power from the lips of a suffering Savior, or a sorely tried disciple, than from the lips of one who has never known adversity. And this holds good, not only of the minister of religion — but of every private Christian, and that, in respect to all the departments of Christian usefulness. He is better prepared by means of his experience, as for comforting the afflicted, so also for exhibiting in his

own life and conduct the sanctifying and supporting power of religion, for commending it to the consideration of his family and friends; and for making many exertions, and submitting to many sacrifices, to which others, living in uninterrupted prosperity, might be less inclined to submit. In a word, the deeper the impressions are which he has received on his own soul — the better is he prepared both in point of knowledge and zeal, and sympathy, to care for the welfare of others, and to promote it. The day of adversity is a suitable preparation for the hour of death. That solemn hour must soon arrive. Much inward preparation of heart is needful if we would meet death with calmness, composure, and fortitude. In the day of prosperity, that preparation may be made, if we can succeed in maintaining the ascendancy of divine truth in our minds: for it is the truth of God inwrought, as it were, into the frame and temper of our spirits — and not any external influence merely — which fits the believer for his last struggle. But during prosperity the mind is too prone to yield to worldly influences, and is often reluctant to allow God's truth that full ascendancy which its importance demands, and which is in fact essential to the believer's comfort in the prospect of death. It is by its beneficial influence in breaking the power of worldly enchantments, in disengaging the mind from delusive expectations, and in directing it more earnestly and simply to the truths of God's Word — that adversity serves to prepare it for meeting death with fortitude. The sorrows of life may thus, without exciting one feeling of discontent, or calling forth a single murmur — predispose the soul to leave without reluctance, a scene of so much trial — and to anticipate without alarm that solemn event which will terminate all our earthly cares, and introduce us into a nobler and happier state of being.

Prosperity is less suitable than adversity as a means of preparation for death, not because the latter possesses any "magical charm" by which the fear or the pain of death is allayed — but because affliction is in God's hand a powerful instrument in awakening our attention to the truths of religion, and impressing them on our hearts. It is not adversity in itself simply — but adversity duly considered and improved, that has this effect.

Many a sorely tried and afflicted man is as reluctant to die as the most prosperous worldling. But the reason is that, in his case, adversity has failed in leading him to open his mind to the full influence of Gospel truth; and his experience, while it shows that affliction, like other means of grace, may be frustrated of its beneficial tendency — affords no ground for concluding that it has no such tendency. The genuine disciple is all the better prepared for his last hour by the many seasons of affliction through which he has passed — because, at every such season . . .

his mind has been powerfully impressed,  
his contrition deepened,  
his faith strengthened,  
his communion with God restored,  
his love for the Savior increased,  
his experience of the Spirit's supporting grace enlarged,  
and his hope of Heaven revived.

Thus enlightened, quickened, and comforted by the truths of God seasonably and powerfully applied to his heart by means of affliction — he is prepared to surrender himself into God's hands, and to trust in His unfailing love and faithfulness, at that last, that solemn hour, when leaving its earthly tenement, his soul must enter into the spiritual and eternal world! The day of adversity is a means of preparation for eternal glory. "For our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 So says the apostle in words which demonstrate the connection which exists between the believer's sufferings on earth — and his ultimate happiness in Heaven. That such a connection between these two things exists, a connection similar, in some respects, to that which existed between the humiliation and exaltation of the Savior himself; and that our present afflictions are working out for us a result so glorious — may well serve at once to reconcile us to them, and to impress us with a sense of the wisdom and love of God in imposing them. But let us not imagine that afflictions have this efficacy in themselves, as if (*ex opere operato*) they automatically either secured or merited for us a future compensation or reward. Far from it! God does not visit us with afflictions beyond our desert — so as to make himself our debtor. Neither does any amount of affliction insure us of future glory, except in so far as it is made the means, in God's hand, of bringing the truth home to our hearts, and inducing us cordially to embrace and diligently to improve it. And hence the apostle not only states the fact that affliction works out for God's people an exceeding weight of glory — but he points out the way in which it does so: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." It is by its influence in weaning our thoughts and affections from the world, and directing them to spiritual and eternal things — that adversity tends to prepare us for glory.

We may suffer much and long — but not until the mind looks upward to God and forward to eternity — not until it cordially receives and embraces the truth of the Gospel, is it thereby better prepared for glory — any more than are the fallen spirits who are kept in chains of darkness unto the day of judgment. But as soon as it brings us to the knowledge and reception of the truth, it prepares us by the truth for glory. It then elevates our minds, and prepares and refines them, "so as to make them fit for the inheritance of the saints in light." This it does . . .

partly by convincing us of the vanity of the world — so as to feel that God alone can be our satisfying and everlasting portion;

partly, by convincing us of the wretchedness of our condition as sinners — so as to feel that peace with God is essential to our happiness;

partly, by convincing us of the remaining corruptions that cleave to us — so as to feel that we must be made perfectly holy before we can expect exemption from trial;

and still more, by enabling us to experience the love of God, the pleasure of comfortable communion with Him, and the unspeakable blessedness of resting on Christ — so as to enjoy some foretaste of that higher and more perfect happiness which shall be enjoyed when we enter into his immediate presence.

Accordingly, we read in the Scriptures that even the redeemed in Heaven look back on their earthly trials with grateful ascription of praise to God for his wisdom and love in making them

subservient to their present glory; and a venerable Christian emphatically observes, "I believe there are very few in Heaven — but owe their conversion or their continuance in that state, to some affliction or other."

Such is a brief account of God's benevolent design in the afflictive dispensations of his providence. Their general end is the progressive sanctification and ultimate perfection of our natures. And with this view, they are intended for our instruction, for our reproof, for our trial, and for our preparation for death and glory. That such is their declared purpose and use, may well serve to impress us with a sense of God's goodness, even when he chastens us. While their admirable fitness, as a means to so great an end, is illustrative of the Divine wisdom which presides over the management of our affairs. And the serious consideration of the grand design which they are so well fitted to accomplish, is not only useful in reconciling us to the patient endurance of our present discipline — but is also necessary to the right improvement of our present discipline — since, if we are either ignorant or forgetful of God's design in them, it is not to be expected that we shall either bear them with patience, or steadily pursue those grand moral results to which they tend.

5. In the day of adversity, you should consider your remaining comforts, your numerous and undeserved mercies, and your ample and efficient means of relief. Under the pressure of some sore trial, the mind is too apt to fall into a morbid state, and to brood over its peculiar misery — while it is forgetful alike of the mercies which might alleviate its bitterness, and of the means by which all that is really evil in it might be removed. In some cases there is a reckless desperation — in other cases there is a desponding melancholy, which prevents the enjoyment of any blessing after one favorite object has been withdrawn; and which indisposes, and in part disqualifies, the sufferer from having recourse to those means of relief and consolation which are yet within his reach. This is an ungrateful and rebellious, as well as wretched state of mind. And hence the apostle rebukes it when he speaks of the two contrasted negatives, "Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him." If we would avoid the latter of these extremes, and rise above our sorrow, or at least be able calmly to endure it — we must turn our thoughts to the consideration of our remaining mercies, and have recourse to the practical use of those means of relief which God has graciously given. Notwithstanding the severe stroke by which we have been deprived of health, or fortune, or friends — we are still surrounded with innumerable mercies, which are far, far beyond our deserts. Have we not still some earthly comforts — some small supply for our needs, however apparently casual — some sight and taste of the sweet beauties of nature, which are free to all — some few surviving friends who cling the more closely to us in proportion as their number is diminished, and who are still ready to weep with us when we weep, and to rejoice in our joy?

Yet suppose our condition to be the most desolate and forlorn, have we not still the almighty providence of God to trust in, and his precious promises to refresh and gladden us? Have we not still in Heaven a Great High Priest, a fellow-sufferer enthroned amidst the glories of the upper sanctuary, who has a fellow-feeling with us in our trials, and the power of supporting or relieving us in them all? Have we not still, as his disciples, the same grounds of everlasting hope, the same assurance of pardon and peace, the same interest in his great salvation? Have we not still the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, whose very office connects him with the afflicted, and makes them the object of his peculiar care? Have we not the sweet fellowship of our fellow-disciples, who can speak a word of comfort to us from their own experience, and bear us on

their hearts at the throne of grace? And have we not access for ourselves to the mercy-seat, where, in the confidence of believing prayer, we may utter the fullness of our hearts in the presence of the God of all comfort?

Oh! let not these precious, these unspeakably sweet and glorious privileges forgotten or despised — merely because some affliction has befallen us! We have still far more left to us, than has yet been taken from us. We have everything we really need to bless us in time, and prepare us for eternity. But let us not merely think of these things, let us seek to enjoy them. It may be, that affliction has been sent chiefly to restore us to the fuller enjoyment of that happiness which such privileges may confer — to teach us their unspeakable value, and by means of them, to raise us to a higher plane of spiritual life than any we had formerly experienced.

Let us not only consider our remaining temporal mercies — but with a grateful heart partake of them, rejoicing in the light and heat, the air, the verdant earth and starry sky, exclaiming, "My Father made them all!" Let us not only consider God's providence — but with lowly reverence adore and trust in it! Let us feed upon his promises by faith, looking forward with heavenly hope to their glorious consummation. Let us have recourse to Christ as a sympathizing friend, receiving his salvation freely, as it is freely offered, rejoicing in his unchangeable love, glorifying his transcendent work of salvation, and exulting in his exaltation. Let us yield to the Spirit's grace, seeking his guidance, submitting to his power, and rejoicing in his consolations. Let us cleave to our Bible, which contains our glorious charter and security for time and eternity — nourishing our souls with divine truth, refreshing them with divine promises, invigorating and strengthening them with the faith and patience of the saints. Let us more frankly enter into Christian fellowship with our fellow-disciples, learning from their experience, and deriving from their communion new light, and love and joy. And with them, or by ourselves, let us repair often and freely to that throne of grace, before which all the sorrows of believers in all ages have been divulged, not doubting, that to us, as to them — relief and support will be sent in every hour of need. And finally, let us not confine our consideration to the circumstances of our present condition — but while we gratefully enjoy our remaining mercies, and dutifully improve our present privileges, let us also consider, and seek in the exercise of holy meditation to realize our future prospects and hopes. These might well support us, even though all earthly supports were removed.

We know that all our afflictions are soon to terminate, and, if we are Christ's disciples — the end of affliction will be the beginning of perfect joy. Heaven is before us. Thence let us draw, as it were by anticipation, some foretastes of its blessedness — motives to encourage, and strength to animate us in our earthly pilgrimage, and an undying energy of perseverance in our spiritual welfare. For why should any Christian faint by the way — if that way is leading him to Heaven?

6. In the day of adversity, you should consider Christ Jesus the Lord, as the forerunner and the pattern of his believing people. Thus writes the apostle: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Hebrews 12:2-3

Christ should be much in our thoughts in the time of suffering. Let us consider the number and intensity of Christ's sufferings, and how far they exceed whatever we can be called to endure. Consider . . .

the lowliness of his birth,  
the labor of his youth,  
the poverty of his whole life,  
the persecutions to which he was exposed,  
the calumnies which were invented against his character,  
the hatred of his avowed enemies,  
the treachery of some of his professed friends,  
the public insults and mockery with which he was treated,  
the pains which he endured of hunger and thirst,  
the still deeper pains of crucifixion, and  
the deepest pains of all — his "soul-sufferings" which made him exclaim, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"

It is related of an eminent man that, while racked by severe suffering, he was accustomed to turn his thoughts to the scene of his Savior's agony, and that he thence derived at once a lesson of meek endurance and a motive to gratitude — he felt that his sufferings were as nothing, when compared with those of his Divine Master. This seems to be the idea that is suggested by the apostle when he reminds the disciples — that they had not yet, like their crucified Lord, "Resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

Let us consider the DESIGN and EFFECT of Christ's sufferings. They were different in these respects from our own. In his case they were strictly penal — intended as a satisfaction to divine justice for all the sins of his people; as a fulfillment of the curse of the law; and as such, their amount must have been inconceivably greater than our light afflictions, while their effect was and is to deprive all our afflictions of their bitterness, and death itself of its sting. Our afflictions are chastisements, and as such, may be properly regarded as manifestations of God's fatherly displeasure — but they are not penal inflictions, such as can satisfy divine justice. No, all that was strictly penal in suffering, all that was required for the vindication of God's law and the fulfillment of the curse — Christ has already endured for us. This consideration is fitted at once to impress us with the conviction that our sufferings have been alleviated by the Savior's agony, and to cheer us with the hope that by the effect of his sufferings and death — we shall soon be delivered from their pressure and raised to perfect joy.

Let us consider the divine sympathy which Christ's personal sufferings secure for each of his suffering people. A suffering Savior, can sympathize with an afflicted people. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." And let us consider the patience with which he endured his sufferings — his meek resignation to the divine

will — his calmness in the midst of human enmity — his fortitude in the hour of death. "He suffered, leaving us an example that we should walk in his steps." "When they hurled their insults at him — he did not retaliate; when he suffered — he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." The apostle's expression, "fixing our eyes on Jesus," is a comprehensive description of what should be in all circumstances — the habit of the believer's soul. But never is "fixing our eyes on Jesus" more needful or more refreshing than when he is placed in circumstances of affliction. Then, if ever, he should be looking unto Jesus — never losing sight of his once crucified, but now exalted Master, nor turning his eye away from his glorious person — until, by the view of his patience and success in the hour of trial, his heart is at once subdued into tenderness and elevated by joyful hope.

One view of Christ, will avail more for our relief in such circumstances than all other considerations combined. A suffering Christ is at once the Savior, the friend, and the pattern of the suffering Christian. And, when He is thus contemplated by the eye of faith, virtue will come out of him for the support and comfort of his redeemed people. In vain is our attention directed to all other subjects — if Christ is overlooked or misunderstood. We may and should consider . . .

the adversities which befall us,

the hand from which they proceed,

the causes which have occasioned,

the guilt which has incurred them,

the declared design and end of affliction, and

the serious and beneficial lessons which it is fitted to teach. But all this will not avail for our comfort and support — unless we know and consider "Christ and him crucified." This is . . .

the grand subject of contemplation,

the only genuine spring of comfort,

the only safe ground of confidence and hope.

If afflictions do not lead us to consider Christ in his sufferings, and to know the end and object for which his sufferings were endured, and their intimate connection with our own welfare in time, and happiness in eternity — our afflictions, however numerous, or heavy, or protracted, have been sent in vain! For all the lessons which they teach, respecting the vanity of the world, and the demerit of sin, and the justice of God — are useful chiefly in a way of subservience to our progress in the knowledge of Christ! It is by their influence in leading us to Christ, and fixing our regards on Him as our only help and hope — that they conduce at once to our personal comfort and our progressive sanctification.

Let the sufferer reflect on his trials, and his sins; let him ponder the proofs of God's judicial administration until he is impressed with a solemn sense of his justice; let him consider the vanity of the world, the certainty of death, and his own weakness to avert any one of the calamities to which he is exposed — all these considerations are beneficial ONLY in so far as they have a tendency to convince him of his need of Christ. But he must look to Christ himself, and especially

to Christ in his agony, and on the cross — and that, too, with an intelligent and scriptural apprehension of the nature and extent of his sufferings, as an atonement for sin — before he can experience either the sanctifying influence of affliction, or the sweetness of Gospel consolation under it.

He who, either through ignorance or error, thinks little of Christ, or misunderstands the mysteries of his humiliation and death — is yet in a condition which prevents him from being either duly humbled, or duly supported in the day of trial.

Oh! why will the weak and stricken spirit turn its thoughts to other objects — while Christ, the Son of God, is plainly exhibited to his view, as a fellow-sufferer on earth. Surely such a Sufferer claims his regard, and exhibits to him an example such as may cheer, and animate, and direct him, in his most trying hour. Surely it is "the cross of Christ" alone, "by which the world can be crucified unto us, and we unto the world!" And we may well "count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord."

7. In the day of adversity, you should consider the recorded examples of the saints and martyrs who have gone before you, and who, in similar trials, have been enabled to endure, as seeing God, who is invisible. "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy!" James 5:10-11 A very large part of the historical Scriptures is occupied with the sufferings of God's people, and their experience and conduct under them. Our first parents, who suffered in their persons, and were driven forth from the beautiful garden, to a world that was laid under the curse; and who suffered severely in their domestic relations, especially when their first-born imbrued his hands in his brother's blood — Abel himself a sufferer and a martyr. Noah, the witness of that terrible deluge, which swept away all but his own immediate relatives. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and David; Isaiah and Jeremiah; the martyred Baptist, and Stephen, the first Christian confessor; Paul, and all the apostles and primitive disciples — all these are exhibited as sufferers, whose experience verified the statement, that it is through great tribulation that we must enter the kingdom.

It is a proof of God's supreme wisdom, that the history of suffering is thus interwoven, as it were, with the whole texture of his Word — since thus it is adapted to whatever has been, and ever will be, the experience of his people in all ages of the Church. Did the Bible speak little of affliction — did it exhibit the believers of olden times as prosperous men, enjoying a happy life on earth, with few or insignificant trials — we might have envied their happy lot, without imitating their virtues, or aiming at their comforts. But when it presents them to our view as men compassed with the same infirmities, exposed to the same trials, enduring the like afflictions with ourselves — we feel that they are our brethren in sorrow — and that like as they were comforted and enabled to endure — so may we also be supported by the same grace, and endued with the same patience from on high. This it is which imparts a charm to the simple narrative of their experience, such as renders these passages among the most precious portions of the Word of God — insomuch, that it may with truth be said, that the afflictions of David, which occasioned the composition of the Psalms, have been a signal benefit to the universal Church of God — every member of which, in all ages and lands, can enter with all the interest of a fellow-feeling into . . .

those mournful complaints,

those pathetic expressions of a stricken heart,

those deep and profound acknowledgments of man's sin and God's eternal justice,

those earnest breathings,

those longing aspirations towards Heaven

— with which these Psalms abound. And more generally, the consideration of the sufferings of God's people in all ages, is of the highest use in discharging the mind of that fond misconception which is so apt to be entertained in the hour of sorrow, even that our sufferings are of a different kind, or more intense in their degree, than those of other men, "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath!" From which we are too apt to infer that God would not thus deal with us, if we belonged to the number of his people, or unless he had an unappeasable anger against us. Whereas, when we consider the Scripture narrative, we find that affliction has been the badge of God's people in all ages, and is to be regarded, not as a mark of reprobation, so much as a pledge of friendship. There we are taught that "fiery as our trial may be, no strange thing has happened unto us" — that "the same afflictions were and have been accomplished in our brethren in all ages of the world" — and that we are only the partakers of those trials, which, as being appropriate to our high and heavenly calling, are described as "the afflictions of the Gospel" — nay, as "Christ's sufferings." The consideration of the sufferings of God's people is fitted farther to assure us, that the Gospel is adequate to sustain us under the severest trials, and in the prospect of death itself. For . . . they passed "through a great fight of afflictions," and yet received no damage; they were burned in the furnace, and were thereby not destroyed — but refined; they submitted to violent death, and the Gospel was adequate to their support and triumph in that fearful hour.

Why then should we despond — we, to whom . . .

the same promises are addressed,

the same supports offered,

and the same hopes insured! Will not Christ be with us in the furnace, even as he was with the Hebrew children who came forth from the furnace unhurt? And finally, their example in suffering affliction with patience, is at once instructive and animating. When we consider Christ Jesus the Lord, we are too apt to think that his divine strength enabled him to endure in such a way as cannot be realized by his weak followers. But here are men, men with hearts as sensitive, with flesh as weak as our own — who have meekly suffered every form of natural evil, and who have been made more than conquerors over all! Let us consider them in the hour of our trial, and in the exercise of the same unshaken faith in God. Let us seek, like them, to "let patience have its perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

8. In the day of adversity, you should consider the actual effect which your trials have yet produced on your own souls. We have seen what God's design in them is — let us inquire whether that design has been fulfilled in our own souls. Does our experience correspond with his declared purpose. Are we more sanctified? Are we more weaned from the world? Are we more humbled

under a sense of our unworthiness? Are we more deeply impressed by Divine truth? Are we induced to pray more frequently and more fervently? Are we more thoroughly devoted in heart and life to God's service — by means of, and in consequence of, our afflictions?

If we cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, have we no reason to fear that we are fighting against God; that we are slighting his warnings, despising his rod, and frustrating his gracious intentions towards us? Oh! it is very needful thus to inquire as to the actual effect of affliction on ourselves — for it operates very differently, according as it is well or ill improved. In the former case, affliction produces . . .

contrition of heart,

deadness to the world,

meek submission to God,

an earnest desire after communion with him,

a holy frame and heavenly temper, such as befits our condition as pilgrims and strangers on the earth!

Affliction prepares us . . .

for usefulness in life,

for peace in death, and

for glory in Heaven! But in the other case, when it is despised, or misimproved, affliction leaves the soul as lifeless as it found it:

instead of contrition, it awakens discontent;

instead of Christian humility, it leaves us in unbelieving despondency;

instead of weaning us from the world, it rivets more firmly around us the remaining ties by which we cleave to it, and issues in dull insensibility, or reckless unconcern.

It has been beautifully said, that "the same fire which melts the gold — hardens the clay." Just so, the same afflictions which softened the heart of David — hardened the heart of Pharaoh into more obdurate impenitency. And is it not worth our while to consider which of these processes is now going on in our own experience — whether we are becoming better or worse by the discipline of God's providence; whether we are ripening for Heaven — or sinking towards Hell.

Oh! that is a solemn statement which declares, "that he who being often reprov'd, and hardens his neck — shall speedily be cut off, and that without remedy!"

If, on the other hand, we have good ground for believing that our minds have yielded to the beneficial influences of affliction, and have thereby become more dead to the world and more alive to God; if we feel a growing humility of heart, and experience a sweeter communion with Heaven; if our faith has been strengthened, and our hope confirmed in the hour of trial — then may we not only rest assured that it has been good for us that we were afflicted; but on a comparison of the spiritual benefit which we have acquired with the temporal prosperity which we have lost — we

shall be able and willing to give our joyful and grateful testimony at once to the wisdom and goodness of God in all his dispensations towards us.

Having suggested various topics as suitable subjects for your consideration in the day of adversity — permit me again to remind you that all the benefits of affliction depend on your attention being awakened and directed to God's truth. It is by consideration alone that it can do you good. An inconsiderate sufferer — will be an unsanctified sufferer. He may suffer much and suffer long — but all to no purpose, unless he is brought to think, and to think seriously. That affliction is fitted to induce thoughtfulness, is the reason why it is employed as a means in the discipline of God's providence. But its tendency may be frustrated, and then all its benefits must be forfeited and lost. And finally, let me impress it on your hearts, that you should thus improve the first moments of affliction before yet it be too late. For while the season of adversity furnishes a fit opportunity, and addresses to you an impressive call to consider your case — it ought never to be forgotten, that when affliction reaches its extreme point, it does, in many cases, unfit the soul for all profitable thought. You may be subjected to a disease which will totally overpower your faculties, and give you over as a passive and unresisting prey to the power of death. Think not, then, of postponing consideration until a future hour; but laying to heart the trials which you have already experienced, seek so to improve them now, while reason is yet clear and strong — as that, whatever may befall you hereafter, you may have good ground to rejoice in the assurance that your soul is safe for eternity!

## 02.02. FAITH.

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### 2. FAITH.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me." John 14:1

These words form part of the heart-affecting discourse which our blessed Lord addressed to his disciples when he had now the near prospect of being separated from them, and of being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Knowing that "their hearts would be troubled," he prescribes an infallible antidote — and that antidote is faith. For all trouble of mind, faith in God and Christ, is the sovereign cure.

You are aware that the word here translated "believe," is sometimes employed to denote the assent which is yielded to the truths of religion, and sometimes to denote the trust or confidence which is reposed in God or Christ. The former is the first in the order of nature — a believing apprehension of the truth being the ground and warrant of that trust which is its proper and immediate effect. But although they admit of being distinguished, they cannot be separated from one another, and are generally combined in the same state of mind. It matters little which of the two ideas we attach to the word, provided always that the belief of the truth be such as is accompanied or followed by trust in God himself; and, provided also, that this trust in God is the fruit of correct and Scriptural apprehensions of the truth respecting Him. The grand general doctrine which we learn from the passage is: That faith in God, and faith in Jesus Christ, is at once the sovereign comfort, and the immediate duty of all his people in the time of trouble.

I. Faith in God ought unquestionably to be to all intelligent creatures, a source of comfort. To every mind that has not been disordered in its noblest faculties — the idea of such a Being must be an elevating and consoling one. And as dark as is the human understanding, and disordered as are its noblest powers — we cannot fail to acknowledge that the existence, the perfections, the providence, and the government of God, ought to minister comfort and satisfaction to our hearts.

Let us form a distinct conception of God as a Being infinite, eternal, and unchangeable; self-existent, omnipresent, omniscient. Let us add to these, His natural and unchangeable perfections, the attributes of holiness, justice, goodness, and truth — which are the special elements of his moral character. Conceive of such a Being, as actually existing, as seated on the throne of this vast universe, and exercising a most provident care over all its provinces. Conceive of Him governing by his sole will, and controlling by his divine perfections — every order of created beings, and every factor of all events. Conceive of Him as extending the same care alike to the seraphs which worship around his throne, and to the sparrows that fall to the earth. Let any human mind, however darkened and debased, take in that one simple, but grand conception — and he cannot fail to acknowledge that, however for other causes it may fail in imparting real comfort — it ought at least, and is fitted to do so. Were there no reason, arising out of our present state and character, for our being afraid of such a being — could we calmly and dispassionately contemplate all his divine perfections, and reflect on . . .

his constant presence with us;

his perfect knowledge of our circumstances;

his benevolent interest in our welfare;

and his power to help and support us

— then assuredly our faith in God would minister comfort in every time of trouble. Our believing apprehension of these momentous truths would produce and sustain a habitual trust and confidence in him.

If, in our present condition, we cannot, from our own experience, speak of the sustaining power of this great truth, let us endeavor to aid our conceptions of it by considering the feelings which it must awaken in the bosoms of perfectly holy and happy beings. Let us conceive of the angels in the upper sanctuary, who have seen the Lord's glory, who have a clear and certain knowledge of his character, and whose daily employment brings them into immediate converse with him — and can we fail to acknowledge that to such holy spirits — the existence, the perfections, the providence, and the government of God, must afford materials for the profoundest admiration, and that God must be their chief joy? Their hearts are not troubled, just because they believe in God. But take the alternative supposition — suppose that they had lost all knowledge of his divine perfections, and all faith in his being and providence. Suppose, if that were possible, that they should come to live, as too many on earth do live, without God. Oh! what a change would then be wrought in all their views and feelings! What a dreary desolation would spread over the face of the universe which heretofore had been supported by the power, and regulated by the wisdom, and gladdened by the smile of the presiding Deity! With God disappearing from their view — the moral world would become dark and cold, just as the natural world changes its whole aspect on the disappearance of the sun. The light and joy of their immortal life would depart, and they would fall into the very same state of doubt, and misery, and hopelessness, in which men have involved themselves in this fallen and sin-ruined world. Their case may help us to conceive aright of our own. For in so far as we resemble them in point of intelligence, and in the capacity of knowing and believing in God — in the same proportion we ought to derive comfort and satisfaction from the consideration of his being and perfections. And although many of us may have had but little experience of the actual influence of this faith — none can fail to see that a realizing and habitual belief in God is in its own nature fitted to sustain, and cheer, and elevate the soul. Is there one man on the surface of this earth to whom it is a matter of perfect indifference whether there is a God or not? There are many, alas! who seldom or never think on the subject of God! There are many more who content themselves with very vague and indistinct notions respecting him. But when they do think upon it so as to form any correct notion at all, all men must feel in their inmost souls, that the existence, the character, the providence, and the government of God, are topics of supreme importance, bearing, not only on the duties and responsibilities of life — but also on their present comfort and their eternal welfare.

Although they have had no experience of the unspeakable peace which God's people enjoy in seeking his counsel, in leaning on his arm, in committing themselves to the care of his watchful providence, and in walking in the light of his countenance — yet they can and do see that God's existence is the best security for the order of the universe; that his divine perfections ought to be a

source of satisfaction; that the protection of his providence is a desirable, and, in times of danger, a most needful defense; and that in the long run, they are and must be a "happy people whose God is the Lord."

Some such convictions and feelings must often have occurred to every reflecting man, especially in those seasons of peril or of trial, when he was most sensible of his own weakness, and of his dependence on a higher power. At such seasons, when the heart is troubled by the apprehension of danger which no human power can avert, or by the pressure of anxiety respecting the dark and uncertain outcome of events which have an important bearing on our welfare — but which no human forethought can regulate or control — everyone must be sensible that a firm belief in Almighty God, and in his presiding providence, can alone sustain the mind, and ought to be sufficient for that end. Yet, that he should be regarded by all intelligent creatures as the fountain of joy and blessedness — as their refuge and defense, their surest support, and their sweetest portion — is not more certain than is the fact, that, in the actual experience of mankind in their fallen state, he is the object of their fear, distrust, and jealousy.

Insomuch that while his existence, and providence, and infinite moral perfections are generally admitted — these considerations, so far from relieving their minds from sorrow, are felt to be the occasions of deep depression or alarming fears! The idea of God, when it does occur to the unsaved mind, is often fraught with terror. Many a man might say with the Psalmist, "I remembered God and was troubled! I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. I am so troubled that I cannot speak!" And with Job, "Therefore am I troubled at his presence, when I consider — I am afraid of him, for God makes my heart faint, and the Almighty troubles me." "For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit! The terrors of God do set themselves in array against me." Our Lord says to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God" — plainly representing faith in God as an antidote or remedy for trouble of mind. Yet Job and the Psalmist, and many of God's tried and afflicted people, as well as multitudes of the ungodly, have been troubled mainly by the remembrance of God.

Why is this? Is it because faith in God is not naturally fitted to minister comfort and joy — let the experience of unfallen angels answer the question. They will testify that all their felicity depends on him who is thus a terror to sinful men. Is it, then, the result of an unenlightened superstition — is it a blind and groundless fear? By no means. Great and majestic, and gracious as is the character of God — yet both Scripture and conscience concur in testifying that he is a just Governor and Judge. So being conscious of our sinfulness, we cannot regard God, in that character, without many misgivings and fears. We must feel, if we think at all, that he may have grounds of accusation against us, and reasons for manifesting his holy displeasure.

These suggestions of conscience are amply confirmed by our present experience, seeing that God's judgments are so numerous and so severe. In these circumstances, it is not astonishing that our belief in God should fail to relieve our hearts of trouble, so long as we consider him only as he stands revealed in the light of nature. Nay, the more profound and the more correct our knowledge of God becomes — the more reason shall we discover, for admiring indeed the excellency and the greatness of his character — but, at the same time also, for apprehending the certainty of his displeasure on account of sin. Thus all the comfort which innocent and holy beings might derive from the contemplation of his divine perfections — may, in the case of fallen and sinful creatures,

be superseded by a fearful apprehension of his wrath and curse. When our Lord says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me" — he plainly intimates that a believing knowledge of the truth respecting himself must be added to our faith in God, in order that we may be delivered from mental trouble. And this is necessary, first, Because in its own nature faith in Christ is fitted to relieve the mind of its most depressing anxieties and cares. And secondly, Because it is the means of qualifying us for enjoying that full peace and comfort which faith in God ought to impart. In its own nature, faith in Christ is fitted to relieve the mind of its most depressing anxieties and cares. This faith has reference to all those grand truths which stand connected with the method of redemption. It apprehends the meaning and acquiesces in the certainty of such statements as these — that "Christ came into the world to save sinners!" That "he came to seek and to save the lost!" That he is "the Mediator between God and man," "The atoning sacrifice for our sins," "The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" That "he died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us unto God," that "he was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, that the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him, and that by his stripes we are healed," that "he has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us," that in consequence of his vicarious obedience and sufferings, whereby the law was magnified and made honorable — God is now "the just God and the Savior," that in token of his approbation and acceptance of Christ's work, "God raised him from the dead," and has "exalted him as a Prince and Savior, to give repentance and the remission of sins," and that now, "whoever believes in him shall not perish — but shall have eternal life!"

These are some of the truths which faith in Christ necessarily involves, and when these truths are correctly understood and sincerely acquiesced in — they produce a habitual trust and confidence in Christ, as an all-sufficient Savior — as a Savior "able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by him." That a believing apprehension of such precious truths, and a personal trust and confidence in such a Savior — should be a remedy for all mental trouble, must be evident to every reflecting mind. But faith in Christ is not only fitted in its own nature to comfort us — it is also the means of bringing us into a new relation towards God, whereby we are qualified for enjoying to the full, all that peace and satisfaction which the consideration of his divine perfections, his almighty providence, and his moral government, is fitted to impart. And this effect of faith in Christ, in enlarging, strengthening, and sweetening our faith in God himself — is well worthy of your serious consideration.

We have already had occasion to observe, that a belief in the existence, perfections, providence, and government of God, apart from the revelation of his character in the Gospel of Christ — although it ought to minister comfort and joy to all his intelligent creatures — is nevertheless insufficient to remove those anxieties and fears which a sense of guilt must awaken in the bosoms of fallen men. That it leaves unresolved, some of the most serious questions which can occur respecting his dispensations towards the guilty, and their prospects under his righteous government. But if we believe in Christ, all these difficulties, whether relating to his purpose towards us, or our relation towards him, are at once removed. For "God in Christ" is revealed as "reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto men their trespasses." Christ brings us to God, not as an avenging Judge — but as a forgiving Father! We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son, and enabled to look up to him without one misgiving or fear — nay, with filial confidence and affection as our Father in Heaven.

Thus liberated from our fears by the faith of Christ, we may enjoy all the comfort which faith in God can impart. We are no longer under the necessity of overlooking any part of his glorious character, in order to preserve our inward peace. We may dwell with devout admiration on each one of his attributes, even on such of them as heretofore had excited our uneasiness or awakened our fears. We may seek to acquire larger views of their transcendent excellence, in the firm assurance that so far from weakening the grounds of our hope and comfort — they will only strengthen them the more. For now through Christ, every perfection of the Divine nature becomes a new pledge of the believer's safety and peace! His faithfulness, his unfailling truth, his very justice and holiness itself — is a new reason for the believer's joy. It is thus, that through Christ we come to enjoy and to delight in God himself, and that the faith of Christ enhances and sweetens that faith in God, which is our support in every hour of danger, and our solace in every time of sorrow. And thus, we realize the full blessedness which Christ proposes to his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me."

2. While faith in God and Christ is the spring of all spiritual comfort, it is also the special duty of the afflicted — a duty to which they are expressly called by God's dispensations, and on the observance of which the sanctified use of affliction mainly depends. The Lord's words direct us to faith, not only as a spring of comfort — but also as a seasonable duty in the time of trouble. Sometimes by providential afflictions, at other times by spiritual trouble — he teaches us to live a life of faith. In such circumstances, we are made to feel that we have no refuge but in God, and no refuge in God himself but through Jesus Christ the Lord. The dispensations of his providence, and the spiritual discipline to which we are subjected, are both designed for this end; and if they are suitably improved, we shall be ready to say with the Apostle, "The life which I live in the flesh, is by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." That affliction is both designed and fitted to call us to the exercise of faith is evident, as well from the general scope of Scripture, as from the experience of every believer. The chief evil of our present condition is, that we are so prone to live under the influence of seen and temporal things, to the neglect of things which are unseen and eternal. But when affliction comes — when we are either disabled for enjoying, or deprived altogether of the means of earthly happiness — when our sky is overcast with clouds, and our worldly prospects are dark and dismal — we are glad to look above the world, and beyond it, for some better and more enduring portion. This may not be the immediate effect of every affliction. On the contrary, the sufferer may for a time seek relief from other quarters, as we learn from the case of backsliding Israel, "When Israel saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound — then Ephraim went to the Assyrian, and sent to king Jareb — yet could he not heal you, nor cure you of your wound." (Hosea 5:13.) But even in regard to them, the same discipline of affliction which had in the first instance failed to produce its full effect, was to be continued as a means of ultimately reviving their faith in God. "I will go, and return to my place, until they acknowledge their offence and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early." (Hosea 5:15.) And accordingly it follows, "Come and let us return unto the Lord, for he has torn, and he will heal us; he has smitten, and he will bind us up." (Hosea 6:1.)

Sometimes affliction is the means of convincing men that they are destitute of true faith, as when a prosperous nominal Christian is suddenly, by severe trials, thrown back for support on those religious principles which he had long professed — but which now, in this the hour of his need, he feels to be too slight and superficial to sustain him. At other times affliction is the means of

invigorating a faith which, under the malignant influence of worldly views and feelings, was ready to die. And universally, affliction is designed for the trial and exercise of faith, wherein consists a principal part of our moral probation in this state of discipline.

God is often pleased to place his people in circumstances in which . . .

they feel that they are shut up to the exercise of faith;

that they are in a labyrinth from which no human wisdom can deliver them;

that they have no outlet by which they can escape, unless God himself clears their way before them;

and that they must look to him solely, and trust in him simply, and follow the leadings of his providence, as it were, blindfold!

They must trust God in the darkest hour of providence, holding fast by the simple word of promise, which is their only light in a dark place. When, to the eye of sense, all is obscure and gloomy — the eye of faith must be their guide. When God's providence is so mysterious that the believer is ready to exclaim, "Your way is in the sea, and your path in the great waters, and your footsteps are not known!" — yet, recollecting the facts and promises of the Sacred Record, he is able to add, "You lead your people like a flock."

When, like David, "his foot had well-nigh slipped," he is recovered by his faith: "I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord." And while many transpose these two things, and seek present sensible experience as the ground and support of faith — he does not, in such circumstances, seek to see that he may believe — but he believes to see. His language is, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O my enemy: when I fall, I shall arise. When I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. 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!"

Wherefore, "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty — yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He makes me as surefooted as a deer, able to tread upon the heights!" Habakkuk 3:17-19 As faith is a seasonable duty in the time of trouble — so it is the means not only of procuring that comfort which may cheer us under it — but also of fulfilling, in our experience, the grand moral design for which it is sent. As "without faith, it is impossible," in any circumstances, "to please God" — so without faith it is impossible to reap the precious fruits of affliction. It is not the trial of our rational nature, nor the trial of our tempers — but "the trial of our faith, which, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, shall be found unto praise, and honor, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 1:7

It is only through faith, that temporal evil is productive of spiritual good. Disease, bereavement, bankruptcy, cannot sanctify us if we cherish an unbelieving frame of mind. It is God's truth, revealed in the Word, clearly understood by the mind, and firmly apprehended by faith — which

exerts a moral influence on the heart, and thus fulfills the design of affliction. "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth!" John 17:17 Is affliction designed to raise our thoughts above the world, and to fix them on God and Heaven? Then it is by faith that this purpose is fulfilled; for "faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." Is affliction designed to refine and purify our moral affections? Then it is by faith that this purpose also is fulfilled; for "God purifies our hearts by faith." (Acts 15:9.) Is affliction designed to break the spell of the world's enchantments, and to raise us to a noble superiority over all its ensnaring pleasures? Then it is by faith that this purpose also is fulfilled, "for this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:5.) In a word, the whole moral and spiritual benefit of affliction depends on the exercise of faith. The apostle tells us, that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen;" and that, "by faith, Moses endured, as seeing him who is invisible." In other words, faith realizes unseen and eternal things; and in proportion as it is exercised, makes the believer to live . . .

as if he saw God beside him;

as if he saw Heaven above, and Hell beneath;

as if he beheld Christ on the cross, or

as if he beheld invisible eternal realities.

Faith . . .

brings a sublime class of objects to bear on the mind;

it widens the range of our vision;

it lifts our eye from the things of time and sense;

it brings us under the powers of the world to come;

it changes our view of everything on earth, by teaching us to consider them in connection with the things of God.

We now see that we have higher objects of thought, and greater interests at stake, and a loftier destiny before us — than this world affords. And thus, when we have seen, in the light of God's truth, the glory of things unseen and eternal — we are worldlings no longer. Faith has broken the charm by which the world enslaved us, and we begin to feel and to act as subjects of God's universal government, as heirs and expectants of immortality. But especially is it faith in God and Christ that has this effect. In Christ's cross, we see a monument of the world's vanity — but also a monument of the worth and value of the soul. We see God in human nature suffering for some great design, and that design, once understood, casts every earthly thing into the shade. And just in proportion as we enter into that glorious scheme, which has its origin in Heaven, its execution on earth, and its consummation in eternity — will we feel that our faith is loosening from around us the fetters of the world, and that by Christ's cross, which exhibits the sum and substance of all revealed truth, "the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world."

Faith changes our view of everything pertaining to this present world, and it enables us especially to look on affliction in a new light. It regards this world as but a scene of preparation for Heaven —

and views the events of time in their connection with the destinies of eternity. Having "respect to the recompense of reward," it teaches us not only to submit to self-denying sacrifices, with a view to everlasting happiness — but even deliberately "to choose," as Moses did, "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Great must be the power of that faith, which has sustained the martyrs and confessors of God's truth in all ages, "who submitted to be tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection; who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yes, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth." And if faith were thus able to resist and overcome all the terrors of persecution, and to quench those fires which it had been the occasion of kindling — should it have less power to sustain us under the more common afflictions of life, which come to us in the ordinary course of providence? Or if it was the duty of the martyrs and confessors to exercise an unshaken faith, and to maintain their constancy in the trying and terrible circumstances of their times — can it be that we are guiltless, if, in the more common tribulations of life, we cherish an unbelieving and distrustful frame of mind? Is it not our blessed privilege, as well as our clearest duty, to exercise . . .

a simple, unwavering, and confiding faith;

a faith grounded and settled on the word and faithfulness of God;

a faith embracing the whole substance of his testimony;

a faith recognizing God in his revealed character as God in Christ;

a faith trusting in him absolutely, and, without fear, committing everything to his care;

a faith regarding spiritual things revealed as most certain, solemn, and eternal realities;

a faith cleaving to the word of promise in the darkest hour;

a faith realizing our eternal prosperity as its ultimate object;

a faith producing inward holiness and comfort as its present fruits, and a pledge and confirmation of our future hopes;

a faith viewing every change on earth, and every succession of private or public events — as only a new manifestation of God's sovereign will, and a fresh illustration of that stupendous providence by which, in all ages, and through the most complicated agencies, he is steadily advancing for his people's good — that one grand scheme of grace, which will soon terminate in glory. In the time of trouble, we are called . . .

to a special exercise of faith in regard to the events of Providence,

to trust his heart — when we can't trace his hand,

to confess the rectitude of his procedure,

to recognize his holy design,

to adore his unsearchable wisdom, and

to acknowledge his loving-kindness in all our trials. But before illustrating these special exercises of faith, I would earnestly solicit your attention to the important reflection, that you cannot exercise this special faith in God's providence with advantage and comfort — unless you believe in God, and believe also in Jesus Christ. It is the truth revealed in Scripture, and especially the truth respecting God in Christ, that is the comprehensive object of faith. And it is by the belief of that truth that you may be prepared for viewing the events of Providence in a scriptural light, and for deriving spiritual benefit from them.

Unless by faith you regard God in his scriptural character,

unless by faith you embrace God's scheme of redemption,

unless by faith you enter into a state of reconciliation with him, and repose your personal trust and confidence in him as your covenant God,

unless by faith you are united to Christ, so as to have a saving interest in all the privileges which he purchased, and in all the promises which he has made — you cannot exercise faith in reference to the events of Providence or the afflictions of life. The latter is only a special act or exercise of a general and comprehensive principle, which embraces the whole truth of God, and applies it to all the various exigencies of our condition — in prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness, in life and death.

## 02.03A. Special Exercise of Faith in the Wisdom of God's Procedure.

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### 3. Special Exercise of Faith in the Wisdom of God's Procedure.

"He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation" Psalms 107:7 This Psalm is designed to illustrate the universal providence of God — but a special allusion is made to the case of the Israelites in the wilderness, as affording a signal example of the method in which God's providence is exercised for the good of his redeemed people. That God led the Israelites through the wilderness, is elsewhere affirmed, where it is said, "you led Jacob like a flock, by the hand of Moses and of Aaron." "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye — as an eagle stirs up her nest, flutters over her young, spreads abroad her wings, takes them, bears them on her wings; so the Lord did lead him." (Deuteronomy 32:10-12.) A visible sign of his presence in the midst of them was graciously given to strengthen their faith in his promise. "The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them in the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light." (Exodus 13:21.) And although, when provoked by their ingratitude and rebellion, he threatened that "he would not go up in the midst of them lest he should consume them in the way;" (Exodus 33:3) yet, on the intercession of Moses, he was graciously pleased to renew his promise, saying, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." (Exodus 33:14.)

Accordingly, every step of their journey was regulated by his counsel. He taught them where to rest, and when to advance. He marked out for them the path which they should take, and at every successive stage they had fresh proof that they were under the immediate guidance and protection of the God of Jacob. When we consider this fact, that God was their leader and guide, and when we reflect on his omniscient and unerring wisdom — but above all, on his paternal kindness and love — we cannot fail, from these considerations alone, to conclude, that the way by which they were led, was, as it is said to be in the text, "the right way." His love, his wisdom, his foresight, his covenant promise, and his Almighty power — these were so many assurances that he would not lead them astray; that weak and wayward as they were in themselves — their steps should be so ordered as to bring them to their promised rest. But while God was their leader, and while the way by which he led them was the right way, I beseech you to observe that it was not a way unhindered by difficulties, and temptations, and trials. On the contrary, it was beset with them on every side, insomuch that their progress through the wilderness, so far from resembling the triumphal march of a prosperous nation under a great and glorious leader, was, throughout, the journey of distressed pilgrims; it involved them in many hardships, exposed them to many dangers, and gave occasion to much murmuring and distrust; and yet, still it is affirmed, that "he was leading them by the right way, unto a city of habitations." It may be instructive to compare the actual facts of the case, as these are recorded by the pen of Moses, with this general declaration from the pen of the Psalmist: to consider the way by which they were led, with all its difficulties and trials, and to connect it with the assurance, that difficult and dangerous as it was, it was the right way.

1. The way by which God led the children of Israel, was neither the shortest nor the most direct. On the contrary, it was circuitous, and, in so far as their mere translation to the land of Canaan was concerned, unnecessarily protracted. Numerous and mixed as the company was under the conduct of Moses, "consisting of six hundred thousand men, besides children, and much cattle," (Exodus 12:37) a few weeks might have sufficed to transfer them from Egypt into Canaan. Yet we read that "when Pharaoh had let the people go, God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; but God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea." (Exodus 10:17-18.) And you are well aware, that instead of completing their journey in a few weeks as they might have done, God kept them in the wilderness for the space of forty years!

2. The way by which God led the children of Israel in the wilderness, exposed them to severe privations, cut them off from many of their favorite indulgences, and deprived them of most of their former comforts. Thus we read, that after their departure from Elim, "the whole congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron, and said unto them: Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we ate bread to the full! But you have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger!" (Exodus 16:2-3.) And again at Rephidim, "the people thirsted for water — and the people murmured against Moses and said, Why have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us, and our children, and our cattle, with thirst? And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people, they be almost ready to stone me?" (Exodus 17:3.) And long afterwards, at Taberah, "the children of Israel wept again and said, Who shall give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt freely: the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic. But now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all, besides this manna, before our eyes." (Numbers 11:4-6.) Their privations, then, were felt to be grievous; but still it is declared, that this was the right way for them.

3. The way by which God led the children of Israel in the wilderness brought them frequently into inextricable labyrinths; into situations of imminent peril, from which they could not have escaped — except by his own miraculous interference. Nor does it appear, either that they could not have reached their destination without passing through these labyrinths, or that they fell into them by mistake or mischance — on the contrary, they were led into them by the express direction of God! Thus, immediately after they had left Egypt, "Then the LORD gave these instructions to Moses: Order the Israelites to turn back and camp by Pi-hahiroth between Migdol and the sea. Camp there along the shore, across from Baal-zephon." (Exodus 14:1.) This was a situation entirely out of their direct road, and of such a nature, that their escape from it was absolutely impossible, by human means, if they were pursued by the Egyptians — for if assailed in the rear, they were hemmed in on either side by the land, and before them was the sea. And yet they were brought hither by the special direction of God himself, and that too, when the peril of such a situation was so obvious, that it was predicted that "Pharaoh would say of the children of Israel, they are entangled in the land; the wilderness has shut them in!" (Exodus 14:3.) Nor was this a solitary instance — many such situations were chosen for them, in which escape, by human means, was impracticable, insomuch, that the difficulties in which the children of Israel were involved by means of the route which was chosen for them, and the labyrinths into which they were brought, being such, as the most ordinary prudence might have avoided, and such also as no leader would have

encountered, unless he acted under the impression that he was divinely directed on the one hand, and would be miraculously delivered on the other hand. The way, then, was full of difficulties — yet it is said to have been the right way.

4. The way by which God led the children of Israel in the wilderness, exposed them to numerous conflicts with their enemies, conflicts for which so mixed a company were but ill prepared, and which often excited the murmurs of fear and discontent. Thus they were called to contend with Pharaoh: "The children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them, and they were sore afraid; and they said unto Moses: Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt thus with us? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness!" (Exodus 14:10-12.)

Afterwards, they had to contend with Amalek; and when they sent some of their number to search the land of Canaan, their report was, "'We can't go up against them! They are stronger than we are!' So they spread this bad report about the land among the Israelites: 'The land we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there. All the people we saw were huge. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that's what they thought, too!'" (Numbers 13:31-33.)

"Then the whole community began weeping aloud, and they cried all night. Their voices rose in a great chorus of protest against Moses and Aaron. 'If only we had died in Egypt, or even here in the wilderness!' they complained. 'Why is the LORD taking us to this country only to have us die in battle? Our wives and our little ones will be carried off as plunder! Would not it be better for us to return to Egypt?' (Numbers 14:1-3.) And when Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, and Joshua and Caleb rent their clothes, and entreated them not to rebel against the Lord, "The whole community began to talk about stoning Joshua and Caleb." (Numbers 14:10.) Yet the Lord was leading them by a right way.

5. The way by which the Lord led the children of Israel in the wilderness, was marked by frequent chastisements sent upon them directly from his own hand. He led them — but it was sometimes in a way of judgment. He was a father unto them, and they were his children; but for that very reason, he lifted the rod and smote them, when they required correction. As he did not exempt them from the assaults of their enemies, so he did not himself spoil them with over-indulgence, "He visited their iniquities with the rod, and their sins with chastisements." And these chastisements were sent in such a way as to show from whose hand they proceeded. Thus at Taberah, "when the people complained, it displeased the Lord, and the Lord heard it, and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed those who were in the uttermost parts of the camp!" (Numbers 11:1.) And again, when in answer to their demand for flesh, he sent them quail to eat; "he sent a plague along with it." (Numbers 11:33.) And soon after, their murmurings were answered by God sending among them "fiery serpents which bit them, so that many of them died." (Numbers 21:6; Deuteronomy 1:40.) And in righteous retribution for their rebellion, he declared that the people should not enter Canaan, until all the men of war of that generation, Joshua and Caleb only excepted, "had been consumed." (Deuteronomy 2:15.) From a review of these facts, you cannot fail to see that the way by which they were led, was one which, to the eye of sense, was far from being inviting or agreeable. It was one which, if they had been left to choose for

themselves, they would not have chosen, and which, when they had entered on it, was felt to be so disagreeable to flesh and blood, that we are told, in the simple language of Moses, "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way." (Numbers 16:4.) Yet by this way the Lord thought it best to lead his people; and we are told by the Psalmist that it was "the right way."

If we now inquire into the reasons of God's procedure in regard to their journey, we shall find that the very difficulties which they encountered were among the most efficient means of preparing them for the high destination which awaited them in the land of promise.

Let us, in the first place, ascertain the end which God had in view, and for which he was preparing his chosen people; for on the fitness of the means employed, to the end which was proposed to be accomplished by them, the rightness of this way depends. On this point, we must not suppose that God's sole object was to translate them from the land of Egypt into Canaan; this might have been effected by a much shorter and a much easier process — they might have passed as quickly and as safely from Egypt to Canaan, as Jacob with his family in former times had passed from Canaan into Egypt. But, while it was his intention to bring them to a city of habitation, in the land of promise — he had a far higher end in view; even to prepare them for being a peculiar people unto himself — the depositories of the true faith, and the channel of conveying the privileges and promises of the covenant to a remote posterity. For this end the family of Abraham had been selected from among all the families of the earth. And it was a high and distinguished privilege thus to be chosen of God as a nation of witnesses to his truth, as a nation of partakers in the everlasting covenant. They alone were privileged to know the one living and true God, when all the nations of the earth were sunk in superstition and idolatry. And it was God's purpose to establish his own worship in the land of Canaan, that the knowledge of himself might thereby be preserved in the world, and that a way might thus be opened up for the appearance of his blessed Son in the fullness of times. This was their high destination, and their long journey through the wilderness was mainly designed to fit and prepare them for it. Had they been translated at once, and with ease, from their bondage in Egypt, into the possession of the promised land — there is sufficient evidence, in their frequent rebellions, their unbelief, their murmurings, and their backslidings in the wilderness, to show, that as yet, they were ill-qualified for so high and holy a destination. Their questioning whether God was in the midst of them or not, even after he had divided the sea before them; their demand that Aaron should make unto them gods to go before them, even at the very foot of Mount Sinai, where God spoke to them with a voice from Heaven; their desperate reluctance to submit to his guidance, and acknowledge his providence, even when it was accompanied with miraculous interposition — these facts, so characteristic of man's fallen nature under every dispensation, show that, as yet, they were neither so fully convinced of the truth, nor so well prepared for being witnesses to it, as it was necessary they should become, if they were to be "a holy nation, a peculiar people, and a royal priesthood" to the one living and only true God. But their being kept so long in the wilderness, and their being placed, while there, under a dispensation essentially miraculous — was a fit and suitable means of impressing on their minds a due sense of the truth respecting God. Every calamity which threatened them, every critical situation in which they were placed, every enemy by whom they were assailed, was made the occasion of a new manifestation of divine power on their behalf. And every such manifestation was fitted to impress them with the fact that "the Lord he is God, and that besides him there is none else!" Their whole way in the wilderness, then, is to be regarded, in general, as a way of preparation, not so much for their mere

possession of the promised land, as for their being God's witnesses and servants there. For thus Moses describes them, "You are a holy people unto the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people unto himself, above all the people that are on the face of the earth." (Deuteronomy 7:6.) It is true, that with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, none of the existing adult generation were to enter the land of promise; but they had so multiplied in the wilderness that, after the men capable of bearing arms had been swept away — there was no sensible diminution of their numbers; and their children, less familiarized with the idolatrous notions and practices of Egypt, and brought up from their infancy in the wilderness, under a miraculous dispensation — could not fail to be deeply impressed with the power and greatness of Jehovah. And this new generation, trained in the wilderness during the space of forty years, were to enter the land of Canaan, and form a nation in covenant with the God of their fathers.

God's object being to raise up such a nation as should preserve the truth alive in the world, the fitness of his procedure is not affected by the death of the existing adult race, when their children, better instructed, remained, of whom, as Moses declared to them, all the nations would speak, saying, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people; what nation is there so great, who has God so near unto them, as the Lord our God is, in all things that we call upon him for." Accordingly, it has been remarked by several writers, that the young Israelites, who had received a wilderness education, were the most godly and exemplary of all the generations of that people; for "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel."

It is an interesting and consoling reflection, that, as in the case of his ancient people, God led them into the wilderness with a view to the discipline and godly training of their children — so, in the case of his people now, he may have an eye to the future good of the children, when he is visiting their families with distress. But while the whole of their history in the wilderness may be regarded, in general, as a course of preparation for their peculiar destination, several special ends, comprehended in this general design, are mentioned in Scripture, and may be separately noticed — as proofs that, however to the eye of sense, their way in the wilderness might be rough and uninviting, it was in reality the right way for them.

1. They were a stiff-necked people, and their way in the wilderness was adapted to their temper, and designed to humble them. It was a course of severe but beneficial discipline. This is declared to be one of God's ends in thus dealing with them: "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you, these forty years, in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, and to know what was in your heart." (Deuteronomy 8:2.) And nothing surely, could have been better suited to this end, than that journey, which was a perpetual series of backslidings on their part, and of marvelous mercies and deliverances on the part of God.

2. They were prone to unbelief, as all men naturally are, especially with respect to the sovereignty and providence of the one living and true God; and their way in the wilderness was designed to establish their faith in God's government of the world, and in his special covenant with themselves. Every stage of their journey furnished fresh evidence that the Lord God was in the midst of them. And every relapse on their part into unbelief, was followed either by some signal deliverance, or by some awakening judgment, such as was fitted to rebuke and reclaim them. Thus, when they were in great terror for the Egyptians, and murmured against Moses for exposing them to what they

regarded as inevitable destruction — God interposed, and Moses said, "Fear not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord!" "The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." (Exodus 14:14.) It is added, "The Lord saved Israel that day, out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore; and Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians — and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord and his servant Moses." (Exodus 14:30-31.)

Even Moses himself was tempted to doubt the word of the Lord, when he promised food in the wilderness; and God said unto him, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short; you shall see now whether my word shall come to pass unto you or not!" And immediately it was fulfilled, in the sight of all Israel, by the descent of quail for their food. Thus, at one time by judgments, at another, by signal mercies, the Lord was rebuking their unbelief, and establishing their faith.

3. The way by which God led them in the wilderness was fitted and designed to bring them to a due sense of their absolute dependence on God. The imminent dangers to which they were exposed, the privations to which they were subjected, the formidable enemies by whom they were assailed — these were all suited to convince them that, but for God, they must inevitably perish. And their daily supply of food from Heaven was a daily memento of their absolute dependence upon Him. So that the very trials and perils of the wilderness were the appointed means of fostering a spirit of trust in the living God, and thus of preparing them for being his witnesses and servants in the promised land.

4. Some of the most signal events in their journey were designed to be the means of magnifying the great name of their God in the sight of the heathen; and thus of impressing them with a beneficial awe, so as to prevent them from assailing or resisting the progress of his people. Thus, they were permitted to be hemmed in by the sea — that Pharaoh, being tempted to follow them, might be overthrown. Pharaoh will say, they are entangled in the land, the wilderness has shut them in; and "I will be honored upon Pharaoh and all his host, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord." The report of this great calamity spread from the Egyptians to the surrounding nations; insomuch that it went before the Israelites, and the people through whose lands they passed were afraid to encounter them, lest a similar calamity might befall themselves. Their contest with Sihon was made a means of magnifying their God, and of affrighting their enemies. "This day will I begin to put the dread of you, and the fear of you upon the nations that are under the whole Heaven; who shall hear report of you, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you." (Deuteronomy 2:25.) Thus were the most critical and trying events of their journey through the wilderness, overruled as a means of their safe admission into the land of Canaan, when by God's discipline in the wilderness, they were prepared for entering on their inheritance.

5. Some of their apparent trials in the wilderness, such as their circuitous route, and the delay that was made in putting them in possession of the land of promise — were in fact the fruits of God's merciful consideration for their weakness. And the murmurs which they occasioned proceeded from ignorance respecting his gracious design in them. Thus God's wisdom and tenderness appear in the reason which is assigned for his not leading them through the land of the Philistines, though that was near; but leading them about through the wilderness, "lest," says he, "the people repent, when they see war and they return to Egypt." (Exodus 13:17.) They were not at that time prepared to face so formidable an enemy, and, therefore, in kind consideration for their weakness,

and with a view to their ultimate good — God led them about by a less direct but more suitable way. Yet the people murmured at being led in this way, not knowing the gracious views which had caused its selection for them. The same considerate kindness appears in the reason which is assigned for their slow and gradual occupation of the land of Canaan, when they arrived at its borders, "The Lord your God will put out those nations before you little by little: you may not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon you." (Deuteronomy 7:22.)

These are a few, out of many proofs which might be selected, of the wisdom, and care, and kindness with which God led his people through the wilderness. They show, that while the way was circuitous, and rough, and dangerous — yet it was, notwithstanding, or rather on these very accounts, the right way — a way fitted to prepare them for their inheritance in Canaan. It was a way of mingled mercy and judgment, which afforded means of discipline, such as a more direct and less painful course could not have supplied. It was a way marked out by unerring wisdom, and in which they were guided by a Shepherd who never slumbered, by a friend who never forsook them. And although many times "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way," yet when Moses told his father-in-law "all that the Lord had done for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them," (Exodus 18:8,) "Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the Lord had done to Israel, and said, Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods!" And subsequently Moses could appeal to the murmuring Israelites themselves, and say, "The Lord your God has blessed you in all the works of your hand. He knows your walking through this great wilderness — these forty years the Lord your God has been with you, you have lacked nothing." (Deuteronomy 2:7.)

Dear brethren, we are now in the wilderness! This poor world is not our rest! We too have heard of a city of habitation, a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. And many of us, I trust, have been separated from the world and united to that company of pilgrims who have set their faces steadfastly to go up to the Jerusalem above.

There is a striking analogy between the Israelites in the wilderness, on their journey to Canaan — and believers in the world, on their journey to Heaven. The history of the former, has been recorded mainly for the purpose of guiding and comforting the latter. I am disposed to look on the miraculous dispensation under which the Israelites were conducted to the land of promise, as only a mere striking exhibition of that universal providence which still watches over God's people on earth; and as being singular only in so far as the agency of God, at all times really the same, was then supernaturally visible.

God is our leader, as he was theirs. No pillar of cloud, indeed, goes before us by day — no pillar of fire is visible by night; but he who led Jacob like a flock, is still the "Shepherd of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps." God rules by ordinary means, not less than by supernatural interposition; and his promise is, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And as God is our leader, so our path through life is as really ordered and directed by him, as was the way of the Israelites in the wilderness. True, we hear no audible voice from Heaven, directing our steps; but God leads us by his providence, shutting us up to a particular line of life, fixing the bounds of our habitation, determining our work, our connections, our success, by a variety of circumstances over which we feel that we have no control, and many of which are apparently trivial — but not one of them are by chance or accidental. And as God is our leader, and as our path in life is prescribed and ordered

by him, so, if we belong to the number of his people, we may rest assured that he is leading us by the right way. Our experience, indeed, may often resemble that of the Israelites in the wilderness. God may seem to lead us in a circuitous and indirect way. We may be, we shall be, subjected to tribulation. We must leave the world behind us, as the Israelites left the flesh pots of Egypt. We must encounter difficulties, and endure the assault of enemies, and sustain trials, such as will humble us and prove us, and show what is in our hearts. Our hearts, too, may be much discouraged because of the way. It may seem a tedious, a dreary, a perplexing way — and, when faith is ready to fail, it may lead us to murmur against the Lord.

All this is true; but the Lord knows the way which we take in this great wilderness; and as sure as God is our guide, so sure is it, that he is leading us by a right way.

All the difficulties,

all the trials,

all the disappointments,

all the bereavements,

all the delays,

all the chastisements

which befall us — are as needful for us, as they were for the children of Israel.

We, too, need to be proved.

We, too, need to be humbled.

We, too, have evil hearts of unbelief which must be subdued.

We, too, must be educated by instruction, and trained by discipline, and purified by suffering — that we may be fitted for our inheritance above.

There is an inheritance for us, as there was for them. Their inheritance in the land of Canaan — was but a type or shadow of our incorruptible, undefiled, unfading inheritance, reserved for us in Heaven. And seeing that God has opened up such a glorious prospect before us, oh! why should we doubt that he will lead us by a right way on our journey towards it. Or why should we quarrel with any of his appointments here — if they are all designed to fit and prepare us for such a destiny hereafter? Would we take the regulation of our life out of God's hands — and keep it in our own? Would we think it safer and better for us to be guided by our own will — rather than by His unerring wisdom and infinite love? Or, leaving our affairs in his hands — would we desire that his wisdom should yield to our caprice, and that he should rather consult our wishes than our welfare?

No, our safety is, that we are in God's hands. The Lord is our Shepherd, and we may rest assured, that however perplexing the path may be by which he conducts us — he will lead us like a flock through the wilderness; that while we are in it, goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life, and that in the end we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." There we shall be able to look back on all the way by which the Lord has led us in the wilderness; we shall then see it to have been "a right

way;" and, in admiration and gratitude, we shall acknowledge with Moses, "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling. Exodus 15:13

## 02.03B. Special Exercise of Faith in the Goodness of God's Procedure.

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### 3. Special Exercise of Faith in the Goodness of God's Procedure.

"Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD." Psalms 107:43 In these words the Psalmist concludes and sums up a review of God's ways in providence. The general doctrine which he inculcates, is, that a considerate observance of God's dispensations will impress every religious mind with a practical and experimental sense of his loving-kindness. In the preceding verses of the Psalm he had referred to five distinct cases, which may be regarded as so many illustrative specimens of God's dealings with his people — and in one or other of which every believer may find something that is analogous to his own experience, and that renders the instruction here conveyed applicable and appropriate to his own case. The inference from all the cases described, is, the general doctrine which is inculcated in the text, namely, that a wise and considerate habit of observing and reflecting on God's ways in providence, will impress the mind with a sense of his loving-kindness; and that, too, notwithstanding the many trials and afflictions which occur in the course of every man's life. For it is very remarkable, that the providences to which the Psalmist refers are many of them afflictive — he does not seek to disguise or palliate the severity of those trials to which God is pleased to subject us in this world. On the contrary, he brings them all into view, and exposes them in their real magnitude — yet he affirms, notwithstanding, that "whoever is wise and will observe these things — even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

1. When the Psalmist, after reviewing the various dispensations of providence, affirms, that "whoever is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord," he plainly proceeds on the supposition, that the events of human life in general, and the facts of every man's own experience in particular — are of such a nature that no one can seriously consider them, without acknowledging that there is a providence at work in the world, and that this providence is a gracious and a merciful One. That there is a divine providence, directing, controlling, and overruling all the events which take place on earth, whether these be of a public or more private nature — is a truth which, however much it may be doubted by the careless, and however boldly it may be denied by the profane — will nevertheless commend itself to the conviction of every considerate mind, which habitually and dispassionately contemplates the events of human life, in connection with the causes out of which they spring, and the results in which they terminate, or which they have a tendency to promote. To a careless observer, the course of events may appear to be determined by no fixed principles, and to be regulated by no steady laws — all may seem to be a strange medley of uncertainty, vacillation, and change. But on more attentive observation, the course of events will be found to afford as strong evidence of a constant providence — as the structure of nature affords of a wise and intelligent Creator. It will hardly be denied that a concurrence of events to one great end, especially if these events are numerous and complicated, while, at the same time, they seem to be mutually independent of one

another, and to have no other connection, except what arises from the supposition of a supreme will, overruling them all for the accomplishment of its own designs — may afford as striking a proof of God's interposition as is furnished by the construction of a piece of mechanism, or by the arrangement of material elements in any organized body. When we examine the structure of a plant, or of an animal, or when we consider the formation of any one organ, such as the human eye — we see at once that its parts are so adjusted to one another as to answer an important end. And hence we infer, from the traces of design and wisdom which are exhibited in its structure, that it could only be the product of a designing cause — or, in other words, the result of God's creative wisdom and power.

Now, what we affirm, is, that a series of events may be so arranged, as to afford precisely the same evidence of an overruling providence; events, which naturally have no apparent connection with one another — but which, nevertheless, may be strung together so as to have a common bearing on some one result, and so as to demonstrate, by their concurrence to that one end, just as an organized body demonstrates by the fit combination of its parts — the interposition of Divine wisdom and Almighty power. The argument, in both cases, proceeds on precisely the same principles; but in the one case, these principles are applied to the combinations of matter — in the other, to the combinations of events. In either instance, there is an end, and a concurrence of means towards that end, which affords ample evidence of design; and the advantage of considering the subject in this light, consists in the evidence which it affords, that the doctrine of a constant and presiding providence rests precisely on the same ground, and should be received with the same unwavering certainty, as the doctrine of God's being itself, in so far as that doctrine is embraced on the strength of those proofs which nature furnishes of the design and wisdom of the Creator of the world.

It is true, that there are many events, of so trivial and insignificant a nature, that we would not think of founding upon them, in any argument for Divine Providence. But it is equally true, that there are many material objects in nature, which, were they considered by themselves, might not afford a sufficient, or at least, a striking evidence of divine creation. When the Theist wishes to establish the latter doctrine, he selects, not an isolated stone, nor a solitary piece of clay — but some organized body, as a specimen of God's work. And in like manner, in establishing the doctrine of a providence, we are at liberty to consider events in their combination and succession, and to select such combinations as most signally display the tokens of God's design.

These are prerogative instances, in both cases; not that God's creation or God's providence is less real in the plainer forms of matter or the more trivial events of life — but that they are less strikingly exemplified; and hence, the origin of those views which have often been presented to the world, and as often excepted against, respecting particular and special providences, which if they be meant to convey the idea of anything miraculous, are unquestionably liable to just exception. But if they are honestly meant merely as striking examples of a providence which is at once universal and minute, are no more to be objected to, than is the common practice of selecting a striking specimen of design in illustrating the proof of a creation, or making a striking experiment, in illustrating any of the laws of nature. And for this reason, the Psalmist selects in the present case, several illustrative specimens, and founds on these the doctrine of God's overruling providence.

All the subjects of human observation admit of being arranged under two heads: nature may be considered either as contemporaneous or successive. The design exhibited in contemporaneous nature, proves the existence of God. The design exhibited in successive nature proves the providence of God. The general doctrine of a providence may be established on these and similar grounds; nor can I conceive it possible to hold, that an act of divine power was necessary for the creation of the world, while it is denied that the continued exercise of divine power is needful for its maintenance and support — or to believe that we could not have acquired our existence but from God, while we arrogantly imagine that we may exist without, or independently, of His will. But I apprehend that in order to realize and appreciate God's providence, we must have recourse to the means suggested by the Psalmist, and instead of looking only to abstract reasonings, apply ourselves to a close and considerate observance of all the methods of God's dealings with ourselves. We must review all the way by which God has been leading us, and, connecting his dispensations with the declared ends and objects of his moral government, and with our felt necessities — we shall be able to see, each in his own case, innumerable proofs both of the wisdom and care of Him in whom we live, and move, and have our being. The events of every man's life, when they are thus considered, will afford abundant evidence of a providence, and will impress that great doctrine on the heart with a power which no abstract reasonings can be expected to exercise over the generality of mankind. The man who, on reviewing the course of his life, can see no trace of God's providential hand — may as well, on considering the frame of his body, refuse to acknowledge the marks of God's creating hand. And he, on the other hand, who is most minutely attentive to the facts of his own personal experience, will be the most thoroughly penetrated with the conviction, that there is a providence that upholds all, and overrules all. But not only will an attentive consideration of the events which befall ourselves or others convince us of the doctrine of God's providence — it will also serve to show that this providence is a gracious and a merciful one, and that it has been pervaded throughout by a spirit of loving-kindness.

We read, "that God is good unto all, and that his tender mercies are over all his works;" and this is so manifest both from the constitution of nature, and the course of providence, that love or goodness is justly held to be one of the essential attributes of the divine nature. In the original constitution of the world, there is ample evidence of the loving-kindness of the Lord. We see the human frame so nicely adjusted in itself, and so admirably adapted to the elements by which it is surrounded and the circumstances in which it is placed. We see faculties bestowed which render us susceptible of happiness. We observe such a harmony between external things and their respective faculties, as betokens at once the wisdom and the kindness which presided over the creation of the world, and which still preside over the course of providence.

There are indeed many evils and much disorder in the world — but these proceeding, as Scripture tells us, from the fall, and capable, as our own experience shows, of being traced more or less directly to the influence of moral evil — cannot affect the general doctrine that God is good. For, as sinful as the world has become, and dark as is the cloud which hangs over it, "God has never left himself without a witness, in that he has done good, and gives refreshing rains, and fruitful seasons, filling the hearts of men with food and gladness," — nay, "making his sun to rise, and his rain to fall both on the righteous and on the wicked, on the just and on the unjust."

If we admit the idea of a providence at all, how can we refuse to acknowledge the loving-kindness of the Lord, seeing that, on the most general view of the state of the world, we must perceive his

hand lavishing its bounties on all lands — year after year, producing grain for cattle, and meat for the service of man; diffusing plenty, at least producing a sufficiency, for the countless myriads of our race, "covering the Heaven with clouds, preparing rain for the earth, making grass to grow upon the mountains; giving to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." "Sending the springs into the valleys which run among the hills, giving drink to every beast of the field; watering the hills from his chambers, so that the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his work, and dropping rain on the pastures of the wilderness, so that the little hills rejoice on every side!" Who can contemplate the order and harmony which reign unbroken, amidst the vast masses and prodigious movements of the skies — the restraints which are imposed on the most boisterous elements — the electric fire — the stormy wind — the raging sea — the regular return and sure gradations of the seasons, and the absolute dependence of our race on all these vast causes, so far removed from under our control, without acknowledging that the Lord is good, and that every day bears witness to his providential care? But more particularly, each individual may find in his own case some peculiar token of God's kindness to him. It is in the details of each man's personal history that we find the most touching manifestations of God's providential care. And none of us can, I think, refuse to acknowledge that we have been the objects of a watchfulness which has never slumbered, and of a benevolence which has never been weary in doing us good. Were we to attempt an enumeration of all the blessings which we have received at God's hand — of all the deliverances which he has wrought out for us — of all the snares from which he has preserved us — and of all the manifestations of his long-suffering patience, and tender mercy, of which we ourselves have been the objects — were we to begin with the years of infancy and helplessness, and to trace our progress through the slippery paths of youth, until we reached our present state — we would soon find how impossible it is to reckon up the sum of our innumerable obligations to "the loving-kindness of the Lord." For not only has he spared us in life, and upheld us from day to day, by his almighty power; not only has he given us our daily bread, and made our cup to run over, and that, too, notwithstanding all the ingratitude which we have displayed, and the manifold provocations which we have offered; but, in peculiar seasons, in seasons of difficulty and trial — he has often delivered . . .

our eyes from tears,

and our feet from falling,

and our souls from death! And as often as we have cried to the Lord in our trouble, He has delivered us from our distresses, or supported and comforted us under them. So that each of His people, on a review of God's dealings with him, will be forced to exclaim:

"The Lord has been my shepherd!"

"I have not lacked any good thing!"

"Hitherto has the Lord helped me!"

"The Lord has done all things well!"

"Surely goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life!"

"His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness!"

I am well aware that, in the course of every man's life, much will be experienced, which to an irreligious mind may furnish food for discontent, and which, even to God's people, may occasion many a severe trial of their patience and faith. Evil is so strangely mixed with good, and affliction so interwoven with mercies in this chequered scene — that the course of providence, if it affords, in some respects, proof of the loving-kindness of the Lord — may be regarded in other respects, as affording an equal proof of his severity. And, as the solution of this apparent contradiction is of great practical importance, and can be found only in the principles of our holy religion, I proceed to observe: That the considerate observance of God's ways in providence, will not only convince us of the loving-kindness of the Lord — but will serve also to disclose to us the true nature of this divine perfection, and to deliver us from many false views which men are apt to entertain respecting it. On no subject is there more misapprehension than on this. The goodness of God is often spoken of as if it were a mere instinctive desire for the diffusion of universal happiness, without reference to the characters or habits of his creatures — as if he were concerned to make them comfortable, whatever might be their views and feelings in reference to himself, and in whatever way might be most congenial to their disposition and taste; as if, in fact, God had regard to no other end than the mere physical enjoyment of man!

Now, no view can be more at variance with the doctrine of Scripture than this! I see not how, on such a supposition, we can reconcile the actual facts of human experience, with the belief that an Almighty Being, acting on this principle, exercises a providence over the world. For, unquestionably, there is much suffering in the world. And if there is no moral reason and no final cause for such suffering — it would seem to derogate either from the goodness which we ascribe to God, or from his power to carry his benevolent intentions into effect. The man who holds it as a first principle, that the only or the chief end of God is the diffusion of mere physical enjoyment, irrespective of all moral considerations, and who takes a survey of the actual state of the world, or a review of his own experience — must be staggered by many difficulties, which a more correct and Christian view of God's end in providence can alone obviate and remove. The Bible does not speak of God's goodness in this way. It never once ascribes to him the desire of making his creatures happy without reference to their moral condition. It declares his loving-kindness, indeed, and tells us that he has no pleasure in our sufferings. But it affirms, notwithstanding, that these sufferings are inflicted by his hand, and will continue to be inflicted, so long as the more important ends of his government are unfulfilled. In a word, it is a moral happiness — a happiness springing from, and in a great measure consisting in, the graces and virtues of a holy character, that the Bible declares God's willingness to bestow. And it is a moral goodness that is ascribed to him, not an indiscriminate charity, that would secure a happiness for every man conformable to his own inclinations, however wicked and perverted these inclinations may be; but a holy love, acting wisely, with a view to moral ends, and seeking to bless its objects in a way suitable to their dignity as moral and responsible beings. To this end, suffering itself is made subservient; and the deprivation of mere rational and animal enjoyment becomes, in his hands, the means of a far purer and loftier happiness — the happiness of a renewed mind, of a good conscience, and of well-ordered affections.

Hence, in the Christian scheme, there is no contradiction in that seeming paradox, "Blessed are those who mourn," for, by the sadness of their countenance, God seeks to make the heart better, and then they are blessed indeed. And hence, also, affliction itself is a pledge and token of God's

love to his redeemed people. It is one of their purchased and chartered privileges, that they shall not lack chastisement when their real welfare requires it.

These views are strikingly illustrated by the cases to which the Psalmist refers in the preceding context. You will observe, that in each of them he speaks of trials and sufferings, and these are not represented as of casual and accidental occurrence — but as appointed and inflicted by God himself, nor as of a slight and trivial nature — but as being often heavy and severe. Insomuch, that he speaks of "their souls fainting within them;" "of their sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron;" of "their hearts being brought down with labor;" of "their falling, when there was none to help;" of "their soul abhorring all manner of food," and of their being forced to cry "to the Lord in their trouble."

Yet, notwithstanding all this, or rather for this, among other reasons, the Psalmist declares, that "whoever shall observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord" — they shall understand it — they shall not only be convinced that the Lord is good — but they shall know the true nature of that goodness — as a principle which has regard, not to the mere exemption of his people from suffering, far less to the indiscriminate bestowal of universal happiness — but to the moral welfare — the spiritual health and happiness of men, as rational and immortal beings. This is not only a very different — but a far higher kind of benevolence than that which is too frequently ascribed to God. The difference may be made manifest by a very familiar illustration. Suppose two parents, the one acting towards his family on the principle of indiscriminate indulgence — giving them all the means of enjoyment, and leaving each to follow the bent of his own desires, without any moral restraint or control. And the other, equally desirous of his children's happiness — but remembering that each of them has within him a rational mind, a conscience, a set of moral affections, on the due discipline and right regulation of which their happiness depends, much more than on the abundance of temporal accommodations — adapts his treatment to the nature of the subject, and by wise instruction and faithful discipline, imposes restraints on self-indulgence, and makes their happiness depend on the culture and improvement of the moral powers.

Which, I ask, is the more benevolent? Not, surely, the man who leaves his children to sink unwarned, unchecked, unrestrained, into wicked indulgence, and all the miseries of which such indulgence is the cause! But the man who, by beneficial discipline, secures the ultimate happiness of his child, although it may be at the expense of temporary pain and restraint, by the culture of his moral principles, and the establishment of his moral habits.

It is on this principle of enlarged and comprehensive benevolence, that God, the Father of his people, acts. The very restraints which he imposes on them — the very chastisements with which he visits them, when these are viewed in connection with his design and end in them all — are pledges and tokens of that loving-kindness, which in him is not an isolated principle — but an attribute which, however supreme and infinite, is coordinate and co-active with perfect holiness, justice, and truth. The duty of considering the course of God's providence will need little enforcement other than what may be deduced from the simple fact, that it is a means of understanding the loving-kindness of the Lord. For, what lesson should we be more anxious to learn, or what sweeter comfort can our minds receive, or what truth more grand and interesting — than the assurance of God's love? But the propriety of looking back on all the ways by which God

has been leading us, may be evinced by the consideration that the events of each man's life, like the more important events of history, can seldom be impartially considered, or even fully understood, at the time of their occurrence. They occasion such an agitation of mind, and call into play so many feelings and passions, that we are too apt to take a partial view of them, especially while as yet the ends for which these dispensations were sent are unknown, or at least have not been realized in our experience. It is after the stunning shock has passed away — after the storm of passion has subsided, and after we have begun to taste the fruits of such painful dispensations, that we are able on a calm, though it may be a pensive review of them — to see all the parts of this chequered drama in combination, and to mark the wisdom and kindness which adjusted them all in relation to some great and important end.

Take one example as an illustration: the head of a young and engaging family, actively engaged in honorable business for their support, may be stunned by the sudden failure of all his schemes, and may not be able at the time to discover any reason arising out of his past conduct, why he should be involved in one of the severest of all calamities, a hopeless bankruptcy. But perhaps these very children, whom he loves so fondly, are just at an age when, if he were to enjoy uninterrupted prosperity, they might be led away by the seducing gaieties and vanities of the world. And for their sakes, God, who knows what is best, sends this heavy stroke, that, being subjected in early life to privation, they may be endued with thoughtfulness, nerved with an independent and industrious spirit, and thus fitted hereafter for usefulness.

All this may be unperceived at the time — but perhaps in the course of years, when that fond parent finds his children growing up with a chastened spirit, and entering life with hardy resolution, fitted by this very discipline for industry, economy, and prudence, and ultimately advanced, it may be, to stations for which an easier path might have unfitted them — he will have reason, in the gladness of his heart, to say, "It was good for them that I was afflicted." So we ought to judge nothing before the time — but to look to the end of God's dispensations, for, says the apostle, "You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy." (James 5:11.) The complete, the comprehensive review of God's dispensations will be best taken from Heaven — when, on looking back from those celestial heights, on the whole course and progress and consummation of our lives, we shall see many proofs of God's kindness and wisdom in those very events which may seem to us at present, by reason of our darkness, to be mysterious or adverse. But even now, and here, we should engage in this exercise. And in attending to this duty, it is needful for you to remember the spirit in which it befits you to consider the events of life. You should consider them in a religious spirit, acknowledging God's hand in them all, whether they may have been prosperous or adverse, and with a reference to those great ends which the Bible declares God to have in view, especially with a reference to your progressive sanctification, and your preparation for an eternal state. The irreligious and careless may make light of the events of human life, for they think little of that eternity which lies before them, and with a view to which these events are ordered by unerring wisdom. But it is not thus that an immortal being should feel, who knows that life is the only season given to prepare him for eternity, and that of this short life one portion after another is fast passing away. Let him then review his past experience in a religious spirit, and he will find that if he is wise — truly wise towards God, duly instructed in religious truth, and capable of applying it to the explanation of providence, "even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

## 02.04. The Danger of Misconstruing God's Dispensations.

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### 4. The Danger of Misconstruing God's Dispensations.

"And Jacob their father said to them: You have bereaved me! Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me!" Genesis 42:36 The severest trials and the strongest temptations of God's people arise, in many cases, from the strength of their most innocent affections, and of their holiest principles.

We shall entertain a very partial and erroneous idea of temptation, if we suppose that it depends only on the presence, or derives its greatest strength from the power, of corrupt passion. For although it is true, that in one sense, "no man is tempted of God, and that every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed" — it is equally true that, in another sense, God does tempt or try his people, and that the strength of such temptations depends on the power of their holiest principles. Thus our blessed Lord himself was tempted.

Thus also, was Abraham tempted, when God commanded him to offer up his son Isaac on the altar — in this instance, the strength of the temptation arose from the innocent yearnings of a father's heart for a beloved and only son — but far more from the firm faith which Abraham exercised in God's promise, that in Isaac, the very son whom he was called to sacrifice, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. The command seemed to be against the promise of God; but the command being clear, Abraham prepared to offer up his only begotten son, leaving God to fulfill his own promise, in his own way, and accounting that, for its fulfillment, "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." (Hebrews 11:19.)

We find Jacob subjected to a similar trial; but his faith, unlike that of Abraham, seems for a time to have forsaken him, and to have left him, under the influence of a sorrowful, if not a desponding spirit. Nor is it astonishing, considering all the circumstances of the case, that, his faith in God's promise being for a time overclouded — he should have given utterance to this complaint. For, if we would estimate the strength of his present temptation, there are two circumstances in the character and situation of the Patriarch which should not be overlooked. The first is, that he seems from the whole narrative of his life, to have been a man of a mild contemplative character — a character in which the domestic affections are usually strongest, and which finds its chief earthly happiness in the welfare and comfort of a family. That, in point of fact, he did entertain a very strong natural affection for his children, unworthy as many of them were, and that no affliction, therefore, which could have fallen upon him would have affected him so deeply as the loss of one or more of them. All this is evident from his own pathetic language, "You have bereaved me! Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin." "If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." But while such was the affection with which he regarded all his children, there were two, for whom he had ever cherished a very peculiar and tender regard — the two children of his beloved Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. And these were the children who, along with Simeon, were the immediate subjects of his present complaint. Joseph had been early lost to him — but was still tenderly remembered. And Benjamin had now been sent for to go down into Egypt

by a powerful governor, of whose good intentions he had no security. And in these circumstances, all the grief which Joseph's loss had occasioned, was renewed in the affectionate heart of the old man, by the proposed departure of Benjamin. Of Joseph it is said, "Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age." And when Joseph was lost to him, it is said, "And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said: For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning." Thus his father wept for him!" Genesis 37:35 Of Benjamin, again, it is said, that when the ten brethren were sent down to Egypt to get grain, "But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him!" And on being urged by them, he gave his reason, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow!" And his feelings, in reference to both the children of Rachel, are beautifully set forth in Judah's pathetic address to Joseph: "Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, "He has surely been torn to pieces." And I have not seen him since. If you take this one from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in misery.' "So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy's life, sees that the boy isn't there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray head of our father down to the grave in sorrow!" Genesis 44:27-31 The strong natural affection, therefore, which Jacob felt for all his children, and the peculiar and tender love which he cherished for the two sons of Rachel, cannot fail to be obvious, from these and similar passages. And it must be equally plain, that these sentiments, amiable as they were, were among the strongest ingredients in that trial to which he was now subjected, and to which he so far yielded, as to utter a desponding complaint. The strength of his temptation arose out of, and bore some proportion to, the strength of his natural affection. And his trial was such, as no indifferent or hard-hearted parent could either feel or understand. So true it is, that God makes even the innocent affections of his people a means of trial, and uses them as instruments of discipline, for their spiritual good. But we said that there were two circumstances in the character and situation of the Patriarch Jacob, which concurred to render this trial peculiarly severe; and the second of these is even more striking than the one already noticed. It consisted in the fact, that the loss of his children was a severe trial to his faith, as well as a heavy affliction to his natural feelings. For these children were the children of promise — and no calamity could befall them without awakening in his mind the painful thought, either that God was no longer faithful to his covenant, or that he had in some way forfeited the privileges of which it had given him assurance. For if you will consider the terms in which those privileges were promised, you shall find that the children were included in the covenant, along with the Patriarch; and that its choicest promises had an express reference to his posterity.

Thus the blessing which Jacob received from his father Isaac, has a direct reference to his children: "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." Genesis 28:3-4 And the blessing which he had twice received directly from God himself, when with an audible voice he spoke to him out of Heaven, had the same express reference to his children: "Your seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and you shall spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south; and in you, and in

your seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed!" (Genesis 28:14; Genesis 35:11.)

You cannot fail to remember what importance is attached by an inspired apostle, to the latter part of this promise, as a short but comprehensive announcement of the Gospel covenant, wherein it was provided, that all the nations of the earth should be blessed in the seed of Jacob; not in seeds, as of many — but in his seed, as of one, that is Christ. The same promise had been given to Abraham, and to Isaac before him — and now it was expressly limited to the line of Jacob's posterity. (Romans 9:13) And, whatever obscurity may have attached to a promise couched in such general terms, there can be no doubt that it was understood by Jacob to the extent at least of affording an assurance, that from among his posterity there should, in due time, be raised up a deliverer, such as he himself describes in his dying blessing to his children: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people." Genesis 49:10

Looking, then, on his posterity as the line of the promised Messiah, "the seed in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed," he could not fail to regard his children with very peculiar feelings as the children of promise. Nor could he contemplate any calamity which might befall them, without viewing it in connection with that promise. His faith in God's covenant was tried, not less than his natural affection, by any such events. And, accordingly, we find him pleading this promise, when he was alarmed for the safety of his family, by the supposed enmity of Esau: "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For You said, 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" Genesis 32:11-12

He was delivered from his fears at that time; but now, he was placed in very different circumstances — he had already lost Joseph, whom he loved above all his brethren. Simeon had been detained as an hostage, by the governor of Egypt. And a further demand was made upon him to send down his beloved Benjamin. And when his children were thus, one after another, withdrawn from him, not only was his parental tenderness awakened — but his faith in God's promise itself seems to have been shaken; and in a moment of grief and despondency, he gave utterance to the complaint, "All these things are against me!"

Such seem to have been the circumstances in which Jacob was placed, and the feelings with which his mind was filled on this interesting occasion; and, if we consider the events as they must have appeared to the eye of sense, at the time, we cannot fail, I think, to acknowledge that they were discouraging indeed. Besides the loss of his children, he was threatened with famine; and so far as man could see, there was no prospect of a speedy deliverance, the only condition on which food was to be secured, being his parting with the child of his old age. A large demand was thus made on his faith in God's promise, and on his trust in God's providence; and for a time it would seem that his faith was not equal to that demand. He did not exemplify the same vigorous faith which enabled Abraham at once to surrender Isaac, his only son. Perhaps the reason of this might be, that even believers are less apt to regard the course of God's providence with devout resignation, than they are to obey an audible voice from Heaven. But in truth and reality, God rules in providence not less than by extraordinary means; and all the while that Jacob was doubting and desponding, God was clearing the way for the accomplishment of his own counsel, and the

fulfillment of his own promise. The very events which occasioned his complaint, were in fact the means, not only of fulfilling the counsels of the Divine mind — but also of securing for Jacob the blessings and privileges which were dearest to his heart. For consider the circumstances of the case, as these are recorded with pathetic simplicity in the sacred narrative: Joseph, although long since given up as lost, was actually alive, and in great power, in the land of Egypt. The detention of Simeon, whereby the fears of his aged father had been awakened, was, in fact, a means of securing the return of some, at least, of his brethren into that land, were it only to obtain his release. And the demand that Benjamin should be sent along with them — a demand without their compliance with which, they were assured they might not hope either for Simeon's release, or for further supplies of food — was so imperative, that Jacob, notwithstanding all his reluctance, was compelled to send him. And we find from the subsequent narrative that it was the sight of Benjamin, his own brother, that moved Joseph to tears, and led to his making himself known to his brethren. Had Simeon not been detained in Egypt, the brethren might perhaps have had no further necessity for repairing there; or, had no demand been made for the appearance of Benjamin, the brethren might have gone to Egypt and returned as before, without any knowledge of Joseph. But the famine, the detention of Simeon, and the compulsory demand for Benjamin, were among the means by which God was preparing the way for bringing the whole family together, and planting them for a season in the land of Goshen.

While, therefore, Jacob was saying "All these things are against me!" he was misconstruing the intentions of an all-gracious providence, and looking with apprehension on those very events which were the appointed means not of depriving him again of one or more of his children — but of restoring to him Joseph, his best beloved son, and of preparing for the fulfillment of that gracious promise in which God had assured him that in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed.

"All these things are against me!" was Jacob's desponding exclamation, when he looked only at the outward and visible appearance of events. But mark, how different was the testimony of faith, when the event had verified the faithfulness of God to his promise. "Be not grieved, said Joseph to his brethren, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither; for God sent me before you to preserve life. God sent me before you, to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance." And, long after, he quieted the remorseful apprehensions of his brethren, by saying, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives!" In this fine recognition of divine providence, in an event so distressing to himself, and so criminal on the part of his brethren — Joseph expressly declares, that his being sent into Egypt was the appointed means of providing for the support of Jacob's family, among many others, in a season of general famine. And there can be no doubt that the violent detention of Simeon in the land of Egypt, and the peremptory demand for Benjamin's appearance there, which were the immediate occasions of Jacob's complaint — were really the means of leading to that discovery of Joseph's being still alive, which secured for the patriarch and his family a safe and comfortable asylum in Goshen. And these events, apparently so unpromising, led not only to the happy reunion of Joseph with his family — but also, to the continued residence of their descendants for four hundred years, in the land of Egypt, where, although in subsequent times they suffered many grievous calamities, God was keeping them as in a safe asylum, until the time should come, when the iniquity of the Canaanites being full — he

should bring them out to possess the land that had been promised to their Fathers.

Into the reasons of their long residence in Egypt we cannot at present enter. Suffice it to say, that this was one of the most important dispensations of providence towards that family, and was subservient, in various ways, to the accomplishment of that gracious promise which had been given in covenant to the Patriarchs. And in this way, God was working to bring about, first, the restoration of Joseph to his family; and secondly, the fulfillment of all the promises which related to his posterity, by the very means which in an hour of anxiety and unbelief caused Jacob to exclaim, "All these things are against me!"

We see in this striking instance, how prone even a believer may be to misjudge the course of God's providence, when, instead of looking on the events of life with the eye of faith, he forms his judgment according to sensible appearances. And there can be no doubt that Jacob saw his error, when the event made manifest the purpose of God. For, having reluctantly consented to send Benjamin with his brethren, and having prayed that God Almighty would give them mercy in the sight of the Egyptian governor, adding in a disconsolate spirit, "if I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved" — on their return, he learned from them, "Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt." On hearing their report, it is said, "Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not" — an expression which depicts a state of mind not uncommon, and another beautiful example of which we have in the case of our Lord's disciples, of whom it is said, that when the resurrection of their Lord was first announced to them, "they believed not for joy, and wondered." But Jacob's unbelief was soon removed; for when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them, and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the heart of Jacob their father revived, and Israel said, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive! I shall go to see him before I die." And afterwards he confessed his former error, and expressed his real satisfaction to Joseph himself, saying: "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too" — and gratefully acknowledges, "Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers." Genesis 49:26

These expressions show that Jacob now recognized the hand of a gracious providence in all that had befallen him, and that he no longer looked on these events with unbelieving discontent. And surely had he been able to foresee the result, or, not foreseeing, had he believed that all things would work together for the accomplishment of such gracious ends, (Psalms 105:17,) he could not have uttered the complaint of my text, "All these things are against me!"

Another remarkable feature in this instructive case deserves to be shortly noticed. It is not unusual for God to send one trial of faith after another; and so it was in the present instance. Jacob was called to leave the land of Canaan, which had been promised to him for an inheritance, and to go down into Egypt. Let it be remembered that God's promise had special reference to the possession of that land, which Jacob was now called to leave — that it was the land of which God had spoken to Abraham, and to Isaac, to which Isaac referred in pronouncing his blessing on Jacob, and respecting which God had himself said to him, "The land whereon you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed." (Genesis 28:4-13.) And again, "The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac to you I will give it, and to your seed after you will I give the land." (Genesis 35:12.)

Yet now, he and his family were called to leave the land of Canaan and to go down into Egypt; and this must have been to him as severe a trial of his faith as any that had hitherto befallen him. But now, we have no apparent symptom of hesitation, no expression of distrust, respecting God's faithfulness; on the contrary, a cheerful acquiescence in the call: "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive! I will go and see him before I die." When he was threatened with the loss of his children, he had said, "All these things are against me!" but now no expression of discontent escapes him when he is called to leave the land of promise. And the reason seems to have been, that the arrival of his sons from Egypt, and their report of Joseph's being yet in life, had convinced him that God was working in a way which he had formerly misconstrued; and that the very events which he had deprecated as his sorest calamities — were likely to bring about the accomplishment of his gracious purposes. Accordingly, "Israel took his journey with all that he had."

It is not to be supposed, indeed, that he could leave the land of Canaan without regret, or contemplate his prospects in Egypt without some apprehension. But he took the first step in his journey; and one step having been taken in faith — God rewarded its exercise by appearing to him at Beersheba, and saying, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." Genesis 46:3-4 So he went down in to Egypt; and never from that hour does his faith in God's promise appear to have failed. On the contrary, he expressed his gratitude that he had there been brought to see Joseph again; and his confidence that God would in due time visit his family, and call them back into the land of Canaan. In this faith he commanded that his bones should be buried in the sepulcher of his fathers, saying to Joseph, "I am dying; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers." In the same faith, Joseph, now near his end, said to his brethren, "God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" — and took an oath of them that they would carry up his bones also, out of that land. "By faith," says the apostle, "Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones." (Hebrews 11:22) In the faith of Jacob and Joseph respecting the ultimate return of their posterity to the promised land, a return which was not to be accomplished for several hundred years, we see a bright example of trust in the faithfulness of God. And in the actual occurrence of that event, through the agency of Moses, we see how surely — yet by what extraordinary means, the fulfillment follows every word which the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Whereas, in the desponding exclamation of Jacob, "All these things are against me!" — we see an example of what is, alas! but too common even among God's own people, of distrust in his faithfulness, when the outward appearance of events seems unpromising — a misjudging of his providence, and a limiting of the Holy One of Israel. While, in the outcome of these very events by which such feelings were occasioned, we see that even by the unlikeliest means, God's purposes are fulfilled — that real, and substantial, and permanent good is often brought out of apparent evil; and that as dark as some of his dispensations may be — his people will, in the end, be constrained to acknowledge, that he has done all things well, that goodness and mercy have followed them all the days of their lives.

Brethren, "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope!" Romans 15:4. Our

circumstances may frequently resemble those of the Patriarch Jacob. To us the dispensations of providence may sometimes be as dark and as perplexing as they were at that time to him. And when one unexpected calamity after another befalls us, our faith, like his, may be ready to fail, so as that in the bitterness of sorrow and disappointment, we may be apt to exclaim, "All these things are against me!" But let us learn the lesson which the subsequent experience of Jacob is fitted to teach, and we shall be forearmed against this temptation. Let us reflect on the fact, that the very events which to him appeared the most threatening and adverse — were in reality the appointed means of working out for him and his family a gracious deliverance. Let us rest assured that God is still faithful to his promise — that however unpromising the aspect of providence may sometimes be, God is working unseen for the accomplishment of his own purpose — and that as Jacob had, so we too shall have reason to acknowledge in the end, that "he has done all things well."

It is true that we cannot foresee the outcome of his present dispensations, nor calculate either on the time or on the method of our deliverance from what may be painful in them. And it is equally true, that under our tribulations, great and manifold as they frequently are — we cannot fail to be deeply affected by suffering; were we insensible to their pressure, or were we prescient of their termination — they might not serve their chief purpose, that of cherishing a spirit of absolute submission to God's will, and implicit faith in his promise. But we have the general assurance, that "all things shall work together for good to those who love God!" And we have, among others, the case of Jacob, as an illustration of the way in which God fulfills his gracious purposes by means the least likely to human prudence, and the most trying to flesh and blood. And have we not also sufficient evidence in our own past experience, of the same great and precious truth — can we not remember some past trials under which we were ready to say, "All these things are against me!" — and yet, were we not brought through them, and enabled in some measure to look back on them with acquiescence and even with gratitude, as needful and beneficial means of moral discipline and improvement? Have we not reason to be grateful, if they were the means of bringing us nearer to God; and should not our own experience, therefore, as well as the history of Jacob, convince us, that we should contemplate every new aspect of providence with a lively faith in God — that we should patiently wait for the development of his purposes, in the assurance that nothing really evil shall be permitted to befall us? And while we contemplate with wonder the mysterious or the solemn ways of providence, remember that we should judge nothing before the time. A rash and premature judgment of God's ways in providence, as it is presumptuous, so it is sure to be erroneous, and the occasion of much misery. God's Providence is like a vast machine, in which there are many wheels, some of which seem to be moving in one direction, others in the opposite direction. And if we fasten our eye upon one wheel only, we cannot see how the end will be gained; it may seem to move contrary to the design. But it is by a combination that it works; the whole must be viewed together, if we would see the wisdom of the contrivance — or we must wait for the accomplishment of the work, if we would judge of the fitness of the means. Even so, providence has many wheels — but all are working together for good to those who love God.

God moves in a mysterious way

His wonders to perform;

He plants his footsteps in the sea,

And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up his bright designs,  
And works his sovereign will.  
You fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds you so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.  
Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.  
Blind unbelief is sure to err,  
And scan his works in vain,  
God is his own interpreter,  
And he will make it plain.  
Cowper.

## 02.05. REPENTANCE.

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### 5. REPENTANCE.

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." Revelation 3:19 The Redeemer himself speaks to us in these affecting words. He informs us, that as the administrator of their affairs, he is often pleased to rebuke and chasten his people, and thus teaches them to ascribe all their afflictions to his hand. He represents these afflictions as rebukes and chastisements, which presuppose guilt or declension on their part, and which imply vigilant inspection, and even some measure of holy displeasure on his. While, at the same time, he declares that they proceed from love, such love as seeks to secure their ultimate and eternal welfare, though it should be by means of present discipline of a very painful kind. And he represents these two considerations as reasons why they should be zealous and repent.

Hence, the general lesson which we derive from these words, and which we propose to illustrate and apply, is, that affliction, as it is here described, includes in it the two grand motives to evangelical repentance, and is both designed and fitted to produce a broken and a contrite spirit.

Repentance is used, in Scripture, sometimes in a wider sense, and sometimes in a more restricted sense. In its largest acceptance, it signifies a change of mind and heart — a thorough, radical, and permanent renovation of our moral nature. And in this sense, it is synonymous with that change which is called regeneration, and described as "a new birth." In this way it seems to be used by our Lord, when he said, "Repent and believe the Gospel;" and by the apostles, when they said, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." In these and similar passages, the whole change which takes place on the mind and heart of a sinner when he is renewed or born again, seems to be denoted by repentance. But it is also used in a more limited sense, to denote the views which he then begins to entertain respecting one special subject, namely, the demerit of sin in general, and the exceeding sinfulness of his own sins in particular.

1. The two principal motives to evangelical repentance which the Bible presses on our attention are these:

the evil and odious nature of sin, and

the love and mercy of God towards the sinner.

There can be no true repentance without a correct scriptural apprehension of the evil of sin. It presupposes a work of conviction, such as in some respects may be common, indeed, to many, who are not converted — but which must be experienced by every sinner before he can be brought to the Savior. Many a convinced sinner may fall short of conversion; but every converted sinner must have passed through the stage of conviction. The experience of all is not, indeed, the same — it may differ in the circumstantial of time, of degree, of duration. But in substance it is the same, inasmuch as we cannot even conceive of a sinner coming in good earnest to the Savior, until he has been brought under convictions of guilt. A man may hear of a celebrated physician,

and may believe that he has effected many wonderful cures — but until he feels that he is himself diseased and in danger — he will not apply to him for his own relief. Just so, the name of the Savior may be on the lips of many a careless sinner, and his grace and power may be admitted. But until he knows his own guilt and danger, however he may speak about Christ, he will not come to Christ in good earnest for pardon and salvation. The first beneficial effect of the preaching of the Gospel, and the first hopeful symptom on the part of any hearer, is a deep conviction of sin — a conviction which may at first consist chiefly in a sense of personal guilt, in a vivid apprehension of danger, and a fear of impending judgment. The sinner begins to see that God is not to be trifled with; that he is a just lawgiver and righteous judge, whose wrath is dreadful, and his power omnipotent, and that his own personal guilt is a sad reality which he cannot deny, and for which no excuse or apology can be devised.

He may have thought of God before, and of guilt too, and of the eternity that lay before him; but he never realized them — he never laid them to heart as he does now. Then he was careless — now he is deeply concerned, and the language of his heart is, "what must I do to be saved?" But while some such convictions are presupposed in the case of every penitent, we must carefully guard against the delusion of confounding them with that contrition which the Gospel describes.

There may be much conviction where there is no contrition. There may be many fears, and much remorse, where there is no gospel repentance. Many a man may tremble at Hell, who has no hatred of sin. He may be sorry for his sins on no other account than this, that they threaten to involve him in suffering. There is a false and a true repentance. "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret — but worldly sorrow brings death." (2 Corinthians 7:10.)

There are many points of difference between the two; but the grand specific difference, and that on which all the others depend, consists in this: that while true repentance presupposes conviction of sin, it implies also a sense of God's forgiving love, or "an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ." The goodness of God leads to repentance, not only by giving space and opportunity to repent — but because it is one of the motives by which we are melted and subdued into a contrite frame of mind. So long as the sinner, under conviction of guilt, thinks only of the terrors of the Lord, he may tremble — but he will not repent. His heart is hardened rather than subdued by the fearful looking for of judgment. He resembles a slave or a criminal under the frown of a powerful master or judge — rather than a child, whose heart swells at the thought of having offended a father. The devils believe and tremble — but they do not repent. An apprehension of God's love and mercy is needful to melt our stubborn hearts — and that will subdue those whom terror will only exasperate. "So I will establish my covenant with you, and you will know that I am the LORD. Then, when I make atonement for you for all you have done — you will remember and be ashamed and never again open your mouth because of your humiliation, declares the Sovereign LORD." Ezekiel 16:62-63 This beautiful principle is confirmed by the universal experience of God's people. Before they knew the grace of God in truth, they may have been under deep convictions of conscience — they may have trembled at God's wrath — but still their hearts were disposed rather to resist God than to submit to him. Their hearts were full of desperate enmity against him — until that enmity was slain by the manifestation of his love. But so soon as they clearly discerned the riches of his forgiving mercy, they relented. They said, what are we that we should be at variance with him who has loved us? Oh! how could we rebel against such a Being, or why should we continue to rebel,

when his mercy is so freely proclaimed, and we are so affectionately invited to return? The prodigal son was wretched, very wretched, when he wandered in a strange land — and it was not until he thought of his kind-hearted father, and his father's house, that he repented and said, "I will go unto my father, and say unto him, Father, I have sinned!" Nor is it difficult to account for the effect of God's mercy in subduing the heart and producing penitence. For besides the influence of kindness, to which no human mind is altogether insensible — it is clear, that so long as the sinner knows nothing of God's grace, and has no hope of forgiveness, it is his interest, and it will be his endeavor to think as little, and to make as light, of his sins as he can. He is forced by sheer terror either to devise plausible excuses for them — or to question the justice of God in punishing them. For if he saw them in all their heinousness, and had no hope of escape, he would be driven to absolute despair. But when he obtains a realizing sense of God's mercy in Christ — he is no longer under the necessity of hiding his guilt, or seeking to extenuate it. He can look on it in all its length and breadth without dismay. I truly believe that then, for the first time, does the sinner see his whole sinfulness, when, being freed from terror, he can entertain the subject with dispassionate impartiality, and sound the very lowest depths of his guilt, in the full assurance that God's love can deliver him out of it all.

We have seen that the two principal motives to evangelical repentance are, the evil nature of sin on the one hand, and the love and mercy of God to the sinner on the other hand.

Now, unquestionably, the chief source and spring of these motives is, the cross of Christ. A believing apprehension of the truths which are displayed in Christ's cross, is the proper root of evangelical repentance. For there we behold such a manifestation, both of the evil nature of sin, and of God's love to the sinner — as cannot fail, when duly apprehended, at once to convince and impress the conscience, and to melt and subdue the heart. There we see how true it is that, in the bosom of our Supreme Governor and Judge, there may exist at one and the same time, a sentiment of righteous displeasure — and yet a sentiment of divine compassion; nay, even a purpose of saving grace and mercy! Such displeasure, as implies in it no hatred; yet such love, as consists with the most inflexible adherence to righteousness and truth. For when we consider Christ, God's only begotten and well-beloved Son in whom he was well pleased, subjected on the cross to the most painful sufferings, and that, too, after he had repeatedly and with great earnestness offered up the earnest prayer, "Father! if it is possible, let this cup pass from me!" And when we farther consider, that the cup of divine wrath was nevertheless put into his hands; that the same God of whom it is written, that "he afflicts not willingly, nor grieves the children of men," "was pleased to bruise him, and to put him to grief" — and this, too, because he, who knew no sin, had been made sin for us; that "he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities" — how can we fail to see in Christ's cross a most impressive manifestation of the evil nature and desert of sin, and a most instructive commentary both on the certainty and the nature of God's displeasure on account of it. The reality of God's displeasure against sin, and his righteous and inflexible determination to punish it, cannot be questioned, without virtually incurring the guilt of either denying the reality and severity of Christ's sufferings — or imputing to God the capricious and cruel infliction of suffering, without any adequate reason, on the person of his beloved Son. The reality of God's displeasure against sin being thus established by the fact of the Redeemer's crucifixion — Oh! what a flood of light does that one fact of his crucifixion throw upon the nature of this displeasure — for here he suffered for sin, of whom it is written that he was,

notwithstanding, God's Well-beloved Son! He, with whom God was in all other respects well pleased, was made a curse for us; nay, the very Son of God, who testified, saying, "Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep" — thereby representing his death itself as acceptable to God — did nevertheless exclaim in the garden, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" — and on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!" And who does not see that God's displeasure against sin, however real and however severe, is the calm sentiment of a righteous Governor and Judge; that it implies, indeed, a supreme regard to his own glory, and an unchangeable determination to assert the majesty and to vindicate the honor of his law, even though it should be by the infliction of suffering. Yet it implies nothing like human hatred, cruelty, or revenge. And that while the cross of Christ does address a most solemn warning — a warning all the more solemn and impressive, by reason of the absence of every indication of human passion on the part of God — to those who make light of sin, or trifle with God's eternal justice — it does at the same time afford a lesson of encouragement and consolation to every penitent sinner.

For, besides the illustration which it affords of the nature of God's judicial displeasure — the cross of Christ affords the most amazing proof of the riches of his love. For that sacrifice of Christ, in which we read the most solemn proof of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the wrath with which God regards — is itself the most affecting pledge of his love to the sinner. He who, on looking to the cross, beholds God's justice there — may also, by looking to the cross, behold God's mercy too! Calvary speaks out more impressively than ever Sinai spoke, of the terrors of the Lord. But amidst the darkness which enveloped the cross, amidst the rending of the rocks, and the opening of the graves, and all the sublime mysteries of that unparalleled scene — we hear the still small voice proclaiming "glory to God on the highest, peace on earth, and good will to men." For "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him might not perish — but might have eternal life." The cross of Christ, then, is the chief source of the two great motives to evangelical repentance, because it exhibits such a manifestation of God's character, as is fitted to awaken in our minds:

first, a penetrating sense of our own sinfulness,

secondly, a lively apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. But affliction is also, and for the same reason, a secondary source of the same motives to repentance. For it is very remarkable that in the text, our blessed Lord represents the afflictions of his people as manifestations at once of his displeasure and of his love — and urges this consideration as a reason for repentance: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent."

It is unquestionably to the cross of Christ that we must look for the most impressive manifestation of the divine perfections, and especially of the sentiments with which he regards the transgression of his law. For without understanding the doctrine of the cross, we cannot enter into the mystery of the afflictions of his people. But every disciple who has been enabled clearly to apprehend the justice and the love of God, as they are displayed in the cross of Christ, and who has felt the power of these evangelical motives to repentance — will be at no loss to understand how it is that the sufferings of believers contribute to the same result, seeing that they manifest the same divine perfections, although, in some respects, and these of great importance, they differ widely from the sufferings of Christ. Not only did his sufferings differ from theirs in degree, as being unspeakably

more severe — but also in their general character and design, as being . . .  
the sole and all-sufficient atonement,  
the full legal payment of the penalty of sin,  
the complete judicial satisfaction to divine justice, and  
the only and entire vindication and fulfillment of the divine law.

Hence we are carefully to guard against the error of supposing that the sufferings of his people are, in any sense, or to any extent, expiatory of their guilt, or satisfactory to God's justice. But while this is unquestionably the doctrine of Scripture, it is equally true, on the other hand, that in the sufferings of believers we see another and a different manifestation of the same divine perfections which are displayed in the sufferings of Christ. They manifest at once God's holy displeasure against sin — and his love towards his people. And by reason of this resemblance between the two cases, the sufferings of believers are called their cross. For thus said Jesus to his disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24.) "Whoever does not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:27.)

We read, then, not of one cross — but of two: the cross of Christ, and the cross of every believer; and these differ the one from the other in some respects of great importance, while in others they agree. The cross of Christ differs from the believer's cross, not only in respect to the peculiar kind of suffering which he endured — but also, and principally, in respect to the end which it fulfilled, as an atonement for sin. It was by Christ's cross, and not by the cross of any believer, that God was reconciled, "for having made peace by the blood of his cross," it pleased the Father, "by him to reconcile all things to himself," (Colossians 1:20,) "that he might reconcile both Jews and Gentiles unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby." (Ephesians 2:16.) It was by Christ's cross that the law was magnified and fulfilled; for the "handwriting of ordinances that was against us, he took out of our way, nailing it to his cross." (Colossians 2:14.) It is Christ's cross that is the believer's chief glory, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ." (Galatians 6:14.) It is Christ's cross by which the believer is crucified: "The cross of the Lord Jesus Christ by which the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world." The cross of Christ was the chief subject of apostolic preaching, and is still the most powerful means of conversion. "The preaching of the cross is to those who perish, foolishness; but unto us who are saved, it is the power of God!" (1 Corinthians 1:18.)

There is thus a super-eminent value in the cross of Christ, as being the sole reason of our pardon and justification, and also the principal means of our progressive sanctification — the most illustrious manifestation of God's character, and the chief source and fountain of all the motives which tend to the renewal and improvement of our own. But this does not hinder the legitimate use of another cross — I mean the cross which every believer is appointed to bear. The cross of the believer differs from the cross of Christ. The believer's cross implies no atonement, offers no satisfaction to divine justice, and affords no ground of pardon or acceptance with God. The believer's cross is laid upon him — but he is not nailed to it as Christ was. There is the same difference between the believer and his Divine Master in this respect, as there was between Jesus who was nailed to the accursed tree, and Simon of Cyrene, whom they compelled to bear his

cross, (Matthew 27:32,) and who was seen drawing near to Calvary with that cross on his shoulders, on which he was not to be suspended, and the torments of which were reserved for the Son of God. But still the believer has a cross to bear; and that cross resembles, in some respects, the cross of his Lord. For not only are the sufferings of the Christian expressly called his cross, and not only is every believer required to take up his cross and follow Christ; but these sufferings are spoken of as the sufferings of Christ. "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ." (2 Corinthians 1:5) — that we may know "the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." (Php 2:10.) "Rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy." (1 Peter 4:13.)

These expressions intimate, not merely that the believer virtually suffered with Christ on the cross, and died with him there — but that the believer has sufferings of his own, which, although they are not to the slightest extent, expiatory of sin, or satisfactory to divine justice — they do, nevertheless, bear some resemblance to those of his glorified Master, and are, on account of that resemblance, described as his cross.

Now, the believer's cross resembles the cross of Christ in this important particular — that it is a secondary source of the same motives to evangelical repentance, of which the cross of Christ is the chief spring and fountain. The sufferings of every believer afford a manifestation at once of the justice and the love of God — and they ought to be improved for the twofold use of deepening our convictions of the exceeding sinfulness and demerit of sin, and of strengthening our apprehensions of God's paternal goodness.

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten."

Here, mark 1st, that the believer's cross is like the cross of Christ — a manifestation of God's love. "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." "Whoever is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord." The believer must not regard the cross which the Lord lays upon him as a mark of reprobation — but as a badge of sonship. He may feel it to be a heavy burden, and may often be ready to faint under it; but he must not question the love of God on account of it. Oh! no. That very cross is the fruit of a Father's love; it was framed for him by a Father's wisdom, and has been laid on him by a Father's hand. This is at once a soul-subduing and soul-supporting thought in times of trouble! The believer is not improving the discipline of God's providence as he ought — if he fails to regard the cross which he bears, as manifesting the same love to him which was displayed in the cross of Christ. But mark, 2nd, the believer's cross is also, like the cross of Christ, a manifestation of the evil of sin, and of God's righteous displeasure on account of it. The believer is taught to consider it as such, when it is represented in the text and elsewhere, as a rebuke and chastisement. It is not the penal satisfaction of God's justice — for that was completed and exhausted by the cross of Christ. But it is a chastisement, it is a rebuke, all the more fitted to subdue and humble, that it proceeds from the hand of a forgiving and reconciled Father.

We are too apt to fall into one extreme or other, in considering this subject. Sometimes the believer looks only on the dark side of his cross, and can see nothing in it but a terrible token of God's displeasure; and then no wonder that his heart quails, and his spirit is overwhelmed within him. At other times, he looks only to the bright side of it, and, rejoicing in the assurance that his

very sufferings are the fruit and token of a Father's love, he forgets or fails suitably to improve the solemn consideration, that the cross he wears is really a rebuke and chastisement — a proof that he needs correction, and a token of God's displeasure.

Nay, so little accustomed are too many professing Christians to entertain the comprehensive fullness of Gospel truth on this subject, that not a few may be ready to exclaim: How can we consider our afflictions as tokens of God's displeasure — when we read that they are tokens of his love? This is a mystery to them; but why should it be so, if they can at all enter into the mystery of Christ's cross? There both justice and mercy, both love and displeasure, both severity and grace — are displayed, not as conflicting or antagonist principles — but in unison and harmony, concurring in the same design, and cooperating for the same result. And so is it also in the believer's cross. That cross is a fruit of love — and yet it is also a token of God's displeasure. And surely it cannot be difficult to reconcile these two ideas, when we can so easily conceive of an affectionate Father being displeased. But were it more difficult than it is to form a correct conception of such a state of mind on the part of God, there can be no difficulty in seeing, and there ought to be no reluctance to acknowledge — that everywhere in Scripture, affliction is represented as a manifestation both of love and displeasure.

"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer." (Isaiah 54:7-8.) "For this is what the high and lofty One says — he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me — the breath of man that I have created. I was enraged by his sinful greed; I punished him, and hid my face in anger, yet he kept on in his willful ways. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him!" (Isaiah 57:15-18.) "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:1.) "If his sons forsake my law and do not follow my statutes, if they violate my decrees and fail to keep my commands, I will punish their sin with the rod, their iniquity with flogging; but I will not take my love from him, nor will I ever betray my faithfulness." (Psalms 89:30-33) And so in the text, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten, be zealous therefore and repent." Viewed in this light, the believer's cross is a call to evangelical repentance. It matters not what that cross may be; it may be heavier or lighter, it may consist of many trials or few, still it is a cross which he must bear, and which is designed at once to impress his mind with a sense of his own unworthiness, and to fill it with profound fear of God's justice, and a lively apprehension of his paternal kindness. Every believer should consider his cross in this light — and then he will know experimentally both its sanctifying virtue, and its consoling power.

## 02.06. HOLY RESOLUTIONS.

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### 6. HOLY RESOLUTIONS.

"I will go into Your house with burnt offerings; I will pay You my vows, which my lips have uttered and my mouth has spoken when I was in trouble." Psalms 66:13-14

We learn from these words that the Psalmist "vowed unto the Lord" in the time of trouble. His vows had reference partly to that mode of worship and service which was established by the dispensation under which he lived — he resolved to glorify God "by going into his house with burnt-offerings" — and partly, also, to those services of praise and thanksgiving, which have been the universal and permanent expression of religious homage under every successive dispensation: "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy — that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever!" Psalms 30:11-12

Such were the Psalmist's vows — and they embodied, as it were, those sentiments which affliction taught him to entertain, in regard both to God and himself. You are well aware that sacrifice under the old dispensation was partly typical and partly ritualistic — that in the one case, it exhibited and expressed a just sense of the evil nature of sin, and of God's displeasure on account of it — while it prefigured or typified that one sacrifice by which the Lamb of God should take away the sins of the world. And, in the other case, it was a grateful acknowledgment of the Lord's goodness — a joyful commemoration of his wonderful deliverances. A believer, under the old dispensation, was naturally led by affliction to cherish those feelings, of which sacrifice was then the proper expression. For just in proportion as affliction impressed his mind with a lively sense of his own sinfulness, or with a reverential fear of God's justice — his subdued and humbled spirit would take refuge in that rite of sacrifice which, as it expressed all that he felt of the evil of sin, so did it also point to a remission of sins, through the shedding of blood. Thus at once deepening his humiliation and confirming his hope — while the experience of God's faithfulness and love, in the time of trouble, furnished fresh materials and motives for those sacrifices of thanksgiving, and those songs of praise, which were the appropriate expressions of his gratitude and joy. Shall it be said, then, that, under the new and more perfect dispensation of the Gospel, the afflictions of God's people can have no corresponding effect, and their experience under it no suitable expression? Are not believers, in modern times, taught the same great lessons in the school of trial which prompted the vows that were uttered by David? Are they not taught the evil of sin, and the justice of God, and the necessity of salvation? Have they not also a rich experience of his paternal love, and many reasons both for humility and gratitude? And shall we suppose that there is no proper expression for their inward feelings — no duty resulting from their discipline — no obligation imposed by their experience both of mercy and of judgment?

Far from it! Sacrifices such as David offered have ceased in the Christian Church — just because the great Atoning sacrifice has been offered for sin. But if we have been taught, as David was, the spiritual lessons which affliction unfolds — we shall have recourse, with greater earnestness than

ever, to that one Sacrifice which has finished transgression, and made an end of sin — and to the sacrament by which that sacrifice is now commemorated, as formerly it was prefigured by sacrifice — and we shall feel it to be our delightful privilege to say, in the very words of David, "What shall I render to the Lord for all his kindness? I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord — I will pay my vows now unto the Lord, in the presence of all his people!"

We cannot conceive, indeed, of the end of affliction being fulfilled, without producing a purpose or resolution of amendment, such as, whether it assumes the formal shape of avow or not — has in it all the moral force and obligation of a solemn engagement to the Lord. Whether we consider the day of trouble as designed for our instruction, for our reproof, and for our probation, or as a means of fitting us for farther trials — for future temptations — for more extensive usefulness — for the hour of death, or for eternal glory — in each of these respects, it affords a suitable occasion, and addresses to us a loud call for new engagements and resolutions in the way of duty. We cannot have experienced the sanctified use of affliction, unless we have been brought to resolve, and to resolve in right earnest, that, "whatever others do — as for us, we will serve the Lord." A solemn resolution or engagement to that effect is the proper fruit of those convictions, and that experience which we have had in the time of trouble. The natural connection between affliction and some such solemn engagements, may be illustrated by a few practical examples. Is affliction designed for our reproof? Is it fitted to humble us, and to prove us, and to show us what is in our hearts? Then how does it accomplish this end? Is it not by leading every believer to review the course of his life — to inquire into the state of his heart — and to mark what in either may have been offensive to God? If, in the course of this inquiry, the believer discerns, as he will have no difficulty in doing, some sins which do most easily beset him, some temptations to which he is most prone to yield, some graces of the Christian character in which he is most defective — he will doubtless, in the first instance, confess his sin before the Lord. But must not his convictions be slight indeed, and must not his painful discipline be equally unproductive — if they terminate in mere confession, and lead to no practical change?

If, in the time of sickness, the remembrance of some one sin has been peculiarly burdensome to his conscience — is it possible that he can have confessed that sin to the Lord without at least forming the purpose of forsaking it? He who confesses and forsakes his sin shall find mercy. But mere confession unaccompanied with a resolution to amend, is unavailing, because it springs rather from remorse of conscience — than from that evangelical repentance which implies not only a sincere grief, but a holy hatred for sin, and leads the penitent to turn from it unto God with the full purpose of, and endeavor after new obedience. And hence, in this psalm, David, who was deeply sensible of his own sinfulness, and yet so thoroughly alive to the freeness of divine grace that he regarded his past transgressions as no reason why he should despair of pardon and acceptance with God — declares, nevertheless, his solemn conviction of the necessity of true repentance, and a thorough change of heart, in these emphatic words: "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." (Psalm 66.18.) Not that a man must be righteous or innocent, before he can hope for God's favor; for David was deeply sinful, and looked for pardon from God's sovereign grace and mercy. Nor that he must be so thoroughly sanctified, as to become perfect, for David was still compassed about with iniquity, and felt, as did the apostle, the law in his members warring against the law of his mind. But still, his declaration is deeply significant — and it plainly implies that there can be no true repentance, and no hope therefore of God's pardon and favor — where the soul

still cleaves to its idols — where there is either a conscious determination to continue in the indulgence of sin, or no settled purpose of heart to forsake it. In the case of an unregenerate man, conscience often awakens remorse and alarm in the time of sickness, on account of his past sins — his impurity, or his dishonesty, or someone act of aggravated guilt, burdens his mind and gives him no rest. And many a sinner has in such circumstances, been brought to confess his sin unto the Lord, to lay to heart his real condition, and to form the purpose of breaking off his sins by repentance. In such a case, when the purpose is carried out into performance, we see the sanctified use of affliction. But what would we say of a drunkard, who while he mourns over his past conduct and confesses its sinfulness, is yet conscious of no resolution to forsake his degrading indulgence. Or what would we say of a dishonest man, who while he confesses his iniquity in words, is yet conscious of no intention to relinquish his gainful frauds, or to make restitution to those whom he had wronged? Would we not say, that here there is no evidence of repentance, and that the design of his affliction had not been fulfilled? And why should we conclude otherwise, in the case of God's professing people. If any of them have been convinced in the time of trouble, that they have contracted habits of worldliness, which are inconsistent with their character as candidates for Heaven; or that they have indulged evil tempers, by which they have brought reproach on the Christian name; if, in fine, there is any one sin or omission of duty which, in a time of sickness, has pressed heavily on their conscience — would we not expect that, if their affliction is really sanctified to them, they will not only be humbled on account of that sin — but induced also to resolve that they will guard against and forsake it in time to come. And so, when affliction is considered as a means of instruction, it imparts new views, and new impressions of divine truth — such as should produce new and more earnest resolutions of entire devotedness to God.

If in the time of trouble, the believer feels that the truths of God's word are peculiarly solemn and impressive — if in the prospect of death, he reads the Bible, with all-engrossing interest, and feels that the whole world is nothing to him in comparison with that precious volume — then is it too much to expect, that he should so improve his experience as to resolve, that hereafter, his chief attention will be bestowed on its contents — that he will take it as the man of his counsel, as the rule of his life, and as his song in the house of his pilgrimage?

If in the time of trouble, the believer receives new and more impressive views of the relative magnitude and the mutual relations of time and eternity; if, in one aspect, time appears as nothing when compared with eternity, being but as a drop of water compared to the ocean — or a grain of sand compared to the sea-shore — a dream, a vapor, the shadow of smoke — while in another aspect, when considered in its connection with eternity, as the only season that is given for preparation, it rises into transcendent importance by reason of its momentous outcomes — then is it too much to expect, that he should, under such impressions, resolve to live for eternity, and, for that end, redeem the time?

If, in the day of trouble, the believer feels as if the spell which this fleeting world too often imposes on him, had been broken, and sees with the clearness of intuition, that there is one only thing which should greatly concern him, and in comparison with which, all other interests are mere trifles — the salvation of his immortal soul — if he is so thoroughly penetrated by this conviction, that he would give all he had in the world to secure it; Oh! is it too much then to expect, that, under such impressions, he will resolve to regard this as the one thing that is needful, to avoid everything in

the business or pleasures of life that might endanger his safety, and to be diligent in the use of every means by which the welfare of his soul may be advanced?

If, in the time of trouble, and especially in the prospect of death, he feels, as he ought, how precious is the favor of God, how great is the redemption of Christ, how needful the grace of the Holy Spirit; if he feels that then he has no stay to rest on — but must seek his refuge in God; no ground of hope except what Christ affords, and no other comfort except what the Spirit imparts — is it too much then to expect, that he who knows that although restored for a season, he is only reprieved, and must yet return to the gates of death, and enter into the world of spirits, and stand at the judgment-seat, and spend an eternity in Heaven or in Hell — that he will, under such solemn impressions, resolve at least to guard against estrangement from God for the time to come — to live a life of faith in the Son of God, and to avoid everything by which the Holy Spirit, to whom he looks for comfort in his dying hour, might be grieved, or induced to withdraw from his soul?

Thus it is, that whether affliction is regarded as a means of reproof, or of instruction — it should in every case, and, whenever it is duly improved, will lead the believer, to devote himself more entirely and unreservedly to his Master's service.

Before leaving this part of the subject, however, it may be useful to suggest three necessary cautions: The first caution is, that these resolutions of future amendment must not be allowed to prevent or supersede the immediate duty of closing with Christ, and returning to God without delay. The primary and most urgent duty of every man, in such circumstances, is to embrace the free offer of the Gospel; to commit his soul into Christ's hands, and to have immediate recourse to God. And if this first duty be neglected or deferred, all his good resolutions are of no avail, and may even be dangerous. It is to be feared that, in the time of trouble, some are prone to substitute resolutions as to future amendment in place of an immediate conversion. They resolve that, if God would but spare them, they will lead a new life, and forsake their former sins, and attend more diligently to the means of grace. They are in danger of supposing that this is a sufficient evidence of repentance, while, if they would but examine the state of their hearts, they could not fail to be conscious that they have had no earnest fellowship with God; that they have made no practical return to him; that they have not as yet deliberately and solemnly surrendered themselves into the Savior's hands, and that they are really as much estranged in heart from God and his spiritual service as they were before.

It is possible, too, that in such circumstances, they may be influenced to a certain extent by self-righteous views; they may be looking to their future amendment as a means of qualifying them for drawing near to God, or of recommending them to his favorable regard. If such is the case with any in the time of trouble, they must bear to be reminded:

First, that they are leaving the salvation of their souls to depend on a mere contingency; they may or they may not recover; and should they leave their salvation to depend on something that they mean to do after their recovery, they incur the most fearful peril, for God may be pleased to take them away.

Secondly, that there is absolutely no reason for this postponement and delay; for the fullness of all Gospel privilege is now placed at their acceptance; the warrant of faith is as plain, and the ground of faith is as strong, and the offer of salvation as free. God is just as merciful a Judge, Christ just

as great a Savior, the Spirit just as benignant a Comforter — the throne of grace is just as accessible, and their reconciliation just as possible, now, as it ever can be, even should they be spared. And thirdly, that while their possible death, at an early period, should shut them up to the necessity of an immediate return to God, their future amendment is neither precluded nor prejudiced — but on the contrary, can only be effectually secured and promoted by this initial change. While its necessity does not arise, in any measure, from its presumed efficacy in qualifying them for, or recommending them to, God's favor — but solely from its inseparable connection with a scriptural faith; from its being a fruit and token of a change of heart, and as such, an evidence of present grace, and a preparation for future glory. Our vows and resolutions, then, are not sincere, and they may be dangerous and fatal — if they supersede or prevent the discharge of our immediate duty — to close with Christ, and to return to God with our whole hearts, and without delay. The second caution which we would suggest is, that in forming resolutions at that solemn season, we are not called upon to bind ourselves to any exercises or observances, other than such as are of universal and permanent obligation, and that we should look chiefly to the weightier matters of the law.

There are two kinds of vows: The first class consists in a recognition of what was previously and ever, must be our duty — independently of our vow, and a sincere resolution to discharge it. The second kind of vow consists in a voluntary engagement to do some particular service, or to abstain from some particular indulgence, in token of our gratitude to God, or with a view to our own good, or that of our fellow-men; but respecting which, there is no express precept or prohibition, defining our duty in the Word of God. By the former, a previous and permanent obligation is recognized. By the latter, a new and special obligation is created. In the one case, we conform to God's will — in the latter, we make a free-will offering. When a believer resolves, in the hour of trouble . . .

that whatever others do — he will serve the Lord;

that he will walk in all the commandments of the Lord blameless;

that he will make the salvation of his soul his chief concern, and God's glory his highest end;

that he will take God's Word as the rule of his life;

that he will commit his soul into Christ's hands, and continue to trust in him from first to last;

that he will pray more frequently and more earnestly;

that he will keep himself unspotted from the world;

that he will guard especially against those sins which do most easily beset him — he is not creating any new obligations, but only recognizing such as are of universal and permanent obligation. Now, this is his primary duty; and these weightier matters of the law, which are common to all Christians, ought to have the first place in his thoughts.

It is not uncommon, however, for a person who conceives himself to be in imminent danger, and whose conscience becomes alarmed — to adopt a different course. Neglecting or shrinking from the great immediate duty of surrendering his heart entirely to God, and, even when he resolves on amendment, omitting the weightier matters of the law — he seeks to pacify his conscience, and perhaps also to propitiate God — by resolving on some external service — the founding of an

hospital, or the building of a school, or the endowment of a church, or a costly donation to the poor.

Now we do not object to these and similar purposes, provided they proceed from Christian principle, and are the free expressions of gratitude to God, and charity to man. But let it never be forgotten that all this may be vowed, and not only vowed — but done by a man, whose conscience is ill at ease, while his heart is not right with God! And if this is designed or used as a substitute for thorough conversion, it is an opiate that may lull the conscience to rest, without any real change either in his spiritual condition or his eternal prospects. The third caution which we would suggest is, that in forming your resolutions, you should beware of relying on your own strength, or of trusting to your own good intentions. So prone are men to this fatal error, that Christian ministers who have had most experience in dealing with the sick, have very generally been led to attach little importance to any resolutions that may be expressed; and even to regard them, when uttered without an express reference to God's sustaining grace, with a certain degree of jealousy, as indications of a mind not yet thoroughly impressed with a sense of its own helplessness.

If, in vowing to the Lord, you acknowledge the authority of God's Word, when it calls you to repentance and amendment of life, why should you not acknowledge the authority of the same Word, when it tells you of your spiritual weakness, and urges you to seek the grace of the Holy Spirit? Yield at once to this humbling but beneficial truth! It will save you from many fruitless efforts, and prevent many painful disappointments, and set you at once on a path of cheerful obedience, hopeful activity, and progressive improvement. The doctrine of your own spiritual helplessness, when received as it ought to be, in connection with the doctrine of the Spirit's grace — so far from depressing the mind, will encourage, and animate, and strengthen it. For then only does the believer feel that he has a sure warrant of hope, and a solid pledge of his final perseverance — when, sensible of his own weakness, he can say from the heart, "my sufficiency is of God!" And when he can enter into the meaning of the apostle's statement, "When I am weak, then am I strong;" — weak in myself — but strong in God my strength.

"It is in vain," said the dejected Luther to Staupitz, when he was passing through that severe mental conflict which prepared the Reformation, "that I make a promise to God; sin is always too strong for me." "Oh! my friend," answered Staupitz, looking back on his own experience, "I have vowed to the Holy God more than a thousand times that I would lead a holy life, and never have I kept my vow! I now make no more vows, for I know well I shall not keep them. If God will not be merciful to me for Christ's sake, and grant me a happy death when I leave this world, I cannot, with all my vows and good works, stand before him. I must perish!"

2. We learn from the Psalmist's example, that it is the duty of believers often to remember and review the resolutions which they made in the day of trouble, and especially to perform them unto the Lord, when he is graciously pleased to give them an opportunity of thus testifying their sincerity. Their duty in such a case is so self-evident that no argument can be required to convince any conscience of its imperative obligation. If they were right in forming these resolutions — then surely they must be wrong in forgetting or in failing to fulfill them! And yet, alas! how often is it otherwise with the professing people of God? How many lamentable examples are there in the visible church, of men whose consciences have been alarmed by the terrors of the Lord in the day of trouble, and whose hearts have been apparently impressed with the most solemn convictions,

while they were agitated by the prospect of death; who have then prayed as in an agony, and lamented their past unprofitableness, and resolved, and even expressed their resolution to an attending minister, to live henceforth, if God should spare them, as they had never lived before; but who, when God's gracious respite came to them, and they were raised from a bed of sickness, and restored to the fresh air and the congenial sunshine, and the sweet society of friends, and the ordinary business of life — have gradually lost every sacred and solemn impression, and neglected again their Bibles and their prayers, and become as much strangers to God and religion as if they had never felt their dependence on his grace, and never acknowledged their obligations to his service!

"When God began killing them — they finally sought him. Again and again they tested God's patience and provoked the Holy One of Israel. They did not remember his power and how he rescued them from their enemies." (Psalm 78.) The aggravated guilt of such conduct may be illustrated by various considerations, which we shall briefly state, with the view of leading those who may be conscious that they are already chargeable with it to serious consideration and repentance, and also of preventing others from falling into so grievous a course of defection.

(1.) Let it be considered, then, that their unfulfilled resolutions are a proof that their afflictions, however numerous, and severe, and protracted — have not as yet been sanctified to them. Nay, that the very end and design of their trials has been frustrated, and that they come within the range of that fearful warning, "He who being often reprov'd and hardens his neck — shall suddenly be cut off, and that without remedy." And is it, can it be — a light matter to frustrate the end of affliction? That potent medicine is administered to us by an unerring Physician, for the cure of our moral diseases, for the renovation of our spiritual health. And is there no danger of its being changed, by our carelessness and folly, into deadly poison? It was the fearful aggravation of Pharaoh's guilt that his heart was hardened by God's judgments, and by the non-fulfillment of his own promises. So is it with every professing Christian who vows unto the Lord in the time of trouble — and, on his recovery, fails to perform his vow.

Affliction, thus mis-improved, cannot accomplish any of its great uses, either as a means of preparing us for future trials, or as a means of strengthening us for future temptations, or as a preparation for more extensive usefulness, for the hour of death, or for admission into glory. Its utility for these ulterior purposes, depends on its immediate effect in bringing us nearer to God, and leading us to devote ourselves, now, and unreservedly, to his service.

If we neglect for a time to fulfill the holy resolutions which we have been led to form while under the discipline of adversity, what evidence have we that our afflictions have been sanctified to us? What reason have we not, on the contrary, to believe that their end has been frustrated, and that God may say of us as he did of his ancient people, "Why should you be stricken any more? You will only revolt more and more!" (Isaiah 1:5.)

(2.) For let it be considered, that unfulfilled vows indicate, not only a forgetfulness of the obligations by which we had, in such solemn circumstances, bound ourselves — but also the loss of those deep and serious impressions of divine things, which then prompted us to resolve on a life of new obedience. These impressions, in which our vows originated, must have been effaced or sadly impaired — if our vows are forgotten or left unfulfilled on our restoration to health. Can we be supposed to have the same realizing views . . .

of God, and of our relation to him,  
of the solemnities of death and judgment and eternity,  
of the transcendent importance of salvation, and  
of the unspeakable value of the soul —

now, when we are making light of our resolutions and engagements, as we had then, when, under these solemn impressions, we were constrained to vow unto the Lord? And yet, what reason can be assigned for this change? Is God less holy or less just — less omniscient or less almighty now, than then? Are we more independent of him in health than we were in sickness? Is he not still our Preserver, and will he not before long be our Judge? Is death less inevitably certain? Is judgment less awful? Is eternity less vast? Is the salvation of our souls less important, or the blood of Christ less precious, or the grace of the Spirit less needful now, than before? And why, then, when the realities of religion remain of the same permanent and unchangeable magnitude, should our views of them become so dim and so uninfluential? Why, if it is not that our hearts have never been seriously and thoroughly surrendered to God, can we so soon and so thoughtlessly forsake him on the return of temporal health and prosperity?

(3.) Let it be considered too, that our unfulfilled vows are a proof that we are not now disposed to act in the spirit of our former prayers. In the day of trouble, we may have prayed with strong crying and tears. When the terrors of death were before us, we found that we had no refuge but in God — and we felt that if we could only come near to him, and order our cause before him, we might yet be safe. But, at that solemn season, we did not pray only for our recovery — no, we felt that the alternative was forced upon our thoughts, of recovery or death. And as the former was then doubtful, oh! did we not pray most earnestly, for pardoning mercy, for renewing and sanctifying grace, for everything that was needful to make us fit for the inheritance of the saints in light? Now, God has been graciously pleased to disappoint our fears — he has granted that recovery which was then so doubtful. And what is the result? Are we as solicitous now as we then were, for those spiritual blessings which we supplicated with so much earnestness, and without which we knew we must perish? How can we be so, if we allow our vows and engagements to stand unfulfilled? Do we not, by this negligence, evince an estrangement of the heart from God? Do we not practically abandon the pursuit of those spiritual blessings which then were so precious to us? Do we not virtually retract and recall the prayers which were then offered up?

(4.) Let it be considered, that our unfulfilled vows are monuments of the deepest ingratitude. God has been good to us, good beyond our most hopeful expectations. He has delivered our eyes from tears, our feet from falling, and our souls from death. He has turned our mourning into dancing, and "given us beauty for ashes." In the day of trouble he supported us, administering the bounties of his providence, and the sweeter consolations of his Word. And now he has relieved and restored us from our trouble — and what is the result? A grateful acknowledgment of his goodness? A more sweet and delightful communion with him? A more cheerful and unreserved devotedness of heart to his service?

Alas! so it ought to be — but it is not, if already our resolutions and engagements have been violated or forgotten; if we have re-entered the busy world only to renew our former course of life; if now we return, "like the dog to his vomit, and like the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the

mire?"

What base ingratitude is here! How can we plead that we love God, or that, however much we may rejoice in our recovery, we are really sensible of God's goodness to us in that respect, if we allow the resolutions which were formed in the day of trouble, to remain unfulfilled in the day of returning prosperity? Nay, is not this a sad but conclusive proof, that as yet we are animated by mere selfishness — seeing that we were more ready to vow to the Lord when we were afraid of his judgments, than we now are to perform our vows after all our experience of his long-suffering patience and tender mercy? What principle of generous love — what fragment of real piety can exist in the heart — which is only capable of religious impressions through its fears, and not through its affections?

(5.) Let it be considered, that unfulfilled vows are too plain a proof of insincerity and hypocrisy of heart. We do not say that every partial declension of piety, occurring after a season of distress, or that every infirmity or sin contracted after such a season — ought to be regarded in this light. Far from it. In the time of trouble, God's people are placed in circumstances which are fitted . . .

to deepen even their impressions of spiritual realities,

to invigorate their faith by imparting a nearer and more realizing view of unseen and eternal things,

and to quicken all the graces of the Christian character. And even they, on their return to the active business of life, are often constrained to mourn over their decays, and to look back to their experience in affliction as the sweetest which they have ever enjoyed. But while we are careful not "to make the heart of the righteous sad, whom the Lord has not made sad" (Ezekiel 13:22) — we must not "strengthen the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, by promising him life." And it is necessary, therefore, to say with the utmost faithfulness — that there is too much reason to suspect the insincerity and hypocrisy of such as vow unto the Lord in the time of trouble — and afterwards neglect or refuse to fulfill their vows.

It is all the more necessary to press this consideration, because such people may have been conscious, in the day of trouble, of such sharp convictions of conscience, such solemn views of death and eternity, such an agonizing commotion of spirit, and such real earnestness in regard to some at least of the subjects of their prayers — as to be in imminent danger of confounding these feelings with that genuine sincerity, and that thorough change of heart which the Gospel requires.

"Were we not sincere," may such people say, "when we felt so deeply, and prayed so earnestly, when our fears were so strong, and our resolutions so holy? We know best how we then felt, and no one will ever convince us that then, at least, we were not sincere!" But will they not bear to be affectionately reminded, that they are liable to be mistaken, and that a mistake on this point must be dangerous, and may be eternally fatal. Do they remember the solemn testimony of God, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," when they speak thus confidently of the impossibility of their being deceived? Instances of a kind precisely similar to theirs are recorded in the Holy Scriptures — instances both of individuals and of communities, who, in the hour of danger, were as much alarmed, and as much in earnest, as themselves — and yet whose partial and temporary convictions did not amount to a saving change. Witness the case which I have already quoted from the 78th Psalm. Witness again the case of Judah, "Judah has not turned unto me with her whole heart — but insincerely, says the Lord." (Jeremiah 12:10.) And again, the

case of Israel, "They have not cried unto me with their heart, when they howled upon their beds."  
(Hosea 7:14.)

There is much in the time of trouble that may excite an earnestness of desire, which is altogether different from Christian sincerity, and awaken deep convictions of conscience, which must not be mistaken for thorough conversion of heart. The sufferer may be not only sincere — but earnest and importunate for some blessings — while his heart is shut against the reception of a full salvation as it is presented in the Gospel.

He may cry to God for help;

he may earnestly pray for recovery;

he may as earnestly supplicate for the pardon of those sins which lie heavy on his conscience, and for deliverance from that future and eternal punishment which no human mind can deliberately anticipate without aversion and alarm. In all this he may be sincere and earnest, and yet everything that is purely spiritual in religion may be as distasteful and offensive to him as it ever was!

He may wish for recovery, and yet shrink from present conversion!

He may cry for God's help, when vain is the help of man — and yet have no love for God!

He may pray for pardon, and yet have no affection for the Savior!

He may fear Hell, and yet have no fitness for Heaven.

Now, in such circumstances, and with these feelings, he may vow unto the Lord, that, if he is spared, he will lead a new life, and devote himself to God's service. And if, on his recovery, he shows by his conduct that he has forgotten, or that he is now unwilling to perform his vows — what other conclusion can we entertain concerning him, than that he either never had a right and scriptural view of the nature and extent of that holy obedience which the Gospel enjoins, or that he is justly chargeable with an insincere and hypocritical profession. Is it not one of the plainest principles of morals that a man making a lawful vow even to his fellow men, is bound to fulfill it; and if it be not fulfilled, is it the less a proof of guilt, or is that guilt less flagrant and aggravated, by reason of its being made, not to man — but to God?

(6.) Let it be considered, that unfulfilled vows are a sad preparation for our dying hour. That solemn hour must sooner or later arrive. Our present recovery is a brief respite — and nothing more. We have been at the gates of death — and have been brought back for a little season. But to these gates we must infallibly return — our feet must yet stumble on the dark mountains — our tabernacle, now restored, must yet crumble into dust. The hour of death is certainly before us — and oh! what a fearful burden must our unfulfilled vows lay upon our conscience when that hour arrives!

Then we may expect that the same solemn impressions, the same deep convictions, the same conflict between hope and fear, will be experienced by us again, as were felt during the pressure of our former distress — unless, indeed, our hearts shall by that time have become hard, and our consciences seared as with a hot iron. And if the same convictions and impressions are then

reawakened in our souls — how must they be embittered by the recollection . . .  
of vows unfulfilled,  
of resolutions violated,  
of afflictions misimproved,  
of time misspent,  
of warnings despised,  
of judgment and mercy alike neglected and abused?

True, even in such a case, and at the eleventh hour, the blood of Christ, and the grace of his Spirit, are all-sufficient to save. But through what a fearful conflict may such a mind pass, before it arrives at settled peace and hope. A great change must be wrought upon it, such a change as will humble it in the very dust, and make it bewail its every sin, and especially its broken vows! And oh! surely so great a change should not be left to a dying hour, when life is so uncertain, and when every day we spend in carelessness or disobedience is treasuring up for us, if not wrath against the day of wrath — yet bitterness and trials for our bitterest and most trying hour.

These considerations may suffice to show that it is the duty of believers to remember and perform the vows which they have made unto the Lord in the day of trouble, and that they cannot forget or violate them without incurring the most aggravated guilt.

They should be performed without delay, "When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill." (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5.) And they should be performed cheerfully, not in the spirit of bondage — but from a principle of love, and in token of gratitude. It is not the mere obligation of the vow which should be regarded — for a man may vow, and afterwards regret that he had done so, and adhere to his pledge in a slavish and servile spirit — such as has nothing in common with the spirit of childlike obedience. But the believer, considering that his holy resolutions and engagements embraced duties which were incumbent on him by divine authority, independently of any act of his own, will perform them cheerfully, from a principle of dutiful submission, and in token of his gratitude and love. His experience of the Lord's faithfulness in the time of trouble, and of his undeserved mercy in delivering him by his mighty power — will afford ample materials for praise. And it is in the spirit of praise, that he will perform his vows. He will seek to glorify God, as did the Psalmist, partly by direct acts of thanksgiving, partly also by testifying to others what God had wrought, and calling them to unite with him in admiring God's faithfulness, and wisdom, and love. "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what he has done for my soul." (Psalms 66:16.) "I will extol you, O Lord, for you have lifted me up; and have not made my foes to rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried unto you, and you have healed me. O Lord, you have brought up my soul from the grave — you have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit." (Psalms 30:1-3.) "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; to the end that my glory may sing praise to you, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks unto you forever." (Psalms 30:11.)

"A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah after his illness and recovery: I said, "In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death and be robbed of the rest of my years?" I said, "I will not again see the LORD, the LORD, in the land of the living; no longer will I look on mankind, or be with those who now dwell in this world. Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me. I waited patiently till dawn, but like a lion he broke all my bones; day and night you made an end of me. I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!" But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living — they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness. The LORD will save me, and we will sing with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the temple of the LORD." (Isaiah 38:9-20.)

## 02.06B. CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

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CHRISTIAN SUBMISSION TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY "Submit yourselves therefore to God" James 4:7

Submission is, on the part of man, the proper counterpart and the due acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. His sovereignty is alike supreme and universal — and is included in the simplest idea which we can form of God as God. He is self-existent and almighty, and alike independent — therefore, of all his creatures, and able to control them. As their Creator and Preserver, he has a right of property in them. As their Governor and Judge, he has a supreme jurisdiction over them. This supreme and unlimited sovereignty is, accordingly, ascribed to God in every part of Scripture. We read "That he is God, and there is none besides him!" "The most high God, possessor of Heaven and earth." "Of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things." "For whose pleasure they are and were created." "The Lord has made all things for himself." "In his hand is the soul of every living thing." "We are the clay — and he is the potter." "The God of the spirits of all flesh." "His counsel shall stand, and who will do all his pleasure." "He works all things after the counsel of his own will." "He gives not account of any of his matters." "The Most High does according to his will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What are you doing?" Such are the strong testimonies of Scripture, and, coincident as these testimonies are with the dictates of enlightened reason — they cannot be disputed or denied without virtually abandoning the idea of God altogether. For what is God, if he is not sovereign and supreme? Can we conceive of him as subordinate — or as limited either in his power, or in his authority — or as controlled and regulated by any other consideration than the counsel of his own will? As it is impossible to conceive of a Supreme Being who is not possessed of universal sovereignty and almighty power — so these infinite perfections must be ascribed to God. And I see not why we who know God's character should be so averse, as many are, to acknowledge this in its full extent, and are so anxious to limit the Holy One of Israel.

Such sovereignty, indeed, as the Bible ascribes to him, and as is necessarily involved in any idea that we can form of a Supreme Being, could not be contemplated apart from the moral perfections of his nature — without apprehension and fear. And even when these perfections are taken into view, it is not astonishing that lost sinners, who have so much reason to fear that they are the objects of his displeasure, should still be unwilling to think of God's sovereignty in connection with his inflexible justice and his almighty power. As sinners, they must have many a misgiving of heart, when the idea of God's sovereignty is vividly presented to them, so long as they are ignorant of the way in which all his attributes may be glorified in their salvation. But surely Christian believers who know the character of God, as a being possessed of every moral perfection, and who know, furthermore, that in Christ, he can be "the just God, and yet the Savior of sinners" — should have the less reluctance to admit, in the most unqualified sense, the doctrine of his sovereignty, in proportion as they feel assured that such a sovereignty may be safely exercised by such a good and gracious Being. And if, notwithstanding, they shrink from acknowledging it, and are conscious of a disposition to evade the evidence by which it is confirmed, they have reason to fear, that they

have not as yet acquired such confidence in God's moral perfections, as would enable them to feel that they are safe in his hands.

It should be matter of serious inquiry, whether their repugnance to God's sovereignty arises out of a mere reluctance to admit that one prerogative of the divine nature — or whether it does not rather indicate a distrust of those moral perfections which, whenever they are duly apprehended, should banish all unworthy misgivings, whatever may be the extent of God's power. For why should Christian men mistrust God, or apprehend any evil from his supremacy? Is he not . . .

omniscient in knowledge,

and unerring in wisdom,

and unchangeable in justice, and goodness, and truth?

Supreme as he is, is he not fit to be "the confidence of all the ends of the earth" — and is it not still true of him, that "the judge of all the earth will do right?" Are we apprehensive of any undue exercise of power, or of any capricious use of prerogative on the part of Him, whose nature is holy, and whose name is love? Or can we really imagine that we would be in a safer or better state — were God's sovereignty less absolute or less universal than it is? Do we not know that the order of the whole universe depends on its being under the government of one God, and under the control of his sovereign will — and that were his supremacy over it supposed to be abandoned, we would have no security for our happiness, and no stay for our hopes, other than what might be furnished by the vicissitudes of chance, or the operation of a blind fate?

I have thus adverted to the sovereignty of God, as the ground and reason of the submission which is here enjoined, partly because that duty cannot be fulfilled without reference to this divine prerogative, and partly also because there is a spurious submission, which has in it nothing of the nature of the Christian grace — but which is not infrequently mistaken for it.

It may help us to distinguish or discriminate between the false and the true, between the spurious and the genuine — if we bear in mind that the submission here enjoined is submission to God — not a sullen and reluctant succumbing to blind fate — but an intelligent and cheerful resignation to the divine will. In order to this, nothing can be either more necessary or more effectual than that we should, in the first instance, have a clear apprehension of God's supremacy, and submit our understandings to the full impression of his rights as a sovereign.

Without this we may submit to circumstances which we cannot alter, or to events which we cannot control — but we cannot be said to submit to God. His hand may not be acknowledged, in the dispensations of providence, nor any homage paid to his sovereign will, as the disposer of all events. And, if this is the case, we may rather be said to submit to fate or to fortune — than to submit ourselves to him, "who works all things after the counsel of his own will." But if we have once acquired a clear apprehension of God's prerogative as a sovereign, and surrendered our understandings to the full impression of his supremacy — we shall be prepared to see how reasonable a thing it is, in all circumstances, and at all times — to submit ourselves to God; the very fact of his sovereignty being a sufficient reason for submission, whatever may be the occasion on which we are called to exercise it.

Indeed, the duty of submission is so inseparable from the fact of God's supremacy, that whenever the latter is duly considered, the former will be regarded as a most reasonable service, and everything like murmuring or complaining will assume the appearance of resisting the will, and questioning the authority of God himself.

Trusting that you will bear in mind the great principle which we have stated, and a right apprehension of which is the source and spring of all genuine submission — I proceed to illustrate some of the leading subjects and occasions, with reference to which you are called to the exercise of this duty:

1. We are called to submit ourselves to God in respect to the various allotments and dispensations of his providence. By the allotments of providence — we mean the situations in which we are individually placed. By the dispensations of providence — we mean the events which, in our several conditions, befall us. The former has reference to our general circumstances in the world — the latter has reference to peculiar and occasional occurrences. The allotments of providence are very various; as is evident when we reflect on the different lots of different men.

Some are born, as it were, to affluence and prosperity — others to poverty and hard toil.

Some are, from their very infancy, surrounded with every advantage that can tend to promote either their physical comfort, or their mental culture — others grow up without any of these advantages, and in a state of constant exposure to every evil influence.

Some are destined to pass through the world, almost unnoticed and unknown — while others occupy a prominent place in society, and are the objects of general observation.

Some are called to stations of influence and authority — while many are subjected to the control of a master's will, and bound over to servile obedience.

Such and so various are the lots of different men. And to one who sees no unseen power at work in the world, and who speculates on the present aspect of its affairs, without reference to the divine will, as if the throne of Heaven were vacant — there is much, unquestionably, in its present condition, which might awaken in his mind a feeling of regret, and even provoke a bitter sense of wrong. For he cannot fail to discover that men are not here dealt with according to the moral merit of their conduct; that among the most indigent and forlorn, there are many of the best specimens of mankind — and among the prosperous, many of the worst. And it is apt to excite a feeling of indignation when he observes that, sometimes by the very indulgence of vice one man prospers, while by the very exercise of virtue, another is impoverished.

It cannot be surprising that, on contemplating such a state of things, the man who omits all reference to God's will in the matter, should be disposed to murmur and complain — or that he should even become dissatisfied with the present order of things, especially if, in the absence of a higher cause, he should ascribe the evils which exist solely to the agency of human power, to the machinations or the policy of particular orders of men.

It cannot, I say, be astonishing, that this should be the result, when we find the Psalmist himself bewildered and perplexed for a season, by these apparent disorders: "As for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-near slipped; for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in

riches. Truly I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning!" (Psalms 73:2-3; Psalms 73:12-14.) Such were the views and feelings which the aspect of society awakened in the mind of a devout man under the old dispensation — and, as matters now stand, the same views and feelings may be awakened in our own, if we do not recognize God's hand in the disposal of our several lots, and bear in mind the great purposes of his present government. But the idea of a presiding providence, ordering all things according to the counsels of unerring wisdom, and with a view to the ultimate manifestation of his own glory, and the permanent, nay, the everlasting good of his redeemed people — that one idea harmonizes all apparent irregularities, and teaches us to regard them as parts of a vast system, whose glorious outcomes will be unfolded in eternity. And it was by recurring to this elevating consideration, that the Psalmist's mind was released from all its perplexities: "When I thought to know this," says he, "it was too painful for me, until I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end!" "Nevertheless, I am continually with you — you have held me by my right hand. You shall guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. My flesh and my heart may fail — but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

It is by such considerations that the mind may be brought to a state of quiet and even cheerful submission, in whatever situation of life we may be placed.

We are too apt to overlook God's sovereignty in this matter, and to ascribe existing evils to the operation of secondary causes. I shall not stop to inquire how far such causes do operate, under God's government; nor enter at all on the perplexing question: How many of our present disorders arise from the errors of human policy, or the defects of human law? Doubtless there is much room for improvement in both; everything of human origin, or under human administration, being marked with the imperfection which cleaves to our fallen nature. But it is sufficient for us to know, that no evil of whatever kind could have befallen us — had we not sunk universally into a state of sin; and that even were all practicable ameliorations in the condition of society effected. These would not annihilate the differences which exist between man and man, nor supersede the necessity of still cherishing a meek and submissive spirit — for it is not a fortuitous accident — but a fixed part of the present system of things, that such differences in the lots of different men should exist, as the distinction between rich and poor, master and servant, appears to be a permanent one. And so long as there is any difference, there must be room for murmuring and complaining on the part of those who think themselves aggrieved — and for submission and resignation on the part of such as acknowledge the providence and sovereignty of God. But we shall err, if we imagine that those only are called to exercise submission to God's will in this matter, who are tempted by reason of their indigence or obscurity to complain of the hardness of their lot. There is the same room, and the same reason too, for submission, although in a different way, in the case of those who are favored with worldly prosperity. It will require no argument, indeed, to persuade them that they should submit to the honor and the emoluments, which they enjoy; for, however defective they may be in contentment and thankfulness, and however ambitious to rival or surpass those that are still above them in the world — they are well enough pleased that their condition is better than that of many around them. But, they do not duly acknowledge God's sovereignty, nor submit to his will, if, besides enjoying the gifts of his providence, they are not careful to apply them to the ends for which they were bestowed, and to use them after the method of his appointment. As God's

sovereignty bestows — so God's will should regulate the application of the peculiar benefits which they enjoy. He has committed wealth, and honor, and power into the hands of some, as his stewards — not for their own personal aggrandizement, nor with a view to their selfish gratification — but in trust, for the benefit of others. And theirs will be a solemn reckoning at the last account, if they have hid their talents in a napkin, or refused to apply them to the ends which he has enjoined.

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain — but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share." (1 Timothy 6:17-18.) Such is the rule of God's Word; and obedience to that rule constitutes one important branch of that submission to God, which should have reference not merely to the allotments of his providence — but to the declared purposes and ends for which they are designed. The same submission is called for in reference to the occasional occurrences or dispensations by which the general lots of men are diversified in the present state. While it is certain that the lots of men are widely different, it is equally certain that, in every man's lot, there are seasons which call for the exercise of submission. We err if we imagine that the prosperous are uniformly happy: a crown is often lined with thorns; wealth is often embittered by sickness, by disease, by disappointment, or by family bereavement. And when such trials come, the possessors of worldly distinction are as much to be pitied as the poorest of their brethren.

Now in every dispensation we are called to "submit ourselves to God;" to recognize his hand in the event; to ascribe it, not to the caprice of fate or chance or fortune, nor to the mere operation of second causes — but to the sovereign will of him . . .

who rules over all,

who gives — and who takes away,

who lifts up — and who casts down, and

who works all things after the counsel of his own will. This intelligent and reverential submission to God's will, is widely different from the feeling which is often expressed in seasons of trial, in such words as these: "We must submit." "It cannot be helped." "It is useless to complain." A Stoic might thus speak! But a Christian should speak better. He should not only see, that the event could neither be prevented by his power, nor guarded against by his wisdom — but he should see in it . . .

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an effect of God's power,

a manifestation of God's will,

an expression of God's supremacy. And then, he would feel not only the uselessness — but the sinfulness of complaining; and not only the hard necessity of submission — but the holy duty of submission. But there are dispensations of a very peculiar kind. Some of the sorest trials of God's people arise out of the state and conduct of their relatives and friends. When one who is near and dear to them exhibits no evidence of his being the subject of divine grace; and still more, when he manifests by his conduct, the prevailing power of depravity — they cannot fail to be deeply concerned, and it is alike their duty and their privilege to make his conversion a subject of frequent and fervent prayer, and to hope even to the end. But should he be cut off without any apparent

change — oh! then there arises a tumult of grief — it may be, a tempest of passion, which faith itself may find it difficult to subdue.

How difficult in such a case to acknowledge God's sovereignty, and to acquiesce in his appointment! And how prone is the believer himself to question the truth or the rectitude of God's electing grace! He may see that God's sovereign election is clearly revealed; and that it is confirmed by the very different experience of individuals, all equally depraved, and exposed to the same temptations. Yet his mind recoils from it, when it is considered in connection with those who are his own beloved relatives and friends.

But, in the hour of calm reflection, he will pray, first that, even in this trying case, he may be enabled to "submit himself to God." Secondly, that he may be enabled to take a right and scriptural view of the subject; to remember that God's will, although sovereign, is not capricious — but takes counsel, as it were, from all his attributes and perfections that, although it is expressly declared that personal merit is not the reason of his electing love — yet he is not in any unjust sense, "a respecter of persons;" that although no reason is assigned for his procedure, such a reason as satisfies omniscient wisdom and infinite justice and love — does unquestionably exist; and that, while it is not capable of being discovered or understood now — it will one day be declared, when all his people will be able to say, "You, O Lord, are righteous, because you have judged thus;" — that his repugnance to the Scriptural doctrine implies a lack, not only of due submission to God's will — but a due confidence in his character, as if it were unsafe to ascribe sovereignty to him.

Every objection to God's sovereignty is to be met by the Apostle's answer, "Who are you, O man, that replies against God?" A disposition to quarrel with God's sovereignty, when viewed in connection with our relatives and friends, implies that we presume to have more equity and more love than God, or that we are as yet little impressed with the supreme duty of adhering to God at all hazards, according to that saying, "Whoever loves father, or mother, or sister, or brother, more than me, is not worthy of me" "Be still and know that I am God." "Will not the judge of all the earth do right." "It is the Lord, let him do as seems him good."

Eli who spoke these last words, affords an example, in this respect, to all believers. His sons were wicked, "they made themselves vile;" and "they made the Lord's people transgress;" and on account of their profligacy, God promised that he would "cut them off." Eli was himself blamed for "not restraining them;" although he had not failed at least to reprove them, and he was a large sharer in the bitterness of their punishment. Yet he received the sentence meekly; and, in the spirit of entire submission, he was enabled to say, even in that most bitter hour, "It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him." (1 Samuel 12:18.)

2. We have seen that, in the season of affliction, we are specially called to the exercise of submission in reference to the dispensations of God's providence. But we must not stop short at this point; nor is this the only application of the lesson which affliction is designed and fitted to teach. That lesson is a very general and comprehensive one, and extends to every other subject on which God's will is made known. When God takes us into his own hand, and visits us with disease, or poverty, we feel how vain a thing it is to struggle against his almighty power, and how right a thing it is to submit to his sovereign will. But these dispensations of his providence are fitted and designed to produce a spirit of entire and unreserved submission — submission, not only to his providential dealings with us — but also to every other expression of his sovereign will. And

thus we are furnished with a safe and sure test by which we may ascertain whether we are really resigned or not.

Many, yielding to the bare necessity of their condition, give themselves up as passive victims to suffering and death, and imagine that because they make no murmuring complaints, and offer no vain resistance — they are submitting themselves to God. But if they would test the genuineness of their resignation to his will — they should inquire whether they have been taught by means of their afflictions to recognize and rest in God's supremacy, to submit themselves to God, in every relation which he bears to them, and in all the respects in which his will has been made known.

They may rest assured that they have not duly submitted to God in any one instance — if they are not thereby prepared to submit to him in every other. And perhaps the stunning stroke of affliction, which impresses us so deeply with a sense of our helplessness, and of our absolute dependence on God's sovereign pleasure — may have been sent, for the purpose of leading to an entire surrender of ourselves into his hands. Yet certainly, it will be productive of no saving benefit, if it leave in our breasts one fragment of cherished repugnance or opposition to his will, to whatever subject his determinations may refer, and by whatever methods they may be disclosed to us. This view of the subject leads us to consider an important practical application of the general doctrine. Affliction is designed and fitted to teach the general and comprehensive lesson of submission to God, in every respect in which his will is made known. And if we would test the genuineness of our submission, we must consider how far it is co-extensive with that lesson.

More particularly, we are called to submit to God as our lawgiver and judge. The law is an expression of God's sovereignty; it derives its power of binding the conscience, not only from the reasonableness of its requirements — but from the authority by which it is enjoined. No one can dispute the obligation of any of its precepts, or refuse submission to them, without impeaching the sovereignty of God. And this holds true alike of the moral and the positive parts of his law. The moral precepts are so reasonable in themselves, and so consistent with the dictates of conscience, and so conducive to our own happiness — that, apart from the revealed sanction of God altogether, they might well commend themselves to our observance.

But, even when our conduct is outwardly conformable to the letter of the divine law — we do not submit ourselves to God, if we act under the influence of mere prudential consideration, and if we do not obey it from a regard to God's sovereign authority. Thus we may have the form of submission, while we are destitute of the spirit of submission.

Further, this submission to God's sovereignty, speaking in the law, must be universal, and have a reference to every intimation of the divine will. The man who really submits to God's authority in one matter, must see it to be equally reasonable to submit to the same authority in every other matter. His obedience will not be regulated by his personal partialities or antipathies, nor confined to those duties which are most pleasing to his natural taste — but co-extensive with the law in all its length and breadth. For the radical principle of obedience, is submission to the supreme will, and in whatever matter, or on whatever occasion that will is made known — it will secure his cheerful compliance.

Whereas he who acts on a different principle, may render an outward and partial obedience — but cannot be said to "submit himself to God." This is frequently exemplified in the case of those who,

professing great respect for the moral precepts of Christianity — refuse, nevertheless, to observe its positive institutions. They admire, and in part observe, the law, in so far as it enjoins honesty, and prohibits blasphemy, or lying, or impurity — but when it speaks of the holy sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Table, which depend for their obligation, on the sole authority of God, they do not submit themselves to his declared will — but act as if the sovereign of the world had no right to impose or to expect such observances.

God's sovereignty, if it is owned at all, must be owned out and out. Whenever God speaks, he must, as a sovereign, be listened to and obeyed. God is not only the supreme lawgiver — but also the sovereign judge of all; and his sentence, once pronounced, must be reverently received. I speak not at present of that last, final, and irreversible sentence which he will pronounce on each of us on that day which is, by way of eminence, called the Day of Judgment; for, however lightly we may now deal with God, or think of him, there will be no room for levity, and no lack of awe-struck reverence, in the vast assembly, which shall hear that sentence pronounced at the judgment-seat. But I speak of a decision which the supreme judge has already pronounced, of a sentence which he has already passed, and which stands on record in the written Word. For, although we are not as yet in a state of retribution, God has been pleased, as it were, to anticipate the final reckoning, and to make known to us, for our warning in a state of trial, and for our benefit in a state of grace — the views and feelings with which, as our sovereign Lord and Judge, he regards our case. His sentence is a solemn one, and proceeding, as it does, from the Judge of all the earth, it may well impress us with awe. In reference to our natural condition, it is none other than this, "Cursed is every one that continues not in all things written in the Book of the Law to do them." This is God's declared mind and will — and who shall question or gainsay it? Yet, so far from surrendering ourselves to the full impression of that sentence, or submitting with reverence to the decision of a Judge, who can neither err nor deceive — many spurn at it as a revolting falsehood, or cavil against its application to themselves. But what avails this opposition? We may rebel against God's sentence — but that will not release us from it. We may argue ourselves into a disbelief of its truth — but that will not alter the word which has gone forth from his mouth.

Surely if this is the judgment of God on our present case, it is useful for us to know the real state of the fact — and as impious as it must be unavailing, to call in question the rectitude of his decision. But thus to yield to the solemn decision of God — to surrender our hearts to the full impression of that fearful sentence, and, above all, to acquiesce in the rectitude and propriety of its application to ourselves — this is one of the hardest parts of that submission which we owe to God. Rather than do so, we shall be glad to have recourse to many a refuge of lies, and we must be driven out of our last stronghold, before we will come to God, and acknowledge that his condemning sentence against us is a just one, and that we cast ourselves absolutely on his sovereign mercy.

Some may imagine that this part of duty, however reasonable in itself, has little connection with the exercises appropriate to a season of affliction. But it is not so. Unless we submit to God's authority as a Lawgiver and Judge, we shall be but ill-prepared to acknowledge the equity and justice of his procedure towards us, and shall not be able to feel the full force of that question, "Why does a living man complain — a man for the punishment of his sins?" In like manner we are called by affliction to submit ourselves to God's sovereignty, in the method of our SALVATION. In the dispensation of grace, not less than in the course of providence — God is Sovereign. It belongs to him to prescribe the method and terms of our salvation — and, indeed, to determine whether we

are to be saved at all. This follows necessarily from the doctrine which we have already expounded respecting God's judgment on our case; for if we were sinners, and as such, justly subjected to a sentence of condemnation — it is plain that it must be of God's sovereign mercy alone, that any scheme of salvation has been provided, and that scheme must be, in all its parts, arranged and ordered according to the counsel of his own will.

Nothing could be more self-evident than this, were it not that we are, through natural pride and perverseness, unwilling to acknowledge God's sovereignty in the matter. We are desirous of finding some ground of right in ourselves, some distinctive peculiarity of character which may put a difference between us and other sinners, and which we may plead as a reason for our acceptance with God. And hence, we do not willingly submit to that scheme of grace which God has revealed, and which addresses itself to us only as sinners, and calls upon us to place ourselves absolutely at God's mercy. But God's sovereignty demands submission; for "many as are the devices of man's heart, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand." And what is the counsel of the Lord in this matter? He has devised, and is now carrying into effect a method of salvation, which provides for the pardon of sin, only through the mediation of Jesus Christ. He declares, that "There is no other name given under Heaven among men whereby we can be saved." And furthermore, he has been pleased to connect the enjoyment of their salvation with the exercise of a simple faith. This is the sovereign determination of Almighty God, and we are required to submit ourselves to it, acknowledging . . .

his right to prescribe the way,

his wisdom in devising, and

his mercy in accomplishing our salvation.

Again, God has a method of SANCTIFICATION as well as of pardon. He has declared that we must be sanctified by the agency of the Holy Spirit — by the instrumentality of the truth contained in the Bible — by the diligent use of appointed means, such as Scripture and prayer, and by the patient endurance and due improvement of affliction and trial. These are the means which God has selected for that end, and we are called to submit ourselves to his sovereign pleasure, and to attempt no other way.

It is the lack of a due regard to God's supremacy which leads us so often to tamper with his appointments, and to forsake the way which he has marked out for us. But if we are once fully impressed with the necessity and the duty of submitting ourselves, in all respects, to God — we will at once comply with his methods, and acquiesce in his arrangements for our good.

I am aware, indeed, that the doctrine of God's sovereignty has sometimes the effect of awakening doubts and apprehensions, such as prevent the sinner from freely embracing the Gospel call. For when that doctrine is viewed in reference to the subjects of salvation, as well as in reference to the method of salvation — the sinner is apt to argue that he has no warrant to expect salvation, since some only are to be saved. And, in this state of mind, he is sensible of little comfort, even from the glad tidings of great joy.

Yet so far from ascribing these effects to a right apprehension of God's sovereignty in this matter, I am disposed to regard them as a proof that their apprehension of it, or at least their submission to

it, is as yet imperfect; and to believe that did they really and cordially own and yield to it, they would be just so much the nearer to a settled ground of peace and hope. For then they would see that they have no refuge anywhere else than in the sovereign mercy of God. They would be led to cast themselves absolutely into his hands, and in the spirit of entire self-resignation, to submit themselves to him. The most unreserved and unqualified admission of the divine sovereignty does not remove the ground of a sinner's hope, nor can it destroy the warrant of faith. On the contrary, it prepares the mind for receiving salvation, in the only shape in which it is offered — as a free gift. And surely, that can neither be a secure nor a safe ground of hope which depends for its stability, on the limiting of God's prerogative, or the denial of his supremacy. And, in no situation, can a believer find a securer hope, or a sweeter peace, than when he is conscious, that, in all respects, and without any reserve, he "is submitting himself to God."

These views, important at all times, are peculiarly impressive, in the season of affliction. We then feel that, in one respect at least, we must submit to God's will — that we have no means of controlling or counteracting it — that we cannot escape from the disease, or the poverty, or death which he has appointed for us. If we are thus taught, not only the hard necessity — but the holy duty of resignation — we shall see the reasonableness of submission to the same divine will, in every other matter in respect to which it may be disclosed. And without this, we may rest assured, that we have not learned the lesson which affliction was designed to teach.

It may be imagined, indeed, that the duty of submitting to God's will in the matter of our salvation, has little connection with the exercises that are appropriate to a season of affliction. But we may well believe that it is God's design, in many of his afflictive dispensations — to lead us to this entire surrender of ourselves into his hands, and that we never can obtain a well-founded and genuine consolation under them, until we yield to that method of salvation which he has revealed in the Gospel.

## 02.07. A MEEK AND QUIET SPIRIT.

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### 7. A MEEK AND QUIET SPIRIT.

"The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" 1 Peter 3:4  
The character which is so exquisitely delineated in these few simple words, is not the result of mere natural temperament or constitution — but the product of ripe and mature Christian experience. It is formed by slow degrees, under the teaching of God's Word and Spirit, and the long-continued discipline of his providence. It is lamentably defective in many, whose personal religion cannot be charitably doubted — and is seldom acquired in the earlier stages of the Christian course. It resembles the mellow flavor and sweetness of fruit which has been fully matured, and is ready to be gathered.

Let me describe and illustrate the spirit which is here commended; contrasting it, as we proceed, with the various dispositions to which it is opposed; and then adduce some reasons and motives fitted to persuade you to the acquirement and cultivation of it. The spirit here described may be regarded under two distinct aspects:

first, as it has reference to our piety towards God;

secondly, as it relates to our charity towards fellow-men. In the one respect, it ranks under our religious duty — in the other, under our relative duty.

1. It is obviously a part of our religious duty to cherish at all times a meek and quiet spirit towards GOD. His Character should secure our heartfelt reverence, and his Will should secure our quiet and unquestioning submission. We should be as little children in God's hands, regarding him as our Father in Heaven, and feeling towards him as a confiding child feels towards a kind parent, whose worth he reveres, whose love he cannot question, and whose will he would not resist for the world.

More particularly, the believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit in reference to God's Teaching. He may find, assuredly he shall find, in reading that Word which contains the revelation of God's mind and will, many truths which are too apt, on their being first proposed, to excite his angry opposition, and to raise questions in his mind, such as that of our Lord's followers, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" The Christian must learn many a hard lesson from the mouth of God — many a lesson which is intended for "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5.) And these lessons, including all the fundamental truths of his Word, never can be learned or received unless the mind is brought to yield itself up entirely to God's teaching — until the disciple becomes as a little child, and sits like Mary at the feet of Jesus, hearing his word. In this respect, a meek and quiet spirit stands opposed to all pride of intellect, and especially to that rebellious temper which is disposed to raise questions and start objections — instead of simply hearing and believing whatever the Lord speaks.

Free inquiry after the truth of God is not forbidden — far from it; but it must be a calm, meek, and submissive thoughtfulness, such as befits the unerring wisdom of our Instructor, and our own ignorance and weakness; an inquiry, whose only object is to ascertain God's truth, and, on its being ascertained, to receive and embrace it — however different it may be from our preconceived opinions, or opposed to our natural prejudices.

Such an inquiry is best and most successfully conducted, when the spirit of a man is thoroughly subdued by a sense of God's majesty, and awed into quiet submission by the conviction of his unerring wisdom. Then, instead of exclaiming in the heat and violence of our exasperated feelings, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" or, "Who is the Lord that we should obey him?" — we shall be ready meekly and simply to ask, "What has the Lord said?" or, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit in reference to God's Accusations and Rebukes. When he reads the Word, and marks the language in which God reproves him of sin; when he considers the humbling view which is there presented of his own vileness, and the displeasure which God has expressed against him — his proud heart may be too often disposed to question the accuracy of such representations, or, at all events, their application to himself. The unrenewed mind cannot endure to have such accusations closely pressed upon it — it spurns with indignation at the charges which God has deliberately stated. But the disciple, whose mind has been subdued by the grace of God, will listen even to these humbling portions of God's Word, with a meek and quiet spirit. He is satisfied on the one hand, that God, as he cannot err or be deceived, can have no disposition to inflict unnecessary pain; and on the other side, that, as his sin must be infinitely more heinous in God's sight than it can be in his own, so it is beneficial for him to know what God thinks of it; and wise to look on it in the same light. When others rail at the Word of God — he is found meekly reading it. While others are loud in declaiming against the passages which are offensive to their taste — he is quietly digesting them, and imbibing their wholesome truth into the very frame of his spirit. While others seek to adapt and accommodate God's Word to their own likings — he is meekly and quietly seeking to conform his character to God's Word. In this respect, a meek and quiet spirit stands opposed to pride, to self-righteousness, to vain-glory; it begins in penitence, and ends in habitual humility of heart. The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit, in reference to God's Dispensations Towards Him. In the course of God's providence, he may be raised to great prosperity — or reduced to deep poverty and distress. In either case, he sees no reason to change his state of mind — he is meek and quiet still. When an unsanctified man is elevated, especially if it is suddenly and unexpectedly, to affluence, or honor, or rank — he is too apt to swell into self-importance, as if a little gold were sufficient to give him new dignity, or a little honor to add to his intrinsic worth: "they grow fat as the heifer at grass, and neigh like stallions," (Jeremiah 50:11.) But the true disciple, while he undervalues none of God's mercies, will join trembling with his mirth. And while he is surrounded with prosperity, will remember chiefly the additional responsibilities which are thereby imposed on him: his own weakness for so great a trust, and the solemn account which he must sooner or later render. And on the very pinnacle of worldly joy, he will seek to cherish a meek and quiet spirit towards God. But meekness is more peculiarly appropriate in the season of adversity and trial. Such seasons every Christian has experienced, and many yet expect. It is through great tribulation that we must enter the kingdom. If all men are born to trouble — the Christian is doubly sure of his share, for "whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." At such seasons, and especially if the trial is very severe, or suddenly sent, or long

continued — the disciple is in God's school, learning a practical lesson of no easy attainment, even the lesson of meekness and quietness towards God. His clearest duty is that of resigned submission, of uncomplaining acquiescence in God's will. But alas! the self-evident clearness of the duty is far from insuring the disposition to obey! Instead of meekness towards God — there is too often an ill-concealed and ever struggling rebellion against his will. And instead of quietness — there is too often a querulous complaining, a fretful utterance of impatient feelings, equally dishonoring to God and injurious to his own peace of mind. God may say of many a professing disciple as he did of Ephraim, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus — you have chastised me and I was chastised — as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," (Jeremiah 31:18.) Or as he said of the Israelites, on another occasion, "Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net!" (Isaiah 51:20.) A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, or a wild bull caught in a net — are but too faithful emblems of many when they are first seized with affliction. They struggle against, and would gladly burst the bands which God has laid upon them — and when they cannot extricate themselves by any violent effort, they are too apt to sink into the habit of grieving and murmuring under their trials.

It is not astonishing that this should be the case with worldly men — for they have no resource except what worldly peace and prosperity can afford. But it ought not to be the case with God's people, who know that every painful dispensation with which they are visited, proceeds from unerring wisdom and infinite love, and that it is a part of that discipline by which God is seeking to purify them, and prepare them for Heaven.

It is long, however, even in a Christian mind, before the habit of unquestioning submission to God's will is formed. In the earlier stages of his course, the believer is apt . . .

to be impatient of the cross which he is appointed to bear;

to question either the necessity or the wisdom of its being imposed upon him, and

to doubt the love of God when it is manifested in the way of chastisement. But as he advances, and in proportion as he is suitably exercised by his affliction, his mind is subdued. He feels that God has taken the management of his case into His own hands, and by ways which seem hard or mysterious — but which are really beneficial, is seeking to "humble him, and to prove him, and to show him what is in his heart." He learns by experience — what he was slow to learn by the mere reading of the Word, however clearly it was there set before him. And thus he comes to cherish habitually a "meek and quiet spirit" — a spirit which neither disputes the necessity, nor questions the wisdom, nor doubts the love of God's dispensations towards him — but which leads him to place himself entirely in God's hands, to be dealt with according to His good pleasure, not doubting, that "all things shall work together for good to those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose." He feels the pressure of affliction, and may even be stunned by its unexpected stroke — but still he says with the Psalmist, "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" Psalms 39:9

Herein he resembles his blessed Lord, who was "meek and lowly in heart." "He was oppressed and he was afflicted — yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7.)

2. The spirit which is here commended, may be viewed in another aspect, as it has respect to our fellow-men. The same meek and quiet spirit which leads the believer to submit to God, as his Father, will also lead him to act towards his fellow-men as brethren, in such a way as to give no unjust offence — to do no real injury — or to occasion no unnecessary uneasiness to any one of them. I do not mean to say that any Christian ever did or ever will pass through the world without offending the prejudices, or exciting the enmity and opposition of worldly men. No, for then "the offence of the Cross had ceased;" "it is enough for the servant that he be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord." If they were offended by the perfect Master, much more may they be offended in his weak followers, who "are as sheep in the midst of wolves." But while they ought not to shrink from duty, by reason of the opposition which they must encounter in the discharge of it — they should seek to maintain throughout, not a restless, irritable, and clamorous temper — but a meek and quiet spirit; a spirit actuated not by hatred — but by love; not shrinking from opposition when it must be encountered — but still less courting it or stirring it up; not delighted with the world's noisy strife — but with the quiet delights of privacy and peace. This meek and quiet spirit should pervade all our interactions with others. The believer is called to exercise it in reference to the dispositions and tempers of those with whom he associates. These may often be irritable and violent; he may be scorned and reviled; he may be regarded with jealousy, or envy, or malice. And even where no such malignant feelings are displayed, he may be annoyed by infirmities of temper, such as call for the exercise of unwearied patience. Still, if his own mind is thoroughly subdued, if he is truly humble — he may be able to preserve his peace of mind in the midst of external discord, and feel how sweet a thing it is to be meek and quiet within. The storm that rages without, the falling rain, and roaring thunder, and tempestuous wind — only serve to make the humble cottager feel how sweet and comfortable is home. Just so, a meek and quiet spirit feels its own happiness the more, when it witnesses the fearful strife of ungoverned and unhallowed passion. The reason why we are so seldom able to maintain this meek and quiet spirit in such circumstances, is that our minds are not thoroughly subdued — there is still the accursed root of pride in our hearts, which embitters our feelings and supplies fuel for the fire of strife and contention.

If we were thoroughly meek, we would also be perfectly quiet. But we often speak unadvisedly, and one unguarded word leads to altercation, and altercation ends in strife. We reprove the temper of others, and often in such a way, as to ruffle our own! Oh! that we could remember the words of the apostle, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory — but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves;" and the example of our blessed Lord, who "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself" — lest we should weary and faint in our minds! The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit towards others, in reference to the personal injuries which they may have committed against himself. Injury provokes resentment — and resentment prompts revenge. The first impulse of every unsubdued mind, is to render evil for evil; and few minds are so thoroughly sanctified as to be exempted altogether from the temptation to retaliate. But the hour of trial is the Christian's time for duty — he must then feel and act as a new creature — as a child of God. If pride swells within him, it must be crushed. If resentment arises, it must be so checked as that he "shall be angry and yet sin not." If revenge prompts retaliation either by tongue or hand, it must be steadily restrained. His spirit is then tested whether it be meek and quiet or not.

Let him in such an hour remember his calm and kind Master, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again — when he suffered he threatened not — but committed himself unto Him who judges righteously." And let him, with reverence towards God, and with pity towards his offending brother, remember that solemn declaration, "Vengeance is Mine — I will repay! says the Lord."

Many of our heaviest afflictions come to us through the channel of human agency. In such cases, as has been already observed, we are too prone to overlook the appointment of God — and to resent the injury that is done to us. And especially when we are insulted and opposed on account of our religion, we are too prone to cherish indignation under the cloak of Christian zeal. We think the cause of God and the good of our enemies themselves require that we should not tamely submit to injury, or fail to lift a bold and indignant testimony against error and sin. And it is unquestionably our duty to avouch the Lord as our God in the face of all opposition, and to "be zealous" in advancing his cause. But the zeal which the Gospel enjoins is such as proceeds from love, and is united with humility and meekness. The zeal which many professing Christians display is too often the zeal of party or of pride — haughty, intemperate, clamorous. It is the zeal which our Lord rebuked, when he said to his disciples, "You know not what spirit you are of." The pure flame of Christian love must not be mixed with the wildfire of human passion, "the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." The zeal of a proud professor makes him acrimonious and loud in condemning the infirmities of others; but a meek and quiet spirit will, like David, retire and weep, and pray for them, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes because they keep not your law."

Fervent zeal may well consist with a modest and humble estimate of ourselves, and a charitable and gentle spirit towards our neighbor. None can be more zealous than Christ — and yet none so meek and lowly as he.

Let me now very briefly adduce some reasons and motives fitted to persuade you to the acquirement and cultivation of this spirit. It is here described as a beautiful and lovely disposition of mind — it is called an ornament. Wherever a meek and quiet spirit is consistently exhibited in the character of a Christian — it is universally felt and owned to be most attractive and engaging. Those professors who lack it, or who are as yet greatly deficient in it, are on that account less esteemed — their society is often felt to be disagreeable rather than pleasing — their conversation is not so sweet or refreshing. But a meek and quiet spirit, maintained under all changes of circumstances, and under every provocation, is felt even by unrenewed men to be the noblest proof of the power of practical religion. It is very precious in the sight of God. He regards it, not indeed as meritorious — but as agreeable to his will, and a copy taken from the pattern of his well-beloved Son. Accordingly, a very large portion of his Word is devoted to the inculcation of those principles by which this character is formed; and a large part of his providential discipline is designed to produce and strengthen it in our souls. "God resists the proud — but gives grace to the humble. To that man will he look, even to him that is humble and of a contrite spirit."

It is thus precious in God's sight, because it is closely connected with, and conducive to, the peace of our own minds, and the order of the Church, and of the world. Personal, domestic, and public peace is promoted by it; and he who is the God of peace and the God of order, delights in that whereby general happiness is advanced. No one can estimate how much his own personal comfort depends on his possessing a meek and quiet spirit. Such a spirit easily endures much which frets and discomposes those who are less thoroughly subdued. An affront which

exasperates a proud man — a meek man calmly suffers. An injury which revenge resents — meekness overlooks or forgets. And trials which scarcely ruffle the composure of a quiet and contented mind — are sufficient to toss the wicked as on the waves of a troubled and boisterous sea.

Whenever we find ourselves violently discomposed, fretful, impatient, or wretched — we may rest assured that our misery arises much more from the distempered state of our souls, than from any external cause. We should seek relief, by acquiring that meek and quiet spirit, which will raise us above the influence of external circumstances, or enable us calmly to endure them.

Finally, let it be remembered that this temper of mind is not natural to any of us — it must be acquired and cultivated. Nor is it a plant of easy and speedy growth — it is the gradual product of much discipline and of growing Christian experience. It seldom springs up, so as to reach maturity, until after many a storm has rooted and established it — nor even then, unless it be implanted and watered by the Spirit of God. "The fruit of the Spirit is meekness, gentleness, long-suffering." "Experience works patience." "The work of righteousness is peace: and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." (Isaiah 32:17.)

## 02.07A. THE CASE AND CURE OF A WOUNDED SPIRIT.

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### THE CASE AND CURE OF A WOUNDED SPIRIT.

"The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity — but a wounded spirit, who can bear?" Proverbs 18:14 The Preacher here contrasts outward with inward trouble. Bodily infirmities, or diseases, or any evil affecting it from without, he declares a man is capable of enduring. Not that he ascribes to it a stoic apathy or indifference, or represents the outward sources of affliction as being either few in number, or insignificant in amount — but he attributes to a vigorous and healthy mind, the capacity of sustaining them, in such a manner as that while it feels their pressure, it shall not be overwhelmed by them. Exemption from outward evils is forbidden by the fallen state of mankind; insensibility to them is forbidden by the feelings of mankind. But such is the dignity of the human spirit, and such its superiority over the fleshly nature with which it is here united, that, being itself sound and healthy, it may enjoy inward peace, even when surrounded with outward calamity, and rise superior alike to the sense of suffering and the fear of danger.

Subject as it is to all manner of influences from without, it seems hardly possible to assign limits to its power of endurance, if it is upheld by its natural and necessary support — that of true religion. Being capable of religion, its capacity of endurance must be measured by the strength of its supporting principles; by the firmness and durability of those foundations on which it rests. And what infirmity is there which may not be sustained, or what outward calamity that may not be endured — by a mind which, imbued with pious principle — reposes itself on the wisdom, and faithfulness, and love of God; which, believing that all events are under His control, resigns itself to his disposal, and acknowledges His hand alike in every blessing and in every trial; and which, assured of the faithfulness of His promise, is thoroughly persuaded that, however dark or perplexing the course of His providence may be — every successive evolution of the present complicated system is tending to a result worthy of the wisdom and benevolence of God, and that all things are working together for good to those who love him. Thus supported, the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities. In the history of the Church there are many signal examples of the patience and fortitude with which believers have triumphed over every kind and degree of outward sufferings. What trials more numerous or severe than those of Job, when, in one day, four successive messengers announced to him the destruction of his vast possessions, the ruin of his fortune, and the death of his sons — yet, "At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised." (Job 1:20-21.) And soon after, when God for his further trial, was pleased to smite him with sore bodily disease, and when his wife tempted him to cherish unbelieving thoughts, he said, "What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10.) In like manner, the power of the human spirit, when adequately supported by religion, to sustain outward sufferings, is signally displayed in the history of those worthies of whom, both men and women, it is said that they "suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of

sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground!" (Hebrews 11:36-37.) Yet, so far from being overwhelmed by those sufferings, as heavy and grievous as they were, the apostle speaks of one of their number as "choosing rather to suffer afflictions with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," (Hebrews 11:25.) Nay, of believers in general, he says, that they "glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." And elsewhere adds for himself, "most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me! I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake — for when I am weak, then am I strong." (Romans 5:3; Romans 8:35; 2 Corinthians 12:9.) In estimating the capacity of the human spirit to bear up under the pressure of outward calamity, it is right to take religion as an element in the calculation — because the human mind is capable of entertaining religion, on the one hand, and because, when entertained, religion is its firmest and surest support on the other. Well may the spirit of a man sustain his infirmities, when his spirit is itself sustained by the truth and faithfulness of God. Resting on this sure foundation, his patience and fortitude may partake of the same firmness which belongs to the grounds of his confidence. In the absence of religion, the mind is deprived of its best support — it rests not on a rock — but clings to a reed. It is glad to have recourse to such means of consolation as the world affords, and seeks rather to forget, than to conquer its sorrows.

Yet such is the kind provision of nature, that even in the absence of religion, many outward calamities may be sustained without any serious inroad on human happiness. There are natural remedies for sorrow, and laws corrective of extreme suffering. For just as a wound is staunched by its own blood, or a bruise skinned over by the curative processes of nature herself — so many a sufferer is indebted to time, to habit, to society, or some similar influence, for the mitigation of sorrow, even where he neglects the religion which alone can convert sorrow into joy.

If one outward spring of happiness is dried up — he has recourse to another. And wandering from cistern to cistern, broken and empty as they are — he pleases himself with the thought that he may yet be happy. A fond delusion but one, nevertheless, which shows the buoyancy of the human spirit, and which teaches us how high the mind may rise above calamity, if embracing all the supports of which it is capable.

"But," adds the prophet, "a wounded spirit who can bear?" So long as the mind itself is untouched, so long as it maintains its soundness and elasticity — so long may it bear up against outward calamity, and rise above the storm. But let the spirit itself be wounded, and thenceforward, not only is it an easy victim to every, even the slightest form of outward evil — but the greatest abundance of outward good is thrown away upon it — it droops and pines unseen, amidst the brightest sunshine of prosperity. For within itself are springs of bitterness, which render every outward comfort insipid or loathsome.

Let us consider the nature, symptoms, and causes of this distemper of the spirit, with the view of ascertaining how far it may admit of cure, and by what means that cure may be effected. As to the NATURE of this distemper, we must carefully mark the difference between it and certain other states of mind which, although they may have some symptoms apparently in common with it, are nevertheless essentially of a different character. By a wounded spirit — we do not understand a

mind deranged in its faculties, through insanity, or so deficient in intellectual energy, as to assume the gentler form of idiocy. Where the mind is either radically defective, or altogether disordered — it exhibits, indeed, a melancholy spectacle, for what can be more melancholy than the deprivation of reason?

But, in such cases, there is often little conscious suffering — the power of continuous thinking is gone — the mind is seldom sensible of its own condition — but is rather the subject of fitful imaginations and dreams — sometimes sad, no doubt — but as often pleasing, grand, or exciting. And it is not until returning reason throws light on the confusion within, that the sufferer is conscious of his real situation. But when the spirit is wounded without being deranged, when reason retains her sway, and broods over the inward miseries of a heart stricken and bleeding — then is the question of the Preacher applicable, "A wounded spirit, who can bear?" And as this distemper is to be distinguished from idiocy or insanity — so must we, in justice to religion, guard against confounding it with that broken and contrite spirit which Scripture recommends as being in itself acceptable to God, and in its effect beneficial to ourselves. A truly broken and contrite heart is consistent with inward peace and comfort. It necessarily implies, indeed, some measure of grief, such grief as the remembrance of sin may and ought to inspire; and that grief, if unalleviated by the consolations and hopes of the Gospel, might settle down into a fixed melancholy, and become a fearful and intolerable burden. But this is the sorrow of the world which works death; such sorrow as natural convictions may awaken — while natural reason cannot allay it. But the godly sorrow of the Christian, when, with a broken spirit he contemplates his transgressions, is so chastened and mitigated by an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, that the true penitent is comforted even in his contrition, and feels that this is a spirit which it best befits him to cherish — a spirit which is the most conducive to his peace. So far from crying out, that he cannot bear it, or being anxious to cast it off as a heavy or intolerable load upon his mind — the believer prays that he may have more and more of this holy, and humble, and contrite spirit. It is his great anxiety to nourish it; in this spirit he desires to live; in this spirit he delights to pray; in this spirit he would approach the table of the Lord; in this spirit he hopes to die and to enter Heaven. And the more he succeeds in maintaining it, the more does he feel the unspeakable consolation and supports of the Gospel. But there is a state of mind, and that of by no means rare occurrence, which corresponds to the description of the Preacher. In this state, the mind is conscious of a total dissatisfaction with itself, and everything with which it has yet become acquainted — a loathing of the world, while as yet no better portion is known or enjoyed by it — a bitter feeling that it is not, and in its present state cannot, be happy. Nor is this state of mind peculiar to those who are involved in the hardships of poverty, or who have suffered an extraordinary degree of temporal distress. On the contrary, some of its most affecting exhibitions are to be witnessed among those who have enjoyed a large measure of outward prosperity — who are loaded with wealth and honor, and replenished not only with every necessity — but with every comfort and luxury of life. In the midst of all their outward prosperity, their spirits sink, their happiness is destroyed. And even when surrounded with the pomp and luxury of rank or fortune, an aching heart destroys their peace, and tempts them to loathe the very distinctions which excite the admiration or the envy of the world.

Oh! how often in a day of jubilee, has such a heart sickened at the vanity of the world; and who knows how many hearts are inwardly bleeding in the midst of our gayest assemblies!

"Who," says Voltaire, "can, without horror, consider the whole world as the empire of destruction? It abounds with wonders — it also abounds with victims. It is a vast field of carnage and contagion. Every species is without pity pursued and torn to pieces through the earth, and air, and water. In man, there is more wretchedness than in all the other animals put together. He loves life — yet he knows that he must die. If he enjoys a transient good — he suffers various evils, and is at last devoured by worms! This knowledge is his fatal prerogative; other animals have it not. He spends the transient moments of his existence in diffusing the miseries which he suffers — and in repenting of all that he does. The bulk of mankind are nothing more than a crowd of wretches equally criminal and unfortunate. The globe contains rather carcasses, than men. I tremble at the review of this frightful picture, and I wish I had never been born!" The effects of this distemper are various, and often the most apparently opposite. In all cases, it is destructive of every rational and substantial comfort. It embitters the heart — which is at once the seat and spring of true happiness. It tinges the eye with gloom — so that every outward object is discolored or distorted. It produces indifference, or some harsher feeling towards the living creatures around us — and by drying up the social affections, takes away one of the sweetest sources of comfort. It naturally impairs our health, according to the beautiful language of Solomon, "a merry heart does good like medicine — but a broken spirit tries the bones." (Proverbs 17:22.) But in seeking relief from it, very different and even opposite courses are pursued. Sometimes, under its pressure, the mind recoils from all fellowship with the world, shrinks from society, and finds a melancholy satisfaction in seclusion and solitude. There brooding over its own miseries, it becomes ascetic or misanthropic — little interested in the happiness of others since it has lost its own — and perhaps deriving a morbid pleasure from every new proof of the vanity of the world or the turpitude of mankind. In other cases, the wretched sufferer is afraid of solitude — cannot bear the company of his own thoughts — and rushes into society, there to forget, amidst the gaieties of fashion; or, should these fail, amidst the deeper excitements of profligacy, the secret horrors by which it is haunted — allowing no time for calm reflection — but intent only on forgetting a misery which it can neither overcome nor endure.

I am convinced that it is the same spirit which often leads to those opposite extremes of social mirth, and secluded melancholy. If we could look through the disguises which it assumes, we might discover the same bitterness of heart in many a scene of gaiety or profligacy, which in other temperaments drives the sufferer to pine unseen in a cottage or a cloister.

Even in our own times, and in ordinary life, many seek relief from the bitterness of disappointment by the use of wine, of opium, or of alcohol — an insidious and dangerous habit, begun perhaps without the intention of being intemperate, and advancing by imperceptible degrees, so that the unhappy victim is scarcely conscious of its progress, until it becomes his master and tyrant, and he its helpless and abject slave!

If we inquire into the CAUSES of this distemper, we shall find that, while any one of the numerous calamities of life may become the immediate occasion of producing it — yet, none of them have this effect, until, as the result of its general experience, the mind is led to entertain the fearful conviction that its whole scheme of happiness is false and deceitful, and that it neither is, nor can be happy in its present course. So long as it can evade this conclusion, and flatter itself with the hope of happiness — it may bear up against the calamities of life, and suffer much without being overwhelmed. But when the fearful truth, (for it is a truth,) that no created thing can render it happy

— and that in its present course dissatisfaction and misery must be its constant attendants — when this truth is discerned, and considered in the light of its own experience, the mind is wounded by the discovery, and loses at once its happiness and its hope. It sinks under calamities which otherwise might have been endured, and becomes either despondently anxious, or recklessly careless, about everything which most nearly concerns it.

There are two considerations, both included in this general statement, which deserve to be specified, as the principal causes which operate in the production of a wounded spirit:

the first relating to happiness in the present world,

the second to our prospects beyond the grave.

1. A consideration which has a strong tendency to produce the distempered spirit which has been described, is, the vanity and emptiness of the world; the felt impossibility of deriving from it that satisfaction which we had fondly expected; and the evidence which every day's experience multiplies . . .

of the instability of our dearest treasures,

of the uncertainty of our sweetest enjoyments,

and the disappointment of our fondest hopes. Who that has passed from youth to manhood, and contrasts his early expectations with his actual experience — has altogether escaped the withering feeling of disappointment? As we advance in life, are we not every day more thoroughly schooled in this universal lesson of human experience, that the world is a vain show; and that its best enjoyments are either beyond our reach, or difficult of attainment; and when attained, they are transient, precarious, and unsatisfying. And our prospects, if confined to the things which are seen and temporal, are not brighter than our past experience. Which of our present comforts can we count on retaining? Our wealth may be taken away. Our friends may grow cool and desert us; at all events, they must die. Our good name is at the mercy of a thousand evil tongues. Our health may fail and disable us for every enjoyment. And soon, very soon, we must leave all earthly things, and resign them to others.

Nay, were every temporal comfort continued with us to the close of life, can we expect to derive from them more substantial happiness than we have yet enjoyed in them — and has that been such as to satisfy the cravings, or fill the capacities of our souls? The mind that thus calmly contemplates its past experience and future prospects, is learning a great lesson, a lesson which God has designed the vanity of the world to teach us — even that souls formed in His image cannot find their happiness in any earthly object — that successful as they may be in the world, they must look beyond it for the satisfaction of desires too great to be limited by its range; and that so long as they look to the world alone or chiefly, they will find it to be but "vanity and vexation of spirit."

Now, a mind that has made this discovery, and sensibly feels its truth, without having yet discerned or embraced the better portion that is provided for it, is a wounded spirit. It is not only unhappy — but feels that it must be so in its present course. It loathes the vain world, and yet has no higher good in view, and it will either become reckless of all consequences, or sink into despondency or despair. Many such spirits there are among us, pining unseen under the growing

conviction of the world's vanity. What, I ask, can the world do for them? The world can do nothing, for it is the very vanity of the world which has caused their distemper. They have tried its cisterns and have found them empty and broken. They have gone the round of its vanities, and have found nothing but vexation of spirit. And that human philosophy which would recommend either Stoic apathy or Epicurean indulgence as a means of relief, is felt to be a vain parade of words to a spirit which knows its own bitterness, and which is conscious that, by the constitution of its nature, it can neither be indifferent to happiness on the one hand — nor satisfied with the world's happiness on the other. And as to the worldly prudence, which would, in such circumstances, laugh them out of their convictions, or recommend recreation, and mirthful society, and amusement, to hearts bleeding and diseased — they look on their sage instructor as one who is not yet so far advanced as themselves in the actual experience of the world — but as treading the same path which they trod, and sure to reach the same conclusion; and feel that it must be either in ignorance or in mockery that he speaks of worldly amusements or gaiety as a cure.

They may yield, however, to the advice — but with an inward consciousness that it must be vain, or with a feeling that it is better to forget what they cannot hope to remedy. They wander from scene to scene with the arrow still sticking fast in their bosom — with the wound still bleeding in their hearts.

If, in such a case, we could expect a cure, it is evident that a new class of objects must be presented to the mind; and this is in part admitted by those who recommend change of scene, or of occupation, or of amusement. But their error consists in not seeing that to a mind which has already discovered the vanity of the world, not only a new but a totally different and far higher class of objects must be presented — that in such a case, the world has been tried and exhausted; and that the eye must be directed beyond the world and above it for true and lasting consolation.

Such objects there are within the compass of human knowledge — the great, sure, and everlasting objects of the Christian faith and hope; and as these are necessary to be known by all, so they are peculiarly suitable to the wounded spirit. Let the eye which sees nothing but gloom and misery in the world, be lifted above it. Let the mind which is perplexed by the uncertain and unsatisfying nature of "all things seen and temporal," be directed to the stability and glory of "things unseen and eternal." Let the heart which feels that nothing on earth can fill its capacities of enjoyment, be taught that God himself is a sure and satisfying portion to them that seek him. In a word, let them see that, instead of seeking their happiness in the creature, they may seek and find it in God himself. And, immediately on such perception, the mystery of their condition will become clear. The heart, which drooped, will revive. Hope will again animate the bosom which the world had given as a prey to despair. Everything around and before them will appear in a new light — and they will feel as if a dark cloud had suddenly been broken and dispersed — a heavy burden removed — a galling yoke struck from their spirits, "all old things have passed away, and all things become new."

Instead of wondering as they once did, at the unsatisfying nature of earthly good; instead of being disposed, as formerly, to repine at that arrangement of Providence which prevents perfect happiness in the enjoyment of the creature — the emancipated spirit will perceive that this is itself one of the wisest ordinations of the divine mind, and one of the highest tokens of his benevolence, inasmuch as by thus depriving the creature of all power of being happy without God — he has laid

him under a sort of moral necessity, or, at least, held out to him the highest inducement to seek to Himself — that if He dried up the streams, or mingled bitterness with its waters — it was that they might be led to repair to the fountain.

He who has discovered that God is the only portion of his spirit, may well rest assured that this portion will never fail him, nor come short of his expectations and desires. For unlike the world, God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is infinite, and adequate, therefore, to fill the largest capacities of the soul. He is perfect, without one defect or blemish. He is all-sufficient, and, being ever present, may be continually enjoyed. Yes, death itself, so far from depriving us of this portion, will only place us in the full enjoyment of it, and eternity will only unfold more of its excellency and worth. "Nevertheless I am continually with You? You hold my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor. Whom have I in Heaven but You? And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than You. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever!" Psalms 73:23-26 As by presenting God as the only sure and satisfying portion of our souls, the Christian religion directs us to an infinite and inexhaustible source of satisfaction. By revealing the doctrine of immortality, and teaching us the connection which exists between our present course on earth and our everlasting destiny hereafter — it removes and rebukes those dismal and degrading views which we are apt to entertain respecting our present life, so long as our prospects are limited within its narrow range.

Considering ourselves as a class of creatures, like others, mortal, and comparing our actual enjoyments on earth with those of the inferior animals — the gloomy thought which will occur to a mind convinced of the world's vanity, is neither unnatural; nor, if immortality is forgotten, altogether untrue. Even that the power of reflection and forethought, by which we are distinguished from them, have materially increased our sufferings, without enabling us to discover a cure for them. We are thereby qualified to discover the vanity of the world, without being able to secure a higher good; and that if the present life is to terminate our existence, it had been better for us to have had the same thoughtless and undisturbed enjoyment of it, which is given to the birds of the air or the beasts of the field. This is intimated to us by the apostle, when, referring to his labors and sufferings in the cause of religion, he points to the prospect of eternal life as the motive and justification of his course; and asks, "What advantage it me, if the dead rise not — let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die!" (1 Corinthians 15:32.) But let the mind which has long brooded over the dismal prospect of death, and, while under the influence of the melancholy feelings which the shortness and uncertainty of human life are fitted to inspire, has become indifferent to the world, or disgusted with it — let such a mind be once vividly impressed with the idea of its own immortality; let it be thoroughly convinced that the being which is begun on earth will stretch onward and onward through the immeasurable ages of eternity; let it contemplate the sublime prospect of everlasting life beyond the grave, and, assured of that great certainty — let it be taught to look upon its earthly course as the preparation for a career which shall never end — and who can fail to see that here is . . .

an object fitted at once to rebuke and to destroy its despondency,

a prize worthy to excite again its torpid desires,

a motive to animate its resolution,

a truth which at once explains the mysteries of its present being, and throws a glowing light on its future prospects!

I say, let the saddest spirit that ever mourned over the world's vanity, be once thoroughly impressed with the belief of eternal life — and from that instant, the vanity of life will no more be thought of; for life will then assume a new aspect, and appear invested with a solemn importance, as the preparatory discipline of an immortal spirit — a state of education for eternity — a probation on which results far too momentous to be adequately conceived of, depend. And while it will no longer look to the world as the source of its happiness, or to the present life as the season of its reward — it will be nerved with new vigor to prosecute its business, and to discharge its duties. And, looking on it in the light of religion, the gloom which formerly overcast it will disappear.

Disconsolate spirit! You that like the dove can find no resting-place on earth — here is a refuge for you; a sure, and sweet, and abiding refuge: choose God for your portion, and Heaven for your home. Here are new objects, worthy of your highest regard, adequate to fill your largest desires, and fitted alike by their greatness and their stability, to secure your everlasting happiness. That you have seen the vanity of the world, is well — God has thus been preparing you for discovering the value of true religion. But beware of resting at this point, as if despondency were a proof of piety; or as if the discovery of the world's vanity were the only article of religion. Remember that many a man is bitterly dissatisfied with his present state, and often weary with the world — who has yet no portion in God. It is not enough that his affections be withdrawn from things "seen and temporal" — unless they are transferred to things "unseen and eternal." Seek not to remain in a neutral state, or to cherish unconcern and indifference. So long as your heart beats within you, it will yearn after some object on which its desires and affections may be fixed. And if the world cannot allure them, or is unworthy of them — then no happiness can be enjoyed until they rise above the world to God. By the discipline of his providence, by every successive disappointment or bereavement with which he has visited you, God has been saying, "Seek my face!" Let every wounded spirit reply, "Your face, O Lord, will I seek." There are many that say: Who shall show us any good? But my prayer will be, "Lord, lift up the light of your countenance upon me." "God is the portion of my soul, therefore will I trust in him." "My heart and my flesh faint and fail — but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever." "Even though the fig trees have no blossoms, and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails, and the fields lie empty and barren; even though the flocks die in the fields, and the cattle barns are empty — yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation!"

I am well aware, however, that to a wounded spirit, religion itself appears gloomy and repulsive; and that there are certain feelings in every breast, which serve even to increase the despondency of a mind in this situation, when it contemplates its relation to God. These feelings arise from a consciousness of guilt and corruption — and this of itself, may in some cases become so intense as to produce the very state of mind for which we propose religion as a cure. The spirit may be so wounded by it, and so harassed by the fear which it awakens, as to become the prey of what has been, not very properly, called, religious despondency.

2. This is the second of the two causes to which I proposed to direct your attention — a cause which operates sometimes without the former, so as to render a man really unhappy even while he is as yet not deeply convinced of the vanity of the world; and which at other times, so concurs with

a conviction of the unsatisfactory nature of earthly good, as to leave the mind without any resource either temporal or spiritual. The conscience is troubled by a sense of guilt, and by the terror of an angry God. This may come on, in the midst of the greatest outward prosperity, and after a long period of insensibility and unconcern. It is the most fearful of all visitations, and makes a man a terror to himself. Even the believer, in those seasons of spiritual darkness when he cannot realize the glorious truths and hopes of the Gospel, is subject to it. "You write bitter things against me" said Job, "and make me to possess the iniquities of my youth." "The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinks up my spirit! The terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. Oh! that I might have my request, and that God would grant me the thing that I long for. Even that it would please God to destroy me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!" "Your arrows stick fast in me," said David, "and your hand presses me sorely. There is no soundness in my flesh, because of your anger, neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin. For my iniquities are gone over my head; they are too heavy for me! I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long; I am feeble and sore broken; I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart."

Such is the agony of a troubled conscience when under convictions of sin. Now we do not deny the truth and reasonableness of such convictions. We would not say one word to dissipate them. On the contrary, we believe that our deepest convictions of guilt fall far short of the actual truth, and that all the fears which conscience awakens are not commensurate with the real danger of our situation. The truth is, that we are sinners, and, as such, exposed to very heavy divine judgments; and it is well that we know the fact and feel it too.

It is true, also, that in such circumstances, a wounded spirit can derive no consolation from the fact of God's existence, or the prospect of an eternal world — so long as it is ignorant of the means of forgiveness, or unwilling to embrace them. No language can express the dissatisfaction and misery of a soul when both causes concur to trouble it, and when it can neither look to the world with pleasure, nor to God with confidence. And what can the world do for one in such a case? What direction, encouragement, or comfort, can human philosophy bestow? Conscious of his own misery, he cannot trifle with his convictions. Conscience is awake, and its still small voice cannot be silenced by those who would make a mock of sin, or teach him to regard it as a imaginary or trivial evil. Nor is it every form of religion that can meet the needs, or satisfy the cravings of such a spirit. The legal or self-righteous system would only aggravate its misery. But there is a cure — and that is to be found, like every other consolation, in the Gospel of Christ. The blood of Jesus can pacify the conscience, when most disturbed. Let the saddest spirit that ever mourned over its guilt and pollution, be brought clearly to see the freeness and the riches of divine grace. Let it but understand the true character of God, as "God in Christ, reconciling a guilty world to himself, and not imputing unto men their trespasses," as "The Lord God merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, pardoning iniquity, and transgression, and sin." Let it but understand the import of that declaration, "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him might not perish — but might have everlasting life." Let it conceive aright of the sufficiency of the Savior's work, and the perfect freeness with which every sinner is invited to go to him without money and without price. Let it thus know and believe the import of the Gospel message — and instead of being overwhelmed by its convictions, it will be led by means of them to a sure and unfailing ground of consolation. By this apprehension of the

mercy of God in Christ, "the wounded spirit" is converted into "a broken and contrite one." It loses all the bitterness without losing any of the humiliation which a sense of guilt inspires. The sorrow of the world which works death — becomes a godly sorrow, working repentance, not to be repented of.

Disconsolate spirit! You who mourn in secret over the bitterness of a troubled conscience — look to the Savior, and be at peace. He now speaks to you, and says, that for such as you are, he came into the world: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, for he has anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness."

Look to the Savior — and through him look up to God as a forgiving Father! "Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God! For the Lord loosens the prisoners — the Lord opens the eyes of the blind — the Lord raises them that are bowed down — he heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds." And of you may it be said, as in times past of many a wounded spirit, "This poor man cried — the Lord heard, and saved him out of all his troubles!"

## 02.07B. PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

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### PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. For in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom." Ecclesiastes 9:10 The Preacher, taking a large view of human life, and considering man as a being destined at no very distant period, to change his present state for another, exhorts his readers, in these words, to the diligent doing of whatever remains to be done before their change arrives. He enforces his admonition by two considerations or motives:

first, that they are going to the grave;

secondly, that once in the grave, all their opportunities will cease.

I propose to direct your thoughts to these two considerations separately, and then to explain and apply the exhortation which the Preacher has founded on them — in the hope, that such as are still frittering away their time and their talents on the vanities of the world, unmindful of the coming eternity — may, under the divine blessing, be induced to think seriously of their eternal prospects. And that such of us as have already turned our faces towards Zion, may be animated and stirred up to greater diligence, in making our calling and election sure.

1. Let me remind each of you, and let every one apply it to himself, as if his own name were now audibly pronounced: "You are going to the grave!" Which of us all can deny or even doubt the certainty of this? You may sometimes hear in Church certain doctrines which you are at a loss to understand, or the grounds of whose certainty you cannot clearly perceive. But here there is no room for doubt, for dispute, or for denial, "You are going to the grave!" With unerring certainty, such as he can feel in regard to no other event, the preacher can warn every man of this: "You are going to the grave!" And looking abroad over the largest assembly of human beings, he can tell, without the possibility of being mistaken, that, within a given number of years — every one of them shall be in the dust; and the place which now knows them, shall know them no more forever. As many human beings as are at any time on the earth's surface, are conveyed to its bosom in the course of little more than thirty years. And if one life be prolonged to three score years and ten — two or three others for every such life come to a premature termination. But all, of whatever age or strength, are going in the same direction, and will meet at last!

If we look on the whole race as moving onwards to the tomb, what a melancholy procession is human life, with all its gaiety and grandeur — a procession to the chambers of death! Were we habitually mindful of this; did we look on life, with a calm and steady eye, as a progress to the tomb; did we think of every man that passes by, whether in the gaudy attire of fashion, or in the pride of triumphant ambition, or in the mirthful pursuit of pleasure, or even in the rags of poverty, and the agony of want, "You are going to the grave!" — how would this reflection serve to diminish in our eye the distinctions of the world, to rebuke its idle fashions, and to direct our reflections to what alone is valuable — that which alone will endure.

And, above all, did the thought occur to us as frequently as it ought, and were it reflected on as its certainty and importance deserve — did I often say to myself, "I am going to the grave" — Oh! what gravity of thought, what composure of manner, what deep seriousness of spirit would such a thought produce! With how much less power would either the wealth, or the honors, or the pleasures of the world seduce me from what alone is worthy of a dying man's regard — that which alone can fit him for the grave.

"Am I going to the grave?" — might one say. Then, why be so anxious, so busy, so engrossed with the world? Could I amass riches — can I keep them? Could I procure fame — what would it avail me there, where great and small meet together, in one common oblivion? No, I am going to the grave. I am every day drawing nearer to that scene where all earthly distinctions are forgotten — and I will pursue my journey heedless of the seductions of the world, and intent only on being prepared, in due time, to lay down without alarm and without regret, a life which I cannot long retain! And with a serious spirit, befitting the solemn termination of my journey, I shall set myself diligently to the work for which life was bestowed. It may be that in my case life will be protracted; but, along the whole line of my earthly pilgrimage, I must expect trials and difficulties sufficient to warrant a holy seriousness of spirit. Yet at length my life must terminate, no matter whether sooner or later, whether suddenly or by slow advances — terminate it must, in death. And it befits me, as a thinking being, not destitute of forethought, so to feel, and so to act, at all seasons, as one to whom God himself has said, "You are going to the grave!"

Such might be the influence of this simple but solemn lesson, were it habitually remembered in the course of life. But the impression would be greatly increased by reflecting with the same seriousness on the second consideration which is here presented, namely, "For in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."

2. That once in the grave, all our opportunities will cease. This statement is not to be understood as intimating either that the soul shall pass into a state of unconsciousness and oblivion, or that, being conscious, it shall exist in a state of passiveness or inactivity — for this were contrary as well to the argument here urged by the Preacher, as to the uniform and strong testimony of Scripture in many other places, where the state of the soul after death is expressly described.

We there read of two conscious states of existence, in one or other of which every human soul will hereafter be found:

1. A state of active improvement and exalted happiness in Heaven.

2. A state of rapid degeneracy and conscious wretchedness in Hell. In both these states, all the faculties of the mind, all the affections of the heart, all the powers of human nature will be in a state of active exercise. Nor will the acquisition here made of knowledge, whether good or evil, be forgotten. Memory will still do its busy work — awakening gratitude in one, and remorse in another class of characters forever. And there, as here, will their faculties be employed in devising schemes of good or of evil, and active exertion will follow to carry these schemes into effect. That the inhabitants of Heaven will be actively engaged in God's service, is one of the most delightful revelations of Scripture! They will serve him day and night in his temple. They will advance in the attainment of knowledge, as their faculties expand, and their opportunities of observation are multiplied. Instead of being doomed to endless sloth and inactivity, they will find their chief

happiness there, as here, in the diligent discharge of duty, as God's ministering servants. This doctrine, as it corresponds with the view which is given of the present occupations of the angels as ministering spirits, sent forth to execute God's purposes, and to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation — so is it in accordance with all that we know of the constitution of the human mind; which has been so framed as to be incapable of any real or lasting happiness apart from the exercise of its own faculties on objects, or in works suitable to its nature and capacity. When we are told, therefore, that in the grave there is neither work, nor device, nor wisdom, nor knowledge — we are not to understand that the active powers of the soul will be suspended by death, far less that death is destructive of human consciousness and thought; for this idea is in direct opposition to numerous express testimonies of Sacred Scripture in other places. More especially, the supposed annihilation of human consciousness or activity, so far from being an argument for greater diligence now, would, on the contrary, run counter to the very design for which the Preacher here urges it, by creating in our minds an utter recklessness as to the course of our life, seeing that in its consummation no difference would be made between the active and the slothful, the righteous and the wicked.

If at the hour of death, all were alike consigned to unconscious and inactive repose; if all knowledge and all wisdom were lost, then, on that supposition — then how could the approach of death be urged, as here it is urged, as a reason for increasing diligence in the accomplishment of our several works on earth. Might not rather the suggestion be rationally entertained by us all, which occurred even to the mind of an apostle in contemplating this supposed result, "What advantage it me," (that I have thought and labored, and suffered in the service of Christ,) "If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!" 1 Corinthians 15:32 This epicurean maxim of life would unquestionably be the most rational, were it so, that thought, and consciousness, and activity, terminate with our present existence. Instead of being an argument for "doing now what our hands find to do with our might" — such a supposition would deprive us of every reason and of every motive for exertion, except in so far as such exertion might conduce to our temporal comfort and pleasure. The real meaning of the last clause will be understood if we consider it in connection with the first: it is that work which our hands find to do on earth, in reference to which the Preacher declares that there is "no work, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave." We are not to take the latter clause absolutely and by itself — but we are to view it in connection with the subject of the Preacher's exhortation, by which it is at once limited and explained. Speaking of the work which our hands find to do, the Preacher declares that if it is not accomplished now — then it cannot be accomplished hereafter; that in reference to that work, there is no knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device, no opportunity, no means, no possibility of attending to it hereafter, if it is neglected now. This is the season appointed for a certain work; if that season is lost, there remains no opportunity of fulfilling our task. We shall continue to exist, to think, to feel, and to act — but that work which our hands find to do now, cannot be done hereafter — it must be done now or never. This is the plain import of the motive which is here urged: not that any of us shall ever be consigned to a state of unconsciousness — but that the work which is appointed to us now cannot be accomplished after death; it is the proper work of time, whose unchangeable results will be manifested in eternity.

Now if we take the most ordinary view of death, as that which separates us from every earthly privilege or pursuit — we shall be at no loss to discover the reasons on which the Preacher founds

the exhortation in the text. For conceive of death simply as the separation of our souls from the present state of being; as that which dissevers all our connections with the world; as that which withdraws us at once, and forever, from the family circle — from the friends whom we love — from the society in which we mingle — from everything that is known or done under the sun.

Conceive of death in this the simplest and plainest view that can be taken of it, and may we not well say with the Preacher, that in reference to everything which here engages the interest, or concerns the welfare of man, "There is no work, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave?" The die is cast — the world is no more — its business, its pleasures, its ordinances, its duties, its joys and sorrows, its opportunities, are all ended — they can neither be observed, nor improved, nor experienced by us more. And as this is in itself a solemn and a mournful thought, so is it one which every instance of death suggests. Look on a human body when life has left it, and what reflection more natural or more certain, than that its work on earth is over; that change as the world may, it can have no more experience of its vicissitudes; that no more will it appear in the place of human concourse, or mingle in the competition of earthly business, or partake in the joys or sorrows of the world; the ties which bind it to the earth are snapped asunder; it is to this world as if it had never been.

Affecting as such a separation from all earthly things must be in any view which we can take of it, it becomes the more solemn, when we consider it in connection with the views which Scripture teaches us to entertain of the present life — as a season of trial and probation for another life to come. For then this separation is not merely a disruption of those ties which bind man to man — but a withdrawal from the means of grace, and the opportunities of salvation. If it is true that, in reference to that work which our hands now find to do, there is neither knowledge, nor wisdom, nor device in the grave — then is it certain that salvation, unless it be gained now, must be lost forever. The means of grace will not be continued with us after death — we shall by that event be separated from Christian ordinances, withdrawn from the scene of trial, and introduced into a state of strict and unalterable retribution. As the tree falls, so it shall lie. Our characters, just such as they are at death, will be brought to judgment. Once separated from the earth, we have no longer the capacity either of deriving benefit from the means of grace which the living enjoy, or of bestowing any benefit on others. Our opportunities alike of improvement and of usefulness are past, and whatever in the way either of personal or public duty remains unfulfilled, must remain so forever.

Now it is from this consideration, of our entire separation at death both from the means of grace, and the opportunities of usefulness, that the Preacher draws the motive here urged for the instant and diligent doing of "whatever our hands find to do."

3. Let me solicit your attention to the duty here enjoined in some of its most important details, requesting each of you to apply it to yourselves, and to ask, with the seriousness and sincerity which so well befits us in the prospect of death, "What have I to do before I die?" Is there any one who, on seriously asking himself this question, can truly say, "I have nothing to do before I die." Many of us may be acting as if this were the case; allowing one day after another to pass away unimproved for the great ends for which our time is lengthened out; careless how life is spent, or solicitous only to secure as many of its fleeting pleasures and idle distinctions as we can. But in the midst of all this carelessness, I know that there is something in every man's bosom which will

respond to my statement, when I say, that he has in reality much to do before he can meet death with composure and peace! As much, indeed, as will afford sufficient scope for his utmost diligence, however long his term of life may be.

For, first, have you nothing to do, in the way of securing the everlasting salvation of your souls? This is the grand concern; and ought to be the chief business of every man on earth. If the soul is lost — all is lost. For making the strongest possible supposition, a supposition so strong that no worldling can ever hope to realize it, our Lord asks, "What is a man profited if he gains the whole world — and loses his soul?"

Now you know enough to awaken your serious thoughts on this matter, for you know that your souls are in danger — you know that many will finally perish. You must either be total strangers to your own hearts, or grievously deceiving yourselves as to their real condition — if you have not discovered many proofs of your own sinfulness and danger, such as should awaken you to immediate and anxious concern.

Think for one instant of the condition in which you really stand, as dying creatures, destined to an eternal world, and in danger of being lost forever. And I ask, whether the salvation of your souls is not a matter with which no earthly consideration should be allowed to interfere — a matter of such grave and solemn importance, that until this is settled — all other pursuits, whether of business or of amusement, should be postponed? For is it not the height of madness for a being possessed of reason to acknowledge that the salvation of his soul is yet at stake, and yet to live day after day, and week after week, without making any serious efforts to secure what his conscience tells him to be so necessary and so valuable? This is the chief thing that our hands find to do on earth. The Gospel places salvation within our reach; it declares the purpose and the plan of God for that end; it reveals an all-sufficient and most merciful Savior; it invites you to accept salvation at his hands as a free gift — a gift offered to every sinner that will accept of it, without money and without price. That salvation consists chiefly of two parts, which are equally necessary, and inseparable from one another. The first is, pardon, justification, or acceptance with God — the sole ground of which is, the righteousness of Christ. You need pardon — and here pardon is proclaimed. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin!" "In him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sin, according to the riches of his grace!" "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God for he will abundantly pardon!" But pardon is not the whole of this great salvation. It is a salvation from sin — as well as from suffering; from corruption — not less than from condemnation. It pacifies the conscience — but it also purifies the heart. "Except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." We must "be washed, we must be justified, we must be sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." This is the comprehensive salvation of the Gospel, and it cannot be divided; it must be wholly embraced — or wholly rejected. It is offered freely, and offered to all.

And, although salvation is not of works, the Gospel points to certain means which are necessary to be used in order to its being enjoyed; it invites you to draw near to God, and to pray to him; it calls upon you to repent of your past sins, and to break off every evil and every wicked way; it commands you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved; and to seek the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit, by whom alone you can be prepared for Heaven.

Here is enough to engage your utmost diligence; for although the terms of the Gospel are free, yet its privileges can only be enjoyed in the diligent use of the appointed means. They are not showered down on the listless, or slothful, or self-indulgent. On the contrary, the Savior requires his disciples to deny themselves, to take up the cross and follow him. They only will succeed in the Christian course, who lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily besets them, and run with patience and perseverance the race that is set before them.

If, on inquiring, you find that as yet you have no reason to be satisfied that the salvation of your soul is secured — this is the work which your hands find to do. It is your interest as well as your duty to do it with your might, to do it in good earnest, to do it instantly, to do it diligently and perseveringly. You must strive to enter in — you must press toward the mark.

Let every one put the question to himself: Have I obtained the salvation of my soul? Were I to be summoned away, am I prepared to stand, just as I am, at the judgment-seat of Christ? Can I say, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him until the great day?" If not, let no time be lost! Set about this great work with all your might! Give to it your most serious attention! Flee from the wrath to come — lay hold on eternal life — fall down on your knees before the mercy-seat. And placing your hope in that Savior who died to redeem sinners, plead the merits of his atonement, and cast yourselves on the mercy of a covenant God. Give no sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids, until you have solemnly and in God's presence, committed yourselves into his hands.

Secondly, Even the people of God have much to do — and the Preacher's admonition should stir them up to greater diligence in doing it. They have the remains of a corrupt nature, which must be subdued. They have evil tempers, or dispositions, or habits which require to be watched against and corrected. They are defective in knowledge, in faith, in love, in humility, in meekness, in all the graces and virtues which, as Christ's disciples, and as the heirs of a happy immortality, they are bound to exercise and to cultivate.

What Christian will not acknowledge with shame, how much he needs to be reminded of his duty in these respects . . .

how lamentably he has fallen short of his own resolutions in former times,

how frequently he has fallen into a state of backsliding,

how constantly he has lived below his privileges,

how little his actual experience accords with his profession and his hopes as an expectant of immortality, and

how much he needs to be frequently and earnestly stirred up to finish the work which is given him to do?

If he regards the state of his knowledge, he will find reason to confess that whereas by this time he might have been a teacher of others, he has need to be taught himself what be the first principles of the oracles of God.

If he regards the state of his affections, he finds that he is far from being what the apostle exhorts every Christian to become — spiritually-minded, which is life and peace.

If he regards his conduct, he sees much that requires amendment and calls for renewed repentance. He will acknowledge that after all that God has done for him, and all the professions and resolutions which he has himself made, he is down to this hour an "unprofitable servant."

Think then, professing Christians, on what your hands find to do. Ask yourselves in your closets, and pray that God may teach you to discover, what roots of bitterness are still springing up within you. Search out the plague of your own hearts. Bring forth every guilty passion from its concealment, and deliberately renounce it. Set yourselves vigorously to the work of subduing whatever is unholy or rebellious — and to nourish those graces of character which are most opposed to your natural dispositions.

If you are naturally proud — seek to mortify pride, and humble yourselves both before God and man. If you are naturally morose, or selfish — seek to become loving and kind. This is the work which your hands find to do, and the further you advance in it, the riper will you be for the glory that is to follow.

If we would meet death, not only in safety, but with comfort — we must live in the habitual expectation of it. This expectation is abundantly reasonable, for the event is certain, and we know not how soon or how suddenly it may overtake us.

We know not when it may occur — this year, this week, this night.

We know not where or in what situation it may find us — at home, on our own pillow, in the midst of our weeping family and friends, or in the highway, or the solitary desert, or in a foreign land.

We know not by what means it may be accomplished, whether by the silent undermining of slow disease, or by the violent attack of some malignant malady, or by the hand of our fellow-men, or by the convulsions of the earth, or by the perils of the deep.

We know nothing but the naked truth — we must die. The certainty of death is one motive and a strong one — but the uncertainty in which we are left as to the time and situation and means of death, gives it still greater urgency. Our Lord refers to both when he says, "Be ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man will come."

If we would meet death with comfort — we must have our treasure in Heaven, and our hearts there also. We must be much conversant with the invisible world, and well assured of eternal life, and habituated to the contemplation of glory. If our treasure is on earth — our heart will be there also. If our hearts cling to the world — no wonder that they revolt from that final separation. Hence the regret and alarm, the tumult of grief and fear, by which many are agitated, when they are first impressed with the conviction that they are dying.

Some even of God's people, who are really safe, as being united to Christ and renewed in the spirit of their minds, have, nevertheless, no comfort — but on the contrary, much distress and uneasiness in the prospect of death. The reason is, that they are so little conversant with Heaven. This is the grand consideration. There are other circumstances that may serve to allay the fear of death — but the hope of Heaven alone can overcome it. We must be spiritually-minded, if we

would have peace in that trying hour. Our hearts must be very much in Heaven, before we can be reconciled to leave this green earth, and to enter the dark valley. And the means of raising our thoughts and affections heavenward, are frequent meditation, and fervent prayer.

Lastly, Let each of us, while we are attentive to the salvation of our souls and the moral improvement of our characters, remember the apostolic injunction, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." We have important duties to discharge towards our fellow-men, so long as we continue in the midst of them. The time is fast approaching which will put an end to our opportunities of doing them good. There is no work of this kind in the grave — our season for benefitting our families, and friends, and country, is now or never.

"Set your house in order," said the prophet, "for you shall die and not live!" This may refer, in the first instance, to the regulation of our worldly affairs — a duty which ought not to be negligently postponed, so as to leave the mind harassed with secular anxiety at a time when its whole energy should be reserved for spiritual employment. And one, which includes in it, not only the settlement of our domestic concerns at the close of life — but a due regulation of our business during the whole course of it, so as that we may not involve ourselves, by speculation and adventure, in such a labyrinth of engagements and cares as may make us anxious and uneasy in the prospect of death. But still more does it refer to those moral and spiritual duties which we owe to our children and friends. Let us not delay doing any good work which we have it in our present power to accomplish. Have we children to instruct? Have we friends to counsel, or comfort, or rebuke? Have we the means of relieving the needs of our poorer brethren? Have we an opportunity of promoting the great cause of religion at home or abroad? Have we heard or read of any scheme which commends itself to our judgment, as likely to promote the welfare of our fellow-men?

Then let us cheerfully put our hand to the work! Let us give our time, our substance, our active exertions to these objects — acting in the spirit, and imitating the example of our Lord himself, who, as a reason for the unwearied diligence with which he prosecuted his labors, said, "I must work the work of Him that sent me while it is day. The night comes in which no man can work."

Thus prepared . . .

united to Christ the Savior by a simple faith,

reconciled to God by his cross,

renewed and animated by his Holy Spirit,

having our treasure in Heaven, and our heart there also

— we may, with humble hope, meet the king of terrors, and enter into the rest which remains for the people of God. And then, all dangers past, all temptations overcome, all enemies subdued, "we shall forever be with the Lord! Therefore, comfort one another with these words."

## S. A Meek and Quiet Spirit

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A Meek and Quiet Spirit James Buchanan, 1840 "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God" 1 Peter 3:4 The character which is so exquisitely delineated in these few simple words, is not the result of mere natural temperament or constitution — but the product of ripe and mature Christian experience. It is formed by slow degrees, under the teaching of God's Word and Spirit, and the long-continued discipline of his providence. It is lamentably defective in many, whose personal religion cannot be charitably doubted — and is seldom acquired in the earlier stages of the Christian course. It resembles the mellow flavor and sweetness of fruit which has been fully matured, and is ready to be gathered.

Let me describe and illustrate the spirit which is here commended; contrasting it, as we proceed, with the various dispositions to which it is opposed; and then adduce some reasons and motives fitted to persuade you to the acquirement and cultivation of it. The spirit here described may be regarded under two distinct aspects:

first, as it has reference to our piety towards God;

secondly, as it relates to our charity towards fellow-men. In the one respect, it ranks under our religious duty — in the other, under our relative duty.

1. It is obviously a part of our religious duty to cherish at all times a meek and quiet spirit towards God. His Character should secure our heartfelt reverence, and his Will should secure our quiet and unquestioning submission. We should be as little children in God's hands, regarding him as our Father in Heaven, and feeling towards him as a confiding child feels towards a kind parent, whose worth he reveres, whose love he cannot question, and whose will he would not resist for the world.

More particularly, the believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit in reference to God's Teaching. He may find, assuredly he shall find, in reading that Word which contains the revelation of God's mind and will, many truths which are too apt, on their being first proposed, to excite his angry opposition, and to raise questions in his mind, such as that of our Lord's followers, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" The Christian must learn many a hard lesson from the mouth of God — many a lesson which is intended for "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5.) And these lessons, including all the fundamental truths of his Word, never can be learned or received unless the mind is brought to yield itself up entirely to God's teaching — until the disciple becomes as a little child, and sits like Mary at the feet of Jesus, hearing his word. In this respect, a meek and quiet spirit stands opposed to all pride of intellect, and especially to that rebellious temper which is disposed to raise questions and start objections — instead of simply hearing and believing whatever the Lord speaks.

Free inquiry after the truth of God is not forbidden — far from it; but it must be a calm, meek, and submissive thoughtfulness, such as befits the unerring wisdom of our Instructor, and our own

ignorance and weakness; an inquiry, whose only object is to ascertain God's truth, and, on its being ascertained, to receive and embrace it — however different it may be from our preconceived opinions, or opposed to our natural prejudices.

Such an inquiry is best and most successfully conducted, when the spirit of a man is thoroughly subdued by a sense of God's majesty, and awed into quiet submission by the conviction of his unerring wisdom. Then, instead of exclaiming in the heat and violence of our exasperated feelings, "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" or, "Who is the Lord that we should obey him?" — we shall be ready meekly and simply to ask, "What has the Lord said?" or, "Lord, what will you have me to do?" The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit in reference to God's Accusations and Rebukes. When he reads the Word, and marks the language in which God reproves him of sin; when he considers the humbling view which is there presented of his own vileness, and the displeasure which God has expressed against him — his proud heart may be too often disposed to question the accuracy of such representations, or, at all events, their application to himself. The unrenewed mind cannot endure to have such accusations closely pressed upon it — it spurns with indignation at the charges which God has deliberately stated. But the disciple, whose mind has been subdued by the grace of God, will listen even to these humbling portions of God's Word, with a meek and quiet spirit. He is satisfied on the one hand, that God, as he cannot err or be deceived, can have no disposition to inflict unnecessary pain; and on the other side, that, as his sin must be infinitely more heinous in God's sight than it can be in his own, so it is beneficial for him to know what God thinks of it; and wise to look on it in the same light. When others rail at the Word of God — he is found meekly reading it. While others are loud in declaiming against the passages which are offensive to their taste — he is quietly digesting them, and imbibing their wholesome truth into the very frame of his spirit. While others seek to adapt and accommodate God's Word to their own likings — he is meekly and quietly seeking to conform his character to God's Word. In this respect, a meek and quiet spirit stands opposed to pride, to self-righteousness, to vain-glory; it begins in penitence, and ends in habitual humility of heart. The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit, in reference to God's Dispensations Towards Him. In the course of God's providence, he may be raised to great prosperity — or reduced to deep poverty and distress. In either case, he sees no reason to change his state of mind — he is meek and quiet still. When an unsanctified man is elevated, especially if it is suddenly and unexpectedly, to affluence, or honor, or rank — he is too apt to swell into self-importance, as if a little gold were sufficient to give him new dignity, or a little honor to add to his intrinsic worth: "they grow fat as the heifer at grass, and neigh like stallions," (Jeremiah 50:11.) But the true disciple, while he undervalues none of God's mercies, will join trembling with his mirth. And while he is surrounded with prosperity, will remember chiefly the additional responsibilities which are thereby imposed on him: his own weakness for so great a trust, and the solemn account which he must sooner or later render. And on the very pinnacle of worldly joy, he will seek to cherish a meek and quiet spirit towards God. But meekness is more peculiarly appropriate in the season of adversity and trial. Such seasons every Christian has experienced, and many yet expect. It is through great tribulation that we must enter the kingdom. If all men are born to trouble — the Christian is doubly sure of his share, for "whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." At such seasons, and especially if the trial is very severe, or suddenly sent, or long continued — the disciple is in God's school, learning a practical lesson of no easy attainment, even the lesson of meekness and quietness towards God. His clearest duty is that of resigned

submission, of uncomplaining acquiescence in God's will. But alas! the self-evident clearness of the duty is far from insuring the disposition to obey! Instead of meekness towards God — there is too often an ill-concealed and ever struggling rebellion against his will. And instead of quietness — there is too often a querulous complaining, a fretful utterance of impatient feelings, equally dishonoring to God and injurious to his own peace of mind. God may say of many a professing disciple as he did of Ephraim, "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus — you have chastised me and I was chastised — as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," (Jeremiah 31:18.) Or as he said of the Israelites, on another occasion, "Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net!" (Isaiah 51:20.) A bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, or a wild bull caught in a net — are but too faithful emblems of many when they are first seized with affliction. They struggle against, and would gladly burst the bands which God has laid upon them — and when they cannot extricate themselves by any violent effort, they are too apt to sink into the habit of grieving and murmuring under their trials.

It is not astonishing that this should be the case with worldly men — for they have no resource except what worldly peace and prosperity can afford. But it ought not to be the case with God's people, who know that every painful dispensation with which they are visited, proceeds from unerring wisdom and infinite love, and that it is a part of that discipline by which God is seeking to purify them, and prepare them for Heaven.

It is long, however, even in a Christian mind, before the habit of unquestioning submission to God's will is formed. In the earlier stages of his course, the believer is apt . . .

to be impatient of the cross which he is appointed to bear;

to question either the necessity or the wisdom of its being imposed upon him, and

to doubt the love of God when it is manifested in the way of chastisement. But as he advances, and in proportion as he is suitably exercised by his affliction, his mind is subdued. He feels that God has taken the management of his case into His own hands, and by ways which seem hard or mysterious — but which are really beneficial, is seeking to "humble him, and to prove him, and to show him what is in his heart." He learns by experience — what he was slow to learn by the mere reading of the Word, however clearly it was there set before him. And thus he comes to cherish habitually a "meek and quiet spirit" — a spirit which neither disputes the necessity, nor questions the wisdom, nor doubts the love of God's dispensations towards him — but which leads him to place himself entirely in God's hands, to be dealt with according to His good pleasure, not doubting, that "all things shall work together for good to those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose." He feels the pressure of affliction, and may even be stunned by its unexpected stroke — but still he says with the Psalmist, "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" Psalms 39:9

Herein he resembles his blessed Lord, who was "meek and lowly in heart." "He was oppressed and he was afflicted — yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." (Isaiah 53:7.)

2. The spirit which is here commended, may be viewed in another aspect, as it has respect to our fellow-men. The same meek and quiet spirit which leads the believer to submit to God, as his Father, will also lead him to act towards his fellow-men as brethren, in such a way as to give no

unjust offence — to do no real injury — or to occasion no unnecessary uneasiness to any one of them. I do not mean to say that any Christian ever did or ever will pass through the world without offending the prejudices, or exciting the enmity and opposition of worldly men. No, for then "the offence of the Cross had ceased;" "it is enough for the servant that he be as his Master, and the disciple as his Lord." If they were offended by the perfect Master, much more may they be offended in his weak followers, who "are as sheep in the midst of wolves." But while they ought not to shrink from duty, by reason of the opposition which they must encounter in the discharge of it — they should seek to maintain throughout, not a restless, irritable, and clamorous temper — but a meek and quiet spirit; a spirit actuated not by hatred — but by love; not shrinking from opposition when it must be encountered — but still less courting it or stirring it up; not delighted with the world's noisy strife — but with the quiet delights of privacy and peace. This meek and quiet spirit should pervade all our interactions with others. The believer is called to exercise it in reference to the dispositions and tempers of those with whom he associates. These may often be irritable and violent; he may be scorned and reviled; he may be regarded with jealousy, or envy, or malice. And even where no such malignant feelings are displayed, he may be annoyed by infirmities of temper, such as call for the exercise of unwearied patience. Still, if his own mind is thoroughly subdued, if he is truly humble — he may be able to preserve his peace of mind in the midst of external discord, and feel how sweet a thing it is to be meek and quiet within. The storm that rages without, the falling rain, and roaring thunder, and tempestuous wind — only serve to make the humble cottager feel how sweet and comfortable is home. Just so, a meek and quiet spirit feels its own happiness the more, when it witnesses the fearful strife of ungoverned and unhallowed passion. The reason why we are so seldom able to maintain this meek and quiet spirit in such circumstances, is that our minds are not thoroughly subdued — there is still the accursed root of pride in our hearts, which embitters our feelings and supplies fuel for the fire of strife and contention.

If we were thoroughly meek, we would also be perfectly quiet. But we often speak unadvisedly, and one unguarded word leads to altercation, and altercation ends in strife. We reprove the temper of others, and often in such a way, as to ruffle our own! Oh! that we could remember the words of the apostle, "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory — but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves;" and the example of our blessed Lord, who "endured the contradiction of sinners against himself" — lest we should weary and faint in our minds! The believer is called to exercise a meek and quiet spirit towards others, in reference to the personal injuries which they may have committed against himself. Injury provokes resentment — and resentment prompts revenge. The first impulse of every unsubdued mind, is to render evil for evil; and few minds are so thoroughly sanctified as to be exempted altogether from the temptation to retaliate. But the hour of trial is the Christian's time for duty — he must then feel and act as a new creature — as a child of God. If pride swells within him, it must be crushed. If resentment arises, it must be so checked as that he "shall be angry and yet sin not." If revenge prompts retaliation either by tongue or hand, it must be steadily restrained. His spirit is then tested whether it be meek and quiet or not.

Let him in such an hour remember his calm and kind Master, who, "when he was reviled, reviled not again — when he suffered he threatened not — but committed himself unto Him who judges righteously." And let him, with reverence towards God, and with pity towards his offending brother,

remember that solemn declaration, "Vengeance is Mine — I will repay! says the Lord."

Many of our heaviest afflictions come to us through the channel of human agency. In such cases, as has been already observed, we are too prone to overlook the appointment of God — and to resent the injury that is done to us. And especially when we are insulted and opposed on account of our religion, we are too prone to cherish indignation under the cloak of Christian zeal. We think the cause of God and the good of our enemies themselves require that we should not tamely submit to injury, or fail to lift a bold and indignant testimony against error and sin. And it is unquestionably our duty to avouch the Lord as our God in the face of all opposition, and to "be zealous" in advancing his cause. But the zeal which the Gospel enjoins is such as proceeds from love, and is united with humility and meekness. The zeal which many professing Christians display is too often the zeal of party or of pride — haughty, intemperate, clamorous. It is the zeal which our Lord rebuked, when he said to his disciples, "You know not what spirit you are of." The pure flame of Christian love must not be mixed with the wildfire of human passion, "the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." The zeal of a proud professor makes him acrimonious and loud in condemning the infirmities of others; but a meek and quiet spirit will, like David, retire and weep, and pray for them, "Rivers of waters run down my eyes because they keep not your law."

Fervent zeal may well consist with a modest and humble estimate of ourselves, and a charitable and gentle spirit towards our neighbor. None can be more zealous than Christ — and yet none so meek and lowly as he.

Let me now very briefly adduce some reasons and motives fitted to persuade you to the acquirement and cultivation of this spirit. It is here described as a beautiful and lovely disposition of mind — it is called an ornament. Wherever a meek and quiet spirit is consistently exhibited in the character of a Christian — it is universally felt and owned to be most attractive and engaging. Those professors who lack it, or who are as yet greatly deficient in it, are on that account less esteemed — their society is often felt to be disagreeable rather than pleasing — their conversation is not so sweet or refreshing. But a meek and quiet spirit, maintained under all changes of circumstances, and under every provocation, is felt even by unrenewed men to be the noblest proof of the power of practical religion. It is very precious in the sight of God. He regards it, not indeed as meritorious — but as agreeable to his will, and a copy taken from the pattern of his well-beloved Son. Accordingly, a very large portion of his Word is devoted to the inculcation of those principles by which this character is formed; and a large part of his providential discipline is designed to produce and strengthen it in our souls. "God resists the proud — but gives grace to the humble. To that man will he look, even to him that is humble and of a contrite spirit."

It is thus precious in God's sight, because it is closely connected with, and conducive to, the peace of our own minds, and the order of the Church, and of the world. Personal, domestic, and public peace is promoted by it; and he who is the God of peace and the God of order, delights in that whereby general happiness is advanced. No one can estimate how much his own personal comfort depends on his possessing a meek and quiet spirit. Such a spirit easily endures much which frets and discomposes those who are less thoroughly subdued. An affront which exasperates a proud man — a meek man calmly suffers. An injury which revenge resents — meekness overlooks or forgets. And trials which scarcely ruffle the composure of a quiet and contented mind — are sufficient to toss the wicked as on the waves of a troubled and boisterous

sea.

Whenever we find ourselves violently discomposed, fretful, impatient, or wretched — we may rest assured that our misery arises much more from the distempered state of our souls, than from any external cause. We should seek relief, by acquiring that meek and quiet spirit, which will raise us above the influence of external circumstances, or enable us calmly to endure them.

Finally, let it be remembered that this temper of mind is not natural to any of us — it must be acquired and cultivated. Nor is it a plant of easy and speedy growth — it is the gradual product of much discipline and of growing Christian experience. It seldom springs up, so as to reach maturity, until after many a storm has rooted and established it — nor even then, unless it be implanted and watered by the Spirit of God. "The fruit of the Spirit is meekness, gentleness, long-suffering." "Experience works patience." "The work of righteousness is peace: and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever." (Isaiah 32:17.)

## S. CONSIDERATION

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CONSIDERATION James Buchanan, 1840

"In the day of prosperity be happy, but in the day of adversity CONSIDER: God has made the one as well as the other." Ecclesiastes 7:14

There is a beautiful harmony between the Word and the Providence of God. When Providence smiles, the Word allows us to be joyful — when Providence frowns, the Word calls us to serious thoughtfulness. The scope and strain of God's revealed will, accord with the natural tendency and apparent design of His dispensations towards us. He neither requires us to rejoice in what is evil — nor to grieve for what is good. It is true, we are taught as Christians, to deny ourselves in the midst of outward prosperity — and to rejoice in the midst of tribulations. But it is only because self-denial in the one case, and joy in the other — are the proper fruits and manifestations of religious principle, and the means of promoting our highest ultimate good.

There is no such thing in the Bible as a disparagement of what is naturally good, or a recommendation of what is naturally evil — except in so far as these are, respectively, injurious or favorable to our true and lasting happiness. We are not required to take bitter for sweet — or sweet for bitter. But as prosperity, which is joyful in itself, may become ruinous to our spiritual interests — we are warned against its dangers. While we are taught that adversity, however bitter — is the wholesome medicine by which our spiritual health may be restored and preserved. In a word, the Bible regards each of these states chiefly as it respects their moral influence on our hearts. And while it admits that the one is joyful, and the other painful in itself — it teaches us that each has its peculiar dangers, and proper uses — and that in both we are to have a supreme regard to those great religious principles which alone can render prosperity safe, and convert sorrow into joy.

We are not to conclude, then, from the antithetic expression of the preacher, either that we may not be joyful in the day of adversity — or considerate in the day of prosperity. On the contrary, we learn both from the lessons and examples of Scripture, that God's people have much reason to be wary and thoughtful while they walk in the sunshine of temporal prosperity — and that even in the darkest night of adversity, it is alike their privilege and duty to rejoice. A long season of uninterrupted prosperity is accompanied with so many dangers; and productive, in many cases, of so much evil — that the disciple, who really regards the salvation of his soul as the one thing that is needful, will find that a holy seriousness of spirit, and a habit of thoughtful consideration, are essential to the right use and improvement of that condition, and to his preservation from the evils which are incidental to it. While, a season of uninterrupted adversity, if it is the blessed means either of commencing or of renewing his communion with God, of implanting, for the first time, in his soul, or of maturing and strengthening the graces of the Christian character — will be an occasion of joy, such as the world can neither give nor take away.

It is not prosperity and adversity, considered simply in themselves — but the presence or the absence of religion, in either case, that tells mainly on our present happiness, or on our eternal welfare. Without religion, prosperity becomes our ruin. While with religion, sorrow is turned into joy. But while this is the light in which these two states are for the most part presented to our view in the Word of God — we are nowhere taught to reverse the dictates of nature so as to regard prosperity in itself as evil; or adversity as in itself good. On the contrary, prosperity is declared to be a proper source of joy, and a strong motive for gratitude. While adversity is described as, for the present, not joyous but grievous. And accordingly, the duties which are peculiarly appropriate to each, and the exercises which they respectively require, are stated in express terms, and illustrated by beautiful examples. In prosperity, a cheerful gratitude, a bountiful charity, and self-denial, devoting all of God's gifts to his glory and the good of our fellow-men. In adversity, a resigned and submissive spirit, meek contentment, combined, not with an anxious care — but with a serious thoughtfulness, and a considerate regard of God's dealings towards us, such as may best qualify us for reaping the fruits of affliction, and enjoying religious comforts under its heaviest pressure. In the day of ADVERSITY we are called to serious consideration on many accounts. Without this, we are in danger of allowing God's dispensations towards us to pass away unimproved, and of forfeiting the precious benefits which they are designed to confer. The whole advantage of affliction depends on a due Scriptural consideration of it. It does not operate as a charm, nor are its wholesome effects produced otherwise than through the medium of our own thoughtfulness. In all His dispensations God has a regard to our rational nature, and addresses himself to the thinking principle within us. And it is not until that principle has been awakened into lively exercise, and directed to Scriptural views of divine truth — that we can either expect to enjoy solid comfort under affliction — or to be sanctified by means of it. It is only to "those who are exercised thereby," that affliction becomes the means of producing "the peaceable fruits of righteousness." And as on these accounts we are called to serious consideration of the day of adversity, as it offers many important and impressive subjects to our thoughts, some of which we shall now enumerate, with the view of directing you in your private meditations.

1. In the day of adversity, you should consider your adversity itself, not turning your mind away from it, because it is distressing to you, nor allowing your thoughts to dwell on more pleasing topics, with the view of forgetting what has befallen you; but steadily and of deliberate purpose, looking at your afflictions in all their real magnitude and probable consequences. This direction may at first sight appear to be unnecessary, as affliction, especially when it is severe, makes itself to be felt, and can hardly fail to command attention. To a certain extent this is true; yet we believe it will be found, that the mind is often unwilling to take a deliberate view of its afflictions; as a man on the eve of bankruptcy is too apt to shut his eyes to the fact of his danger — or as a man smitten with mortal disease is unwilling to be convinced that his recovery is hopeless — and the consequence of this is, that the mind is not suitably impressed by God's dispensations, nor qualified to derive from them the benefit which they might otherwise confer. The reason why we ask you to consider your actual condition, and especially the nature and probable consequences of your affliction, is, that so long as you refuse to consider it, or take only a partial view of it — you do not read aright the lesson which God has placed before you — a lesson which you cannot understand if you turn your thoughts away from it. And thus it is that worldly men contrive to frustrate the beneficial design of affliction in their own case, and seek to obliterate from the hearts of their friends the impression which it is fitted to produce. They have recourse to business, to

society, to change of scene, to frivolous amusements — with the avowed purpose of diverting their thoughts from afflictions which they cannot endure to think of with calm deliberation. And they are ever ready to prescribe to others the only remedy which they have tried for themselves. But should this advice be offered to any one of Christ's disciples, we beg him to remember that he has a remedy provided for him, of which the worldly man knows nothing — a remedy, whose efficacy depends not on affliction being forgotten — but on its being duly considered; a remedy, which so far from requiring a diversion of thought as essential to our comfort — acts through the medium of thought, and makes affliction itself subservient to our good. The Christian is not precluded, indeed, from availing himself of any benefit that might arise from change of air or scene, viewed simply as a means of relieving him, under God's blessing, from the physical weakness or disease under which he labors. This may even be his duty — a duty involved in the great law of self-preservation, and in attending to it, he may have a supreme view to the glory of God, his own spiritual improvement, and future usefulness in the world. But he is solemnly debarred from seeking relief to his soul by banishing the thought of affliction and death.

Oh! it is a dangerous error, it may be even a fatal error — to act on the supposition that we may lawfully seek relief by forgetting the calamities that have befallen us. These calamities are warnings addressed to us as rational beings, and, as such, they loudly claim our serious consideration. To have recourse to business, to society, to change of scene, or to frivolous amusement, in such circumstances, is to "despise the chastening of the Lord." It is to do violence to those feelings which affliction naturally produces, and which instinctively point to retirement and reflection as appropriate to our condition. And notwithstanding the favor with which this course is regarded by worldly men, it will be found to be opposed to the common sentiments of society, if it were pursued at those seasons when our sorrows are the most overwhelming.

If a husband were seen in the theater on the evening of that day which witnessed the death or burial of his beloved wife, or child; or if a man smitten with poverty were seen to join in the dance — would not the moral sense of the whole community be offended? And yet if the recipe is good for anything, it should stand us in stead in our greatest extremities. No! Adversity is a serious thing! It calls for solemn consideration. It never can be improved nor endured as it ought, unless we think of it, and learn the lesson which it affords.

View it in whatever light you please; consider it as a trial fitted to exercise your minds; or as a discipline designed to improve them; or as a chastisement for past transgression; or as a preparation for future duty — in every aspect in which it can be contemplated, it claims a thoughtful consideration. And, if this is refused, it will harden the heart, and all the more if it be superseded by the cares and pleasures of the world. Were no better remedy provided for the afflicted, or were the mind to brood over its sorrows while the remedy is unknown or overlooked — then, indeed, it might be our wisest course to seek diversion in the world. But a remedy has been provided; and the Christian disciple can well afford to look on his affliction in all its magnitude, without incurring the least hazard of troubling the springs of his comfort. If he falls into melancholy or dejection, it is only because he omits something from his consideration which the Bible presses on his attention.

2. In the day of adversity, you should consider from whose hand it has been sent to you. It comes direct from the hand of God.

Intermediate agencies may have been employed in inflicting it:

a cherished family member may have been the messenger of disease;

a treacherous friend may have been the cause of bankruptcy;

an avowed enemy may have been the author of reproach and shame;

Satan himself may have been allowed to smite you. But through whatever secondary agency it may have been conveyed, adversity comes from God's hand!

"I form the light — and create darkness; I make peace — and create evil. I the Lord, do all these things." Isaiah 45:7 "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" Lamentations 3:38 "Shall we receive good at the hand of God — and shall we not receive evil?" Job 2:10

"Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" Exodus 4:11

"See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides Me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of My hand!" Deuteronomy 32:39

"The LORD brings death and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up. The LORD sends poverty and wealth; He humbles and he exalts." 1 Samuel 2:6-7 "This is what the LORD says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people . . ." Jeremiah 32:42 "When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?" Amos 3:6 "For He wounds, but He also binds up; He injures, but His hands also heal." Job 5:18 From these and many other passages it is plain that temporal affliction is ascribed to God in the Holy Scriptures, and no one who acknowledges God's Providence at all, can fail to believe that the numerous calamities of human life are permitted, appointed, and overruled by the Supreme Governor of the world. This is a consideration of great practical importance, and should be seriously weighed in the day of adversity. For first of all, it assures us that our afflictions are neither imposed by a fatal necessity, nor produced by the uncertain vicissitudes of chance — but come forth from the hand of one who is infinitely wise and just and good.

Secondly, it is fitted to minister at least a certain degree of comfort, inasmuch as it demonstrates that we have the security of all his attributes against the infliction of greater or more protracted suffering than is required by the necessities of our case, and the rules of perfect justice and wisdom and love.

Thirdly, it teaches us in many of our afflictions, and those which it is indeed most difficult to bear, to look beyond, and to rise above, the consideration of the mere human agency by which they have been inflicted. I refer to such as are brought on us through the malice of our fellow-men, in regard to which we are too apt to alone consider the secondary agency through which they fall upon us — instead of steadily contemplating God as addressing to us, through that agency, the warnings and lessons which we need to learn and improve. Thus it is that this class of afflictions — comprising calumny and defamation, extortion, oppression, and such like — are too little improved, and, indeed, seldom fail to produce an exasperation of spirit, diametrically opposed to that submissive temper which other afflictions, recognized as coming more directly from the hand of God, are fitted

to produce.

Whereas, did we consider all afflictions, of whatever kind, as emanating from the unerring heart of loving Father — we would find, that even those which the hand or the tongue of man inflicts — are a wholesome discipline, and means of spiritual improvement.

And, finally, did we habitually bear in mind the consideration which I am now pressing on your attention, we should be the more disposed, and the better prepared for inquiring, with becoming earnestness, into the reasons which may exist for such dispensations, and the grand ends and uses for which they are designed. Let us remember, then, that every affliction, through whatever channel it may flow, comes to us ultimately from God's hand.

3. In the day of adversity, you should consider the causes and occasions of suffering in general — and especially, inquire into the causes and occasions of your own affliction at the present time. As to the general cause of all suffering, it is sin, and nothing else than sin. But for this accursed thing, there would be . . .

no affliction in the world,

no painful disease,

no abject poverty,

no hostile violence,

no death,

no damnation.

Sin is the root of bitterness — and no wonder that its fruits are bitter. Rest assured, that God has not allowed so much suffering to prevail in the world from mere indifference to its welfare, or from any disposition to cruelty. No! "God is love" — and your happiness is dearer to him than any other object — his own glory excepted. All suffering is designed to mark his holy displeasure against sin, and to vindicate the honor of that law which God, as the righteous governor of the world, has prescribed for the regulation of our hearts and lives. When viewed in this light, the sufferings which prevail to such a melancholy extent in the world, are fitted to deepen our conviction of the odious nature of sin. For when we reflect, on the one hand, on the infinite love of God, and his delight in the happiness of his creatures — and consider, on the other hand, how that, notwithstanding this love, God has permitted, nay, appointed so many evils to befall us — Oh! are we not sensible that sin, which is the cause of all suffering, must be, in his estimation, a most offensive and loathsome thing! When a warm-hearted and kind father, who finds his chief delight in the bosom of his family, lifts the rod, and smites his beloved child for no reason? Does not the very warmth of his love, when viewed in connection with the severity of his chastisements, demonstrate that he abhors the disobedience which imposed on him the necessity of doing violence to his own feelings, by inflicting pain on the object of his fondest regards? Just so it is with God. And his severe but beneficial and needful discipline, is a signal proof and manifestation of the hatred with which he regards transgression, seeing that for a time that displeasure seems to overcome all his delight in human happiness, and his reluctance to the infliction of pain.

But, in the day of adversity, the Christian disciple should not content himself with this general view of the cause of all affliction. He should inquire into the special reasons that may exist, in his past life, or in the present condition of his own soul — for God's dispensations towards him. He should consider "why the Lord is thus contending with him" — what root of bitterness there is still in his heart, or what cause of offence in his life, which can have called for the providential warnings and chastisements with which he has been visited. And, in short, whether any, and what cause can be assigned for his own personal and peculiar trials.

I am aware that, while all suffering proceeds from one general cause, namely, our inherent and actual sinfulness in the sight of God — yet it does by no means follow, that the special afflictions with which any one of God's people may be visited, can in all cases be ascribed to any particular dereliction of duty, and decay of personal religion; or that we are warranted to regard those who are visited with the severest and most protracted sufferings, as being, on that account, marked out as the greatest sinners. Absolutely not! Affliction is not dealt out in this state of probation on the principles of strict retribution; nor in the case of God's people, although, in some sense, it is still the consequence, is it to be regarded as the penal desert of sin.

God has other ends in view than merely to recall to their remembrance the sins of their past lives. He often sends trials upon them with the view of preparing them for future duty — of fitting them for more extensive usefulness — and of promoting, in general, their more rapid progress in the path of sanctification, and their fitness for a speedy translation to glory. Still, even when affliction is viewed in this light, as a preparatory discipline of the soul, it implies and presupposes certain defects in our character, which ought to be supplied — certain remaining corruptions which should be subdued. And, in most cases, the Christian disciple will be at no loss to discover, in his own state and character, many sufficient reasons for God's dispensations towards him.

Now it is of great importance that he should consider these in the day of adversity — that he should ascertain what are the defects of his character, and what are the special reasons of his present affliction, in order that, knowing the plague of his own heart, he may apply himself vigorously, and in right earnest, to the work of his high calling. Let him, in such circumstances, consider whether he may not have been gradually, and almost insensibly, falling from his first love — whether he has not become less spiritual in the ordinary frame of his thoughts and affections — whether he has not become, more than he once was, a stranger at the throne of grace, or more of a formalist in the exercise of prayer — whether he has not been neglecting some duty, or addicted to some self-indulgence, or in one respect or other exhibiting the marks of a decaying piety, or walking as a backslider from the Lord. And if, on making such an inquiry, he see cause to conclude that it is not now "with him as it was in months past, when the candle of the Lord shone upon him" — Oh! let him acknowledge the seasonableness of God's interposition — his faithfulness in fulfilling his promise of needful discipline — and his own sinfulness in provoking the Lord to anger, even though he is one of his own adopted and forgiven children.

Most assuredly he will feel, unless, indeed, he is one that "turns the grace of God into licentiousness," that the sins of God's people are in some respects more heinous than those of unregenerate men, who have never enjoyed the same privileges, nor made the same professions, nor offered up the same prayers. And feeling how much his sins are aggravated by the consideration of God's love, and his own ingratitude — he will regard God's chastisements as a

reason for the deepest humiliation of heart, for unreserved confession of sin, and for earnest prayer — not so much that his affliction may be removed, as that the cause of it may be taken away.

4. In the day of adversity, you should consider the design and end of affliction, or the uses which it is intended to serve. As it proceeds neither from blind necessity, nor from casual accident — but from the hand of your Omniscient Governor and Judge — so nothing can be more certain than that it is designed for the accomplishment of some great and useful purpose. Now the design of affliction is expressly revealed in the Word of God. He has condescended to explain the reasons of his dealings with you — and it is alike your duty and your privilege to consider and to concur in his declared design. The general end of affliction, as it is explained in God's Word, is the moral and spiritual improvement of believers — in other words, their progressive sanctification, and their preparation for glory. Oh! how important must the right use of affliction be, if it is intended to terminate in such a result. It stands connected with our everlasting welfare — with all that we can enjoy on earth, and all that we hope for in Heaven. But more particularly, the day of adversity is intended for our INSTRUCTION. The Lord's rod has a voice which speaks to us lessons of heavenly wisdom; and, therefore, we are required "to hear the rod, and Him who has appointed it." (Micah 6:9.) "The rod and reproof give wisdom." (Proverbs 29:15.) It presents to our minds many of the same great truths which are declared in Scripture — but which we may have overlooked, or failed rightly to understand — until they were pressed on our attention, and made the matter of our personal experience, in the day of trouble.

Thus, it teaches most impressively, that great Scriptural truth of the vanity of the world, and its insufficiency as the portion of rational and immortal beings. This is a truth which might almost be regarded as self-evident; yet it is one which is very slowly and reluctantly admitted by the young disciple, and which can only be effectually impressed on his mind, and unfolded in all its extent, by the experience of disappointment and sorrow. In the case of unrenewed men, the world is the only portion which is valued — the object of their supreme affections — the source of their highest enjoyments. When the day of adversity arrives, even they are made to feel that the world is a poor and empty thing — "a broken cistern which can hold no water." But so long as they know nothing of a better portion, they are glad to cling to it, notwithstanding all their experience of its worthlessness. If, however, at such a season, they have their attention directed to the better portion that is provided for them in the Gospel, their experience of the uncertain and unsatisfying nature of all earthly good is fitted to awaken their desires after that higher happiness, and those enduring riches, which belong to the people of God. And thus many an individual has been brought, by the discipline of sickness, and many a family, by bankruptcy or bereavements — to relinquish the world, and to seek God as their chief good. No new truth has been revealed to them; for they had often read in the Scripture, and heard from the pulpit, of the vanity of the world — but that which was then addressed to their understandings, is now impressed with power on their hearts. Their own experience has confirmed and strengthened the testimony of God. On the same subject — the day of adversity administers a wholesome lesson, even to God's own people, who, in some prosperous season, are too apt to attempt a compromise between God and the world, and to seek only a part, and that, perhaps, a small one, of their happiness in Him. They are ready, in such circumstances, to "settle on their lees;" and because "their mountain stands strong," or because "they have had no changes" — they have become more familiar with the world, less

conversant with God, and more wedded to temporal enjoyments, than befits the candidates for heavenly glory. But the day of adversity comes, and dispels at once the fond illusions by which they had been deceived. It reveals the world to their view in its true light, and they awaken as from a dream to the inbred and thorough conviction that all is meaningless and vanity! Poverty, disease, and death are employed, to teach them a lesson which they were slow to understand or believe when they read it in the Bible, or heard it declared from the pulpit, while as yet they had no experience of its truth. And as soon as they are thus thoroughly impressed with this practical conviction, they are prepared to rise above all worldly influences, and to seek with greater earnestness than ever, the enjoyment of God's favor, which is life, and his loving-kindness, which is better than life. In like manner, the day of adversity teaches us the great lesson of our entire and constant dependence on God. But a little while before, we were rejoicing in the midst of prosperity — our health was sound, our business prosperous, our families entire. But the sudden stroke has come which has smitten . . .

our bodies with disease,

our business with bankruptcy,

or our families with death. And that stroke has come from the Lord's hand!

Oh! in such circumstances, we are impressively taught . . .

that we are absolutely in God's power;

that all that we have is at His sovereign disposal;

that we depend on Him, day by day, continually for . . .

our personal preservation,

our worldly prosperity,

our domestic comfort,

for all, in short, that we desire or love on earth.

It befits us never for one moment to forget our obligations to him "in whom "we now feel more sensibly than we ever felt before, that "we live, and move, and have our being!" And finally, our experience of present suffering exhibits to us in a most impressive and convincing light, some of the grand leading principles of God's moral government. It demonstrates his holy determination that sin shall not pass by unpunished; and makes it as certain as any other fact in human history, that as a sinner, man is exposed to the righteous judgments of God.

These are some of the lessons which adversity, when viewed as a means of moral instruction, is fitted to inculcate and to impress with great practical power on our hearts. And when these lessons are duly considered, and, above all, when they are submissively embraced and acted on — the disciple will learn from his own experience the value of affliction, and admire the wisdom with which God suits his lessons to the most urgent necessities of his soul.

The day of adversity is intended not only for our INSTRUCTION — but also for our REPROOF.

It is designed as a chastisement, to rebuke and humble us. The grand design of God both in his Word and Providence is to produce a genuine humility of heart. Many of his most solemn messages to us in the Bible are intended for this purpose — but the evil is, that pride is too apt to resist the application of these passages to ourselves. Nay, the more proud any man is, and the greater his need of being humbled — so much the more averse is he from this faithful application of God's revealed truth to his own soul. But in the day of adversity, the Lord takes the rod in his hand, and by singling out an individual or a family for his fatherly chastisement, he makes a personal application, as it were, of the truth to that individual or family, so as to make them feel that they are under his reproof and correction. Then many sins that had been made light of at the time of their occurrence, and which had perhaps escaped altogether from their remembrance, are forcibly recalled and pressed upon their consciences. The threatened judgments which, when heard by the ear merely, had failed to awaken their apprehensions — are now realized and felt to be certain as well as solemn, when they are actually suffering under the rod.

God's holiness and justice are now known to be active attributes of his nature, as well as essential attributes of his nature. And his moral government is felt to be at work in reference to themselves. Thus pride is slain, repentance awakened, and humility produced. God has applied the truth by the agency of the rod! And while they smart under his chastisement, they feel that it reproves them for sin, and that they dare not utter one word of complaint, or offer one plea in their self-justification. Thus God "has humbled them, and proved them, and shown them what was in their hearts." The day of adversity is designed for our probation and trial. It brings with it peculiar trials, which are fitted to test as well as to exercise the graces of God's people. Thus Abraham was tried, when he was commanded, apparently in direct opposition to God's covenant promise — to offer up his son Isaac. This was, in every point of view, a sore trial; it brought with it peculiar temptations to unbelief and disobedience, such as had never assailed the patriarch before. But he was strong in faith, giving glory to God — -and his faith and obedience were rendered only the better and more illustrious by means of his trial. So is it with the people of God, who are the children of faithful Abraham. God visits them with adversity, not merely with the view of instructing or chastising them — but for the purpose of trying and exercising their Christian graces. By means of such trial and exercise, these graces are strengthened and matured. For just as the bodily frame is more fully developed, and grows in vigor by means of active exertion — so the principles of spiritual life in the soul are improved and perfected by means of discipline — that discipline calling these principles into exercise, and thereby increasing their strength and vigor.

Thus, when a man who has long been weak in faith is visited with adversity — he is laid under a necessity, as it were, of having recourse to God in his straits. He feels that he has no other being on whom he can depend for support or help; and as one consideration after another presents itself to his mind, as to the all-sufficiency and faithfulness and love of his Lord — his faith acquires increasing confidence, and when he is weak he feels that he is strong. So with the man who, while he lived in the sunshine of earthly prosperity, may have been easily annoyed by trifling inconveniences, and reluctant to submit to them. But when he is visited by a signal and sore affliction, he is compelled, as it were, to recognize God's hand in it, and thus a holy resignation to the Divine will, and a submissive temper, are exhibited by him in his severest trials, such as he was unable to preserve in former times. These graces of the Christian character being called into lively exercise, and thus strengthened and matured. And oh! if this be the benevolent design, and

this the happy effect of affliction, how much reason has he to rejoice that, while his outward man perishes, his inward man is renewed day by day! And who that knows the unspeakable value of those heavenly graces which are thus invigorated and strengthened by affliction — will murmur at the discipline by which God seeks to call them into exercise, and to carry them onward to perfection. The day of adversity is designed as a means of preparation for the future which lies before us. This is an interesting aspect of our present trials. We are too prone to take a retrospective view of their causes and occasions — while we think little of their prospective design and results. But we ought not only to look back on the causes which may have rendered our afflictions necessary — we should also look forward to the events for which they are designed to prepare us.

I believe that affliction is often sent, not so much as a chastisement for past sins — but as a means of preparation for future duty. And for this end, it is most suitable and efficacious. It is a means of fitting us for future trials.

All the afflictions of life are not sent upon us at once, otherwise we should be in danger of being overwhelmed by them; but one is sent at a time, and this makes way for another, and prepares us for enduring it. The Lord, in his providence, follows the same rule as in his instructions: "He gives line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little; according as the disciples are able to bear it." One affliction, duly improved, prepares us for enduring another, and deriving good from all.

There is great diversity, indeed, in God's methods of dealing with his different disciples.

Sometimes, by a sudden stroke, he visits a prosperous disciple with the heaviest calamity at first. And it is not astonishing if, thus unprepared by previous discipline, it should be felt to be almost overwhelming. But then, if such an affliction is at all improved as it should, it must serve, by its very magnitude, to suppress all repining, and to produce a meek and resigned spirit, under the smaller afflictions which may follow it. In other cases, the smaller trials are sent first, and one follows after another, until the disciple is prepared for enduring the heaviest of all. The mind that is in any measure duly exercised by the former — becomes, as it were, familiar with the principles which administer support and comfort, and is ready to have instant recourse to them, when the latter arrives.

Oh! how mercifully does God deal with his people, in thus adapting the method of his discipline to their respective circumstances — sending on one, who might otherwise fail to be awakened to his highest interests, a stroke like a sudden thunderbolt — and on another, whom such a heavy stroke might overwhelm, such preparatory minor trials as initiate him gently in the school of affliction.

Some may wonder that we speak of so many successive trials, and of the wisdom of God in making one affliction prepare the way for another — but it is even so in the experience of God's people. Affliction is not one act of chastisement — but a course of beneficial discipline, a series of preparatory trials leading on to the glorious consummation — for it is "through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom of God."

Adversity is a means of fitting us for future temptations. God, whose knowledge extends to all future events, sees that a disciple is before long to be placed in circumstances which will throw strong temptation in his way. And He also, whose knowledge extends to the secrets of the heart,

knows that, in the frame of mind which present prosperity has induced, that disciple would be ill qualified to resist these temptations — perhaps prone to yield to them. He must be called off from the world, and brought to his knees, and strengthened inwardly with strength in his soul. But so long as prosperity continues, this moral change, so essential to his future safety, is not to be expected.

Therefore, in the exercise of his unfailing love and faithfulness, the Lord takes him into his own hand, and visits him with affliction. The disciple is grieved, no doubt — but he is also humbled, and instructed and strengthened by this discipline — a new and more spiritual frame of feeling is produced — the truths of religion acquire a firmer footing in his mind, and a fuller ascendancy over his heart. And these truths, thus applied to his soul, furnish him with new and stronger motives — so that, when the hour of temptation comes, he is prepared, through God's grace, to meet it, and his very sorrows are his preservative from sin!

Oh! little do we know from what temptations we have been preserved or delivered by means of such beneficial discipline. How little do we know what we might have been, had we had fewer trials! The Christian disciple, who has been subject to protracted bodily indisposition, may be apt to wonder why he should be for so long a time kept in a condition which apparently hinders or impairs his active usefulness. But perhaps that very disciple had the seeds of vanity, worldliness, or intemperance in his heart, which the constant sunshine of prosperity would have caused to spring up and ripen — or he was likely to be placed in circumstances which would have tempted him to open sin. How thankful, then, should he be for God's restraining grace, even though that grace has operated through the discipline of sorrow — especially if he finds that, during his sickness, his spiritual health has been preserved and increased, while he sees many a prosperous professor, who has fallen before the power of that temptation from which he has been so graciously preserved!

Adversity is a means of preparation for extensive usefulness. That affliction, when it comes upon us either in the shape of bodily illness, or extreme poverty, or blighting calumny, unfits us for the active service of God — is the complaint which is usually made by those who are visited with it in the prime of life. While many an aged disciple, who is completely disabled by his infirmities, is apt to wonder why he is still preserved in life when his usefulness is apparently gone. But he, who considers that the greatest usefulness consists in glorifying God — will see at a single glance that there is no ground for such thoughts in either case. In regard even to present usefulness, and without reference to the future service for which affliction may be preparing them, they may glorify God as much by patient suffering as by active service, and may thus be in the highest degree useful to those who are around them. The mere consideration of their sufferings may impress many a beneficial lesson on the minds of others, especially of the young; while the active and consistent exercise of their Christian graces, in such circumstances, may afford an example of religion in its sustaining power — such as is admirably fitted to commend it to the acceptance of their friends. Thus, even the aged sufferer, disabled as he is from active duty, may be a powerful witness for Christ. And although he has no prospect of being restored to his former sphere of exertion — he is occupying with good and beneficial effect the post which the Lord has assigned to him.

If it is true, as unquestionably it is, that even an old blind beggar is not without his moral use in the world — then how much more certain is it, that the aged and apparently disabled believer is, even in his greatest infirmities, a blessing to his family and friends. For how can he be more useful to them, or how could he better glorify God — than by exhibiting, as he does in the hour of his greatest need, the worth and value of that divine religion which comforts him in all his tribulations, and smooths his path to the grave; nay, which enables him to rise above the love of life and the fear of death, and to rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory, and to bear his testimony to the love and faithfulness of his Lord throughout the whole course of his protracted trials! Such a man is not useless. Oh no! Though his limbs are inactive, his memory faded, all his faculties impaired — yet . . .

his moral feelings are strong within him,

his faith is firm,

his hope is heavenly,

his heart is full of peace and joy. And many others feel that the aged sufferer makes a deeper and more beneficial impression on it, than all the learning and eloquence of the schools. As an aged believer was accustomed to say, when reduced to extreme poverty, and wholly disabled by a paralytic stroke, "I often seem to myself and others to be a useless burden on the world — but I know and believe that God must have something yet to do by me or in me, otherwise I would not be here." But while the believer, during the time of his affliction, is really occupying a post of usefulness, that season is, in many cases, designed to prepare him for more extensive and successful exertion in God's service hereafter.

While the aged believer looks forward to Heaven as his only remaining sphere of service, the younger brethren may anticipate a restoration to health, and a course of usefulness on earth. And their present afflictions are designed and fitted to prepare them for exerting a higher and more beneficial influence over their fellow-men. This they do by their influence in promoting our personal sanctification; by deepening our impressions of the vanity of the world, and the value of the soul, and the magnitude of eternity; by enlarging our experience of the power of religion, and teaching us its unspeakable importance. In proportion as affliction serves to promote our personal growth in grace — in the same proportion it prepares us for future usefulness. Our capacity of glorifying God in all the ways of private or public duty depends on the condition of our own souls. If our souls have been improved by the discipline of adversity — our testimony to God and his truth, and our love and care for our fellow-men, will be proportionately more constant and more effectual than before. Thus the apostle refers to his own experience during his manifold afflictions, as having been a means of fitting him more fully for one important part of the Christian ministry. "Blessed be God," says he, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulations — that we may be able to comfort them that are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (2 Corinthians 1:4.) Everyone can feel the force of these words. The word of comfort comes with unspeakably greater power from the lips of a suffering Savior, or a sorely tried disciple, than from the lips of one who has never known adversity. And this holds good, not only of the minister of religion — but of every private Christian, and that, in respect to all the departments of Christian usefulness. He is better prepared by means of his experience, as for comforting the afflicted, so also for exhibiting in his

own life and conduct the sanctifying and supporting power of religion, for commending it to the consideration of his family and friends; and for making many exertions, and submitting to many sacrifices, to which others, living in uninterrupted prosperity, might be less inclined to submit. In a word, the deeper the impressions are which he has received on his own soul — the better is he prepared both in point of knowledge and zeal, and sympathy, to care for the welfare of others, and to promote it. The day of adversity is a suitable preparation for the hour of death. That solemn hour must soon arrive. Much inward preparation of heart is needful if we would meet death with calmness, composure, and fortitude. In the day of prosperity, that preparation may be made, if we can succeed in maintaining the ascendancy of divine truth in our minds: for it is the truth of God inwrought, as it were, into the frame and temper of our spirits — and not any external influence merely — which fits the believer for his last struggle. But during prosperity the mind is too prone to yield to worldly influences, and is often reluctant to allow God's truth that full ascendancy which its importance demands, and which is in fact essential to the believer's comfort in the prospect of death. It is by its beneficial influence in breaking the power of worldly enchantments, in disengaging the mind from delusive expectations, and in directing it more earnestly and simply to the truths of God's Word — that adversity serves to prepare it for meeting death with fortitude. The sorrows of life may thus, without exciting one feeling of discontent, or calling forth a single murmur — predispose the soul to leave without reluctance, a scene of so much trial — and to anticipate without alarm that solemn event which will terminate all our earthly cares, and introduce us into a nobler and happier state of being.

Prosperity is less suitable than adversity as a means of preparation for death, not because the latter possesses any "magical charm" by which the fear or the pain of death is allayed — but because affliction is in God's hand a powerful instrument in awakening our attention to the truths of religion, and impressing them on our hearts. It is not adversity in itself simply — but adversity duly considered and improved, that has this effect.

Many a sorely tried and afflicted man is as reluctant to die as the most prosperous worldling. But the reason is that, in his case, adversity has failed in leading him to open his mind to the full influence of Gospel truth; and his experience, while it shows that affliction, like other means of grace, may be frustrated of its beneficial tendency — affords no ground for concluding that it has no such tendency. The genuine disciple is all the better prepared for his last hour by the many seasons of affliction through which he has passed — because, at every such season . . .

his mind has been powerfully impressed,  
his contrition deepened,  
his faith strengthened,  
his communion with God restored,  
his love for the Savior increased,  
his experience of the Spirit's supporting grace enlarged,  
and his hope of Heaven revived.

Thus enlightened, quickened, and comforted by the truths of God seasonably and powerfully applied to his heart by means of affliction — he is prepared to surrender himself into God's hands, and to trust in His unfailing love and faithfulness, at that last, that solemn hour, when leaving its earthly tenement, his soul must enter into the spiritual and eternal world! The day of adversity is a means of preparation for eternal glory. "For our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 So says the apostle in words which demonstrate the connection which exists between the believer's sufferings on earth — and his ultimate happiness in Heaven. That such a connection between these two things exists, a connection similar, in some respects, to that which existed between the humiliation and exaltation of the Savior himself; and that our present afflictions are working out for us a result so glorious — may well serve at once to reconcile us to them, and to impress us with a sense of the wisdom and love of God in imposing them. But let us not imagine that afflictions have this efficacy in themselves, as if (*ex opere operato*) they automatically either secured or merited for us a future compensation or reward. Far from it! God does not visit us with afflictions beyond our desert — so as to make himself our debtor. Neither does any amount of affliction insure us of future glory, except in so far as it is made the means, in God's hand, of bringing the truth home to our hearts, and inducing us cordially to embrace and diligently to improve it. And hence the apostle not only states the fact that affliction works out for God's people an exceeding weight of glory — but he points out the way in which it does so: "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." It is by its influence in weaning our thoughts and affections from the world, and directing them to spiritual and eternal things — that adversity tends to prepare us for glory.

We may suffer much and long — but not until the mind looks upward to God and forward to eternity — not until it cordially receives and embraces the truth of the Gospel, is it thereby better prepared for glory — any more than are the fallen spirits who are kept in chains of darkness unto the day of judgment. But as soon as it brings us to the knowledge and reception of the truth, it prepares us by the truth for glory. It then elevates our minds, and prepares and refines them, "so as to make them fit for the inheritance of the saints in light." This it does . . .

partly by convincing us of the vanity of the world — so as to feel that God alone can be our satisfying and everlasting portion;

partly, by convincing us of the wretchedness of our condition as sinners — so as to feel that peace with God is essential to our happiness;

partly, by convincing us of the remaining corruptions that cleave to us — so as to feel that we must be made perfectly holy before we can expect exemption from trial;

and still more, by enabling us to experience the love of God, the pleasure of comfortable communion with Him, and the unspeakable blessedness of resting on Christ — so as to enjoy some foretaste of that higher and more perfect happiness which shall be enjoyed when we enter into his immediate presence.

Accordingly, we read in the Scriptures that even the redeemed in Heaven look back on their earthly trials with grateful ascription of praise to God for his wisdom and love in making them

subservient to their present glory; and a venerable Christian emphatically observes, "I believe there are very few in Heaven — but owe their conversion or their continuance in that state, to some affliction or other."

Such is a brief account of God's benevolent design in the afflictive dispensations of his providence. Their general end is the progressive sanctification and ultimate perfection of our natures. And with this view, they are intended for our instruction, for our reproof, for our trial, and for our preparation for death and glory. That such is their declared purpose and use, may well serve to impress us with a sense of God's goodness, even when he chastens us. While their admirable fitness, as a means to so great an end, is illustrative of the Divine wisdom which presides over the management of our affairs. And the serious consideration of the grand design which they are so well fitted to accomplish, is not only useful in reconciling us to the patient endurance of our present discipline — but is also necessary to the right improvement of our present discipline — since, if we are either ignorant or forgetful of God's design in them, it is not to be expected that we shall either bear them with patience, or steadily pursue those grand moral results to which they tend.

5. In the day of adversity, you should consider your remaining comforts, your numerous and undeserved mercies, and your ample and efficient means of relief. Under the pressure of some sore trial, the mind is too apt to fall into a morbid state, and to brood over its peculiar misery — while it is forgetful alike of the mercies which might alleviate its bitterness, and of the means by which all that is really evil in it might be removed. In some cases there is a reckless desperation — in other cases there is a desponding melancholy, which prevents the enjoyment of any blessing after one favorite object has been withdrawn; and which indisposes, and in part disqualifies, the sufferer from having recourse to those means of relief and consolation which are yet within his reach. This is an ungrateful and rebellious, as well as wretched state of mind. And hence the apostle rebukes it when he speaks of the two contrasted negatives, "Despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him." If we would avoid the latter of these extremes, and rise above our sorrow, or at least be able calmly to endure it — we must turn our thoughts to the consideration of our remaining mercies, and have recourse to the practical use of those means of relief which God has graciously given. Notwithstanding the severe stroke by which we have been deprived of health, or fortune, or friends — we are still surrounded with innumerable mercies, which are far, far beyond our deserts. Have we not still some earthly comforts — some small supply for our needs, however apparently casual — some sight and taste of the sweet beauties of nature, which are free to all — some few surviving friends who cling the more closely to us in proportion as their number is diminished, and who are still ready to weep with us when we weep, and to rejoice in our joy?

Yet suppose our condition to be the most desolate and forlorn, have we not still the almighty providence of God to trust in, and his precious promises to refresh and gladden us? Have we not still in Heaven a Great High Priest, a fellow-sufferer enthroned amidst the glories of the upper sanctuary, who has a fellow-feeling with us in our trials, and the power of supporting or relieving us in them all? Have we not still, as his disciples, the same grounds of everlasting hope, the same assurance of pardon and peace, the same interest in his great salvation? Have we not still the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, whose very office connects him with the afflicted, and makes them the object of his peculiar care? Have we not the sweet fellowship of our fellow-disciples, who can speak a word of comfort to us from their own experience, and bear us on

their hearts at the throne of grace? And have we not access for ourselves to the mercy-seat, where, in the confidence of believing prayer, we may utter the fullness of our hearts in the presence of the God of all comfort?

Oh! let not these precious, these unspeakably sweet and glorious privileges forgotten or despised — merely because some affliction has befallen us! We have still far more left to us, than has yet been taken from us. We have everything we really need to bless us in time, and prepare us for eternity. But let us not merely think of these things, let us seek to enjoy them. It may be, that affliction has been sent chiefly to restore us to the fuller enjoyment of that happiness which such privileges may confer — to teach us their unspeakable value, and by means of them, to raise us to a higher plane of spiritual life than any we had formerly experienced.

Let us not only consider our remaining temporal mercies — but with a grateful heart partake of them, rejoicing in the light and heat, the air, the verdant earth and starry sky, exclaiming, "My Father made them all!" Let us not only consider God's providence — but with lowly reverence adore and trust in it! Let us feed upon his promises by faith, looking forward with heavenly hope to their glorious consummation. Let us have recourse to Christ as a sympathizing friend, receiving his salvation freely, as it is freely offered, rejoicing in his unchangeable love, glorifying his transcendent work of salvation, and exulting in his exaltation. Let us yield to the Spirit's grace, seeking his guidance, submitting to his power, and rejoicing in his consolations. Let us cleave to our Bible, which contains our glorious charter and security for time and eternity — nourishing our souls with divine truth, refreshing them with divine promises, invigorating and strengthening them with the faith and patience of the saints. Let us more frankly enter into Christian fellowship with our fellow-disciples, learning from their experience, and deriving from their communion new light, and love and joy. And with them, or by ourselves, let us repair often and freely to that throne of grace, before which all the sorrows of believers in all ages have been divulged, not doubting, that to us, as to them — relief and support will be sent in every hour of need. And finally, let us not confine our consideration to the circumstances of our present condition — but while we gratefully enjoy our remaining mercies, and dutifully improve our present privileges, let us also consider, and seek in the exercise of holy meditation to realize our future prospects and hopes. These might well support us, even though all earthly supports were removed.

We know that all our afflictions are soon to terminate, and, if we are Christ's disciples — the end of affliction will be the beginning of perfect joy. Heaven is before us. Thence let us draw, as it were by anticipation, some foretastes of its blessedness — motives to encourage, and strength to animate us in our earthly pilgrimage, and an undying energy of perseverance in our spiritual welfare. For why should any Christian faint by the way — if that way is leading him to Heaven?

6. In the day of adversity, you should consider Christ Jesus the Lord, as the forerunner and the pattern of his believing people. Thus writes the apostle: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Hebrews 12:2-3

Christ should be much in our thoughts in the time of suffering. Let us consider the number and intensity of Christ's sufferings, and how far they exceed whatever we can be called to endure. Consider . . .

the lowliness of his birth,  
the labor of his youth,  
the poverty of his whole life,  
the persecutions to which he was exposed,  
the calumnies which were invented against his character,  
the hatred of his avowed enemies,  
the treachery of some of his professed friends,  
the public insults and mockery with which he was treated,  
the pains which he endured of hunger and thirst,  
the still deeper pains of crucifixion, and  
the deepest pains of all — his "soul-sufferings" which made him exclaim, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!"

It is related of an eminent man that, while racked by severe suffering, he was accustomed to turn his thoughts to the scene of his Savior's agony, and that he thence derived at once a lesson of meek endurance and a motive to gratitude — he felt that his sufferings were as nothing, when compared with those of his Divine Master. This seems to be the idea that is suggested by the apostle when he reminds the disciples — that they had not yet, like their crucified Lord, "Resisted unto blood, striving against sin."

Let us consider the DESIGN and EFFECT of Christ's sufferings. They were different in these respects from our own. In his case they were strictly penal — intended as a satisfaction to divine justice for all the sins of his people; as a fulfillment of the curse of the law; and as such, their amount must have been inconceivably greater than our light afflictions, while their effect was and is to deprive all our afflictions of their bitterness, and death itself of its sting. Our afflictions are chastisements, and as such, may be properly regarded as manifestations of God's fatherly displeasure — but they are not penal inflictions, such as can satisfy divine justice. No, all that was strictly penal in suffering, all that was required for the vindication of God's law and the fulfillment of the curse — Christ has already endured for us. This consideration is fitted at once to impress us with the conviction that our sufferings have been alleviated by the Savior's agony, and to cheer us with the hope that by the effect of his sufferings and death — we shall soon be delivered from their pressure and raised to perfect joy.

Let us consider the divine sympathy which Christ's personal sufferings secure for each of his suffering people. A suffering Savior, can sympathize with an afflicted people. "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." And let us consider the patience with which he endured his sufferings — his meek resignation to the divine

will — his calmness in the midst of human enmity — his fortitude in the hour of death. "He suffered, leaving us an example that we should walk in his steps." "When they hurled their insults at him — he did not retaliate; when he suffered — he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." The apostle's expression, "fixing our eyes on Jesus," is a comprehensive description of what should be in all circumstances — the habit of the believer's soul. But never is "fixing our eyes on Jesus" more needful or more refreshing than when he is placed in circumstances of affliction. Then, if ever, he should be looking unto Jesus — never losing sight of his once crucified, but now exalted Master, nor turning his eye away from his glorious person — until, by the view of his patience and success in the hour of trial, his heart is at once subdued into tenderness and elevated by joyful hope.

One view of Christ, will avail more for our relief in such circumstances than all other considerations combined. A suffering Christ is at once the Savior, the friend, and the pattern of the suffering Christian. And, when He is thus contemplated by the eye of faith, virtue will come out of him for the support and comfort of his redeemed people. In vain is our attention directed to all other subjects — if Christ is overlooked or misunderstood. We may and should consider . . .

the adversities which befall us,  
the hand from which they proceed,  
the causes which have occasioned,  
the guilt which has incurred them,  
the declared design and end of affliction, and  
the serious and beneficial lessons which it is fitted to teach.

But all this will not avail for our comfort and support — unless we know and consider "Christ and him crucified." This is . . .

the grand subject of contemplation,  
the only genuine spring of comfort,  
the only safe ground of confidence and hope.

If afflictions do not lead us to consider Christ in his sufferings, and to know the end and object for which his sufferings were endured, and their intimate connection with our own welfare in time, and happiness in eternity — our afflictions, however numerous, or heavy, or protracted, have been sent in vain! For all the lessons which they teach, respecting the vanity of the world, and the demerit of sin, and the justice of God — are useful chiefly in a way of subserviency to our progress in the knowledge of Christ! It is by their influence in leading us to Christ, and fixing our regards on Him as our only help and hope — that they conduce at once to our personal comfort and our progressive sanctification.

Let the sufferer reflect on his trials, and his sins; let him ponder the proofs of God's judicial administration until he is impressed with a solemn sense of his justice; let him consider the vanity of the world, the certainty of death, and his own weakness to avert any one of the calamities to

which he is exposed — all these considerations are beneficial ONLY in so far as they have a tendency to convince him of his need of Christ. But he must look to Christ himself, and especially to Christ in his agony, and on the cross — and that, too, with an intelligent and scriptural apprehension of the nature and extent of his sufferings, as an atonement for sin — before he can experience either the sanctifying influence of affliction, or the sweetness of Gospel consolation under it.

He who, either through ignorance or error, thinks little of Christ, or misunderstands the mysteries of his humiliation and death — is yet in a condition which prevents him from being either duly humbled, or duly supported in the day of trial.

Oh! why will the weak and stricken spirit turn its thoughts to other objects — while Christ, the Son of God, is plainly exhibited to his view, as a fellow-sufferer on earth. Surely such a Sufferer claims his regard, and exhibits to him an example such as may cheer, and animate, and direct him, in his most trying hour. Surely it is "the cross of Christ" alone, "by which the world can be crucified unto us, and we unto the world!" And we may well "count all things but loss, for the excellence of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord."

7. In the day of adversity, you should consider the recorded examples of the saints and martyrs who have gone before you, and who, in similar trials, have been enabled to endure, as seeing God, who is invisible. "Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy!" James 5:10-11 A very large part of the historical Scriptures is occupied with the sufferings of God's people, and their experience and conduct under them. Our first parents, who suffered in their persons, and were driven forth from the beautiful garden, to a world that was laid under the curse; and who suffered severely in their domestic relations, especially when their first-born imbrued his hands in his brother's blood — Abel himself a sufferer and a martyr. Noah, the witness of that terrible deluge, which swept away all but his own immediate relatives. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and David; Isaiah and Jeremiah; the martyred Baptist, and Stephen, the first Christian confessor; Paul, and all the apostles and primitive disciples — all these are exhibited as sufferers, whose experience verified the statement, that it is through great tribulation that we must enter the kingdom.

It is a proof of God's supreme wisdom, that the history of suffering is thus interwoven, as it were, with the whole texture of his Word — since thus it is adapted to whatever has been, and ever will be, the experience of his people in all ages of the Church. Did the Bible speak little of affliction — did it exhibit the believers of olden times as prosperous men, enjoying a happy life on earth, with few or insignificant trials — we might have envied their happy lot, without imitating their virtues, or aiming at their comforts. But when it presents them to our view as men compassed with the same infirmities, exposed to the same trials, enduring the like afflictions with ourselves — we feel that they are our brethren in sorrow — and that like as they were comforted and enabled to endure — so may we also be supported by the same grace, and endued with the same patience from on high. This it is which imparts a charm to the simple narrative of their experience, such as renders these passages among the most precious portions of the Word of God — insomuch, that it may with truth be said, that the afflictions of David, which occasioned the composition of the Psalms,

have been a signal benefit to the universal Church of God — every member of which, in all ages and lands, can enter with all the interest of a fellow-feeling into . . .

those mournful complaints,

those pathetic expressions of a stricken heart,

those deep and profound acknowledgments of man's sin and God's eternal justice,

those earnest breathings,

those longing aspirations towards Heaven

— with which these Psalms abound. And more generally, the consideration of the sufferings of God's people in all ages, is of the highest use in discharging the mind of that fond misconception which is so apt to be entertained in the hour of sorrow, even that our sufferings are of a different kind, or more intense in their degree, than those of other men, "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath!" From which we are too apt to infer that God would not thus deal with us, if we belonged to the number of his people, or unless he had an unappeasable anger against us. Whereas, when we consider the Scripture narrative, we find that affliction has been the badge of God's people in all ages, and is to be regarded, not as a mark of reprobation, so much as a pledge of friendship. There we are taught that "fiery as our trial may be, no strange thing has happened unto us" — that "the same afflictions were and have been accomplished in our brethren in all ages of the world" — and that we are only the partakers of those trials, which, as being appropriate to our high and heavenly calling, are described as "the afflictions of the Gospel" — nay, as "Christ's sufferings." The consideration of the sufferings of God's people is fitted farther to assure us, that the Gospel is adequate to sustain us under the severest trials, and in the prospect of death itself. For . . .

they passed "through a great fight of afflictions," and yet received no damage;

they were burned in the furnace, and were thereby not destroyed — but refined;

they submitted to violent death, and the Gospel was adequate to their support and triumph in that fearful hour.

Why then should we despond — we, to whom . . .

the same promises are addressed,

the same supports offered,

and the same hopes insured! Will not Christ be with us in the furnace, even as he was with the Hebrew children who came forth from the furnace unhurt? And finally, their example in suffering affliction with patience, is at once instructive and animating. When we consider Christ Jesus the Lord, we are too apt to think that his divine strength enabled him to endure in such a way as cannot be realized by his weak followers. But here are men, men with hearts as sensitive, with flesh as weak as our own — who have meekly suffered every form of natural evil, and who have been made more than conquerors over all! Let us consider them in the hour of our trial, and in the exercise of the same unshaken faith in God. Let us seek, like them, to "let patience have its perfect

work, that we may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

8. In the day of adversity, you should consider the actual effect which your trials have yet produced on your own souls. We have seen what God's design in them is — let us inquire whether that design has been fulfilled in our own souls. Does our experience correspond with his declared purpose. Are we more sanctified?

Are we more weaned from the world?

Are we more humbled under a sense of our unworthiness?

Are we more deeply impressed by Divine truth?

Are we induced to pray more frequently and more fervently?

Are we more thoroughly devoted in heart and life to God's service

— by means of, and in consequence of, our afflictions?

If we cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, have we no reason to fear that we are fighting against God; that we are slighting his warnings, despising his rod, and frustrating his gracious intentions towards us? Oh! it is very needful thus to inquire as to the actual effect of affliction on ourselves — for it operates very differently, according as it is well or ill improved. In the former case, affliction produces . . .

contrition of heart,

deadness to the world,

mEEK submission to God,

an earnest desire after communion with him,

a holy frame and heavenly temper, such as befits our condition as pilgrims and strangers on the earth!

Affliction prepares us . . .

for usefulness in life,

for peace in death, and

for glory in Heaven! But in the other case, when it is despised, or misimproved, affliction leaves the soul as lifeless as it found it:

instead of contrition, it awakens discontent;

instead of Christian humility, it leaves us in unbelieving despondency;

instead of weaning us from the world, it rivets more firmly around us the remaining ties by which we cleave to it, and issues in dull insensibility, or reckless unconcern.

It has been beautifully said, that "the same fire which melts the gold — hardens the clay." Just so, the same afflictions which softened the heart of David — hardened the heart of Pharaoh into more

obdurate impenitency. And is it not worth our while to consider which of these processes is now going on in our own experience — whether we are becoming better or worse by the discipline of God's providence; whether we are ripening for Heaven — or sinking towards Hell.

Oh! that is a solemn statement which declares, "that he who being often reprov'd, and hardens his neck — shall speedily be cut off, and that without remedy!"

If, on the other hand, we have good ground for believing that our minds have yielded to the beneficial influences of affliction, and have thereby become more dead to the world and more alive to God; if we feel a growing humility of heart, and experience a sweeter communion with Heaven; if our faith has been strengthened, and our hope confirmed in the hour of trial — then may we not only rest assured that it has been good for us that we were afflicted; but on a comparison of the spiritual benefit which we have acquired with the temporal prosperity which we have lost — we shall be able and willing to give our joyful and grateful testimony at once to the wisdom and goodness of God in all his dispensations towards us.

Having suggested various topics as suitable subjects for your consideration in the day of adversity — permit me again to remind you that all the benefits of affliction depend on your attention being awakened and directed to God's truth. It is by consideration alone that it can do you good. An inconsiderate sufferer — will be an unsanctified sufferer. He may suffer much and suffer long — but all to no purpose, unless he is brought to think, and to think seriously. That affliction is fitted to induce thoughtfulness, is the reason why it is employed as a means in the discipline of God's providence. But its tendency may be frustrated, and then all its benefits must be forfeited and lost. And finally, let me impress it on your hearts, that you should thus improve the first moments of affliction before yet it be too late. For while the season of adversity furnishes a fit opportunity, and addresses to you an impressive call to consider your case — it ought never to be forgotten, that when affliction reaches its extreme point, it does, in many cases, unfit the soul for all profitable thought. You may be subjected to a disease which will totally overpower your faculties, and give you over as a passive and unresisting prey to the power of death. Think not, then, of postponing consideration until a future hour; but laying to heart the trials which you have already experienced, seek so to improve them now, while reason is yet clear and strong — as that, whatever may befall you hereafter, you may have good ground to rejoice in the assurance that your soul is safe for eternity!

## S. The Key of Death!

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### The Key of Death!

James Buchanan, 1837

"Do not be afraid! I am the First and the Last, the Ever-living One! I died — but see, I am alive forevermore! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (the realm of the dead)." Revelation 1:17-18  
The Bible affords a solid ground of comfort, by the cheering light which it throws over the valley of death, and, across that dark valley, on the fields of immortality beyond it. To every thoughtful mind, death and the grave will suggest many serious reflections — reflections which must ever be of a pensive nature, and which, but for the cheering information conveyed by the Gospel — might even induce a feeling of despair. Look to the deathbed of man — and what do you behold? An intelligent creature, in the spring of life, when hope is brightest — or in the prime of manhood, when activity is greatest — or in the maturity of old age, when the fruit of a long experience was ripening for usefulness — laid prostrate by the derangement of some organ or function of his material frame. He is deprived at once, and forever, of all that hope had anticipated, or activity pursued, or experience gathered — and given over as a captive to death, and a prisoner to the grave!

Look to the grave — and what do you behold? Multitudes which no man can number, of human bodies, once as vigorous and active as our own — now buried in deep forgetfulness, and a prey to corruption and the worm — nothing remaining to attest their previous existence save a few bones beneath, and, perhaps, some fading epitaph above!

Go into every land, the same scene appears — however different in climate and scenery, however dissimilar in their institutions and customs, in this, all regions are the same — every land is the sepulcher of the dead. When musing on the earth as the vast repository of the dead, who does not feel that the grave is a melancholy scene — and yet a scene in which more than in any other he is personally interested, since it contains a large portion of his dearest kindred, and will soon receive into its bosom his own mortal remains! Dark, indeed, would be the end of man, were the grave his final resting-place! And over the wreck of the human family, we might have wept with unavailing anguish, had we not known and heard the Savior's voice, "I am the resurrection and the life! If any man believes in me, though he were dead — yet shall he live again!" The Bible gives us some consoling views of this melancholy theme, in connection with that grand and universal scheme of grace, which gilds with the rays of peace and hope even the gloomiest prospects of man. It represents death and the grave as being under the jurisdiction and superintendence of the same divine person, who, as the Redeemer of his people, exercises a sovereign dominion over all the events of the present world. Time, with its solemn events — eternity, with its awful issues — and death, the passage which leads from the one into the other — are all equally under his control! So that, into whatever state of untried existence any of his people may be brought — they cannot, by any change in their circumstances, be placed beyond the bounds of his jurisdiction, or the reach of his guardian care.

Death, which severs them from every other connection, and the grave, which shuts them up from all other help — cannot separate them from his tender love, nor exclude them from his watchful eye — for he presides over death not less than over life. To him the sepulchers of the dead are as accessible as the abodes of the living; and go where they may, after death he meets with them, and cares for them in the state of disembodied spirits, and will ultimately bring them into the general assembly of the just in Heaven.

Both worlds are equally subject to his authority, and the dark pathway between the one and the other is also under his special care. So that, whether we live in the body — it is because he sustains us; or whether we die — it is because he summons us; or whether we enter into the invisible world — it is because he admits us. And everywhere, and at all times, on earth, or in the grave, or in the separate state — we are equally under the protection of One who, possessed of infinite power, unerring wisdom, and unquenchable love — will order all things that concern us, so as to fulfill his own gracious purpose in dying for our redemption, and to promote our present progress and our eternal perfection in holiness and bliss. "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28

These views are strikingly presented in the sublime prologue to the book of the Apocalypse, where, appearing to the beloved disciple in the magnificent, yet amiable character of God-man, the Redeemer declares, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hell!" Every clause of this sublime declaration, coming as it does from our glorified Redeemer, is pregnant with assurance and consolation to his believing people, and is specially fitted to banish those fearful and anxious forebodings which oppress their minds in the prospect of death and the grave.

"I am the Living One," the first and the last; without beginning of days or end of years; self-existent, and therefore, independent of every outward condition; and incapable of change. He asserts his supreme divinity as a reason why his disciples should "not fear." And, surely, to every Christian mind, the fact that the Son of Man, in whom they have trusted as their Savior, is "the Living One," may well furnish a ground of unshaken confidence, since it assures us, that, happen what may — our trust is reposed on one, whose existence, and whose power to affect our welfare, cannot be destroyed by any event whatever, and that our interests for eternity are absolutely safe, being placed in his omnipotent hands! But how much greater ought to be our confidence in him, and how much sweeter the consolation which his words impart, when he adds, "I was dead." He appears to the apostle not simply as "the Living One," the self-existent Son of God — but as God manifested in the flesh, the Son of God in human nature, and even in his glorified state, "like unto the Son of Man," whom the beloved disciple had often seen and followed as the "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

Let us attempt to conceive of the feelings with which the beloved disciple must have looked on his glorified Master; let us remember that he had accompanied him on earth, that he had leaned upon his bosom, and that he knew the sad history of his crucifixion — and we cannot fail to perceive how the mere fact, that the same divine Redeemer now stood before him, and spoke with him of the death which he had accomplished at Jerusalem, must have served to annihilate in the mind of the apostle the fear of death, and to open up to his view such a glorious prospect into the invisible

world, as would strip death, the pathway that led to Heaven, of its terrors, however dark and dismal it might otherwise be. And to every Christian, the words of our Lord, "I was dead," will suggest reflections that should serve to fortify the mind against the fear of death; or, at all events, to rebuke and mitigate the aversion with which it is usually contemplated. Did the Redeemer die — a Being who claims to himself the dignity of "the Living One" — a Being not only of infinite dignity — but of spotless purity, and who, from the beginning until the end of his existence on earth, was the object of God's supreme delight and approbation? And shall we complain that death is allotted as our portion also? We, who, as created beings, are insignificant by our mortality; and by actual guilt — polluted and debased? To us, death comes as wages earned by guilt; but even were it otherwise — did death come to us as an accident of our being — how could we complain of the hardness of our lot, when Christ himself declares, "I was dead?" Did the Redeemer die — he in whose sympathy and care we are commanded to confide, and to whom we are taught to look, in every hour of danger or distress, for needful support and consolation? And is it no encouragement to reflect, that he, into whose hands we commit our care, when in the extremity of mortal agony, and when vain is the help of man, has himself drunk the cruel cup before us and felt its bitterness — that every inch of that dark valley was trod by him, and that, from his own experience, he knows what strength and support we need in that dreadful hour? Did the Redeemer die — as the surety and representative of sinners — was his death a solemn expiation of our guilt, and an adequate satisfaction to God for the penalty which we had incurred? Is there no reason, then, to suppose, that dying, as he did, in the place, and on behalf of the guilty — death met him in a more formidable shape, and put into his hands a bitterer cup than can now fall to the lot of any of his people; and that their death will be greatly less terrible than it would have been by reason of his enduring in their place, the heaviest part of it? For what is it that mainly embitters death, and surrounds it, even when viewed at a distance, with innumerable terrors? Not surely the mere pain with which it is accompanied — for equal or greater pain we have often endured — not the mere dissolution of the tie between soul and body — for if that were all, however our sensitive nature might shrink from the shock — our rational nature might enable us to regard it with composure. Not the mere separation from the society and business of the present world — for that, however it may awaken a feeling of melancholy regret, can hardly account for the forebodings and terrors of which every mind is more or less conscious when it contemplates death. No; it is something more than the mere pain of dying, or the mere dissolving of the elements of our being, or the mere separation from this world — that embitters the cup of death.

"The sting of death is sin" — the same sin which gave us over as a prey to death, makes us also slaves to the fear of death. For, by the unvarying law of conscience, sin and fear are bound up together. And it is a conscience burdened with guilt, and apprehensive of punishment, which, in our case, arrows death with terrors unknown to the inferior and irresponsible creation. But Christ died to expiate and cancel the guilt of his people; he has already endured, and by enduring, has taken away the penalty of their transgression. Death remains — but its sting is taken away; so that we may "thank God, who has given us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord," and may exclaim with the apostle, "Oh! death where is now your sting — Oh! grave, where is your victory?" Did the Redeemer die — that he might show us an example of suffering affliction with patience, and be to us a pattern of faith and hope in our last extremity? And is there no consolation in the thought, that when we reach the shore of that dark water which divides time and eternity — we can fix our eye on one who, for our sakes, crossed it in triumph before us; and think of the love of our

Redeemer, who, in compassion to our fears, became "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," that, by his own example, he might teach us how to die? Had he returned from earth to Heaven in triumph — had he avoided the dark valley himself, and, summoning his legions of angels, left the world by a direct ascension to glory — then, whatever lessons he might have taught, and whatever commands and encouragements he might have addressed to his followers, respecting their conduct in that last hour of darkness and distress — his instructions would have had little effect in comparison with the charm of his example, when, placing himself in their circumstances, and submitting to their fate, he "bowed his head and gave up the spirit;" and met death, as he commands his people to meet it, in the exercise of an unshaken confidence in God, and humble submission to his will. Where shall we find such another example of holy fortitude for our imitation? Where shall we find such another instance of success for our encouragement? Did the Redeemer die — that he might not only deprive death of its sting — but overcome him that had the power of death, and take it into his own hands? Let us, then, rejoice in his success; for once Satan had the power of death — but Christ has "carried captivity captive," and "Satan has fallen before him as lightning from Heaven." In that hour, which he himself emphatically called "the hour and the power of darkness," when he was in more than mortal agony, travailing in the greatness of his strength, he vanquished death and Hell, and he wrested from the hands of our greatest enemy, and took into his own possession — the keys of death and of the invisible world. Death still reigns — but Christ has now the dominion over death! In token of his victory, the Redeemer adds, "I am alive for evermore!" The grave received — but it could not retain him. And while the fact of his interment may well serve to reconcile us to the peaceful grave, with all its loneliness and darkness, since it was embalmed by the presence of our Lord himself — the fact of his resurrection from the grave should enkindle the bright hope of a glorious morning, after that dark night has passed away.

For, did the Redeemer arise from the tomb? Then here, at least, is one example of restoration to life, after the agony of death was past — one case in which the spell of death was broken, and the cerements of the tomb burst, and the power of Satan vanquished — one living monument of the immortality of man — one incontestible proof, that the same body which died, and the same spirit which departed, may meet again after that fearful separation. Christ has risen, and in his resurrection we find the ground of an eternal hope! Did the Redeemer arise from the grave in the same character in which he died — as the head and representative of his people? Then is his resurrection not only the proof — but the pledge; not only the evidence — but the assurance of our own. For if the head is risen — shall not the members of his body rise also? If, as our representative, he has passed into the heavens — then shall not we, in whose name, and for whose behalf, he undertook and accomplished his mediatorial work — follow him in our order and time? Did we die with him, and shall we not rise with him? "If we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection." "If we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." "Because I live, you shall live also." Did the Redeemer not only rise from the grave — but does he live for evermore? Is he the same yesterday, today, and forever? Not only eternal in his being — but unchangeable in his character, as our Redeemer? What, then, should cause us to despond, or make us afraid? "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Since Christ has died, yes, also, and has risen again, and is now and forever at the right hand of God, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing — will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus

our Lord!"

True, we know not what may yet befall us, nor into what untried circumstances, or state of being, that we may hereafter be brought. But we are sure that one day we must die and enter the invisible world; and we may well be concerned for an event which will have an everlasting outcome for good or for evil; but placing our trust in the efficacy of the Redeemer's death. And believing in the fact of his resurrection, we may take his own word as the rock of our confidence and hope, "I am alive for evermore, Amen;" and "because I live — you shall live also!"

If these views of the death and resurrection of our blessed Lord are fitted to banish, or mitigate, the fear of death and the grave, and to inspire the hope of a glorious immortality — how much should their impression be aided by the sublime statement in the last clause of the passage, "I have the keys of death and of Hell!" The power of the keys is an absolute power — a royal prerogative. Christ's authority is not confined to the visible Church on earth; it extends to the invisible world, and embraces under its jurisdiction all the disembodied spirits, of whatever character. Although they have left this world, they are still under the dominion of him, of whom it is said, that "at his name every knee shall bow, of things in Heaven, of things on earth, and of things under the earth; and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

It is as the Redeemer, that he asserts his claim to the keys; that claim is founded on the fact, that "he overcame death and him that had the power of death, in order to deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." And it is expressly declared by the apostle, that, "For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living!" Romans 14:9 That he is the Lord of the dead, is here asserted, "I have the keys of HELL." In the original there are two terms, each of which is rendered by the word "Hell" in the English version. The one, however, literally imports the invisible world at large; while the other denotes that department of the invisible world which is specially appropriated to the punishment of the wicked. In the passage before us, the more comprehensive term is used; and here, as elsewhere, it is to be regarded as signifying not merely the place of future punishment, although that is unquestionably included in it, but, more generally, the world of spirits — the entire state of retribution, whether of reward or punishment.

We learn from Scripture, that the whole of that vast world is divided into two departments, and only two — Heaven and Hell; and that between the two, a great gulf is fixed — an impassable gulf of separation. But separated as they are, Christ reigns over both; and when he says, "I have the keys of the invisible world," he asserts his dominion over all the spirits that have ever passed from this world, either into Heaven or Hell; and his absolute control over them in their final destination of happiness or woe. When it is affirmed, that he has also "the key of DEATH," it is plainly implied that no spirit can pass out of this present world without his appointment; and, more generally, that he is lord of the living not less than of the dead, and has a thorough control over everything that can in any way affect the lives of men. An absolute power over death necessarily presupposes a corresponding power over life and its affairs. And it is by the exercise of his providence in sustaining life — that he fulfills his purpose as to the time and mode of their departure hence. So that, combining these several views, we arrive at this grand and comprehensive result: that the Redeemer is possessed of absolute power over the course of our lives on earth; over the time and manner of our departure out of the world; and over that invisible state, in each of its great

departments, on which our spirits enter when they quit their mortal tabernacles. And this noble testimony to the universal power and everlasting presence of Christ with his disciples, is fitted to suggest several reflections, which may be useful in dissipating their anxieties, and in fortifying their courage, when they contemplate either the future course of their pilgrimage here, or the solemn prospect of its termination, or the still more solemn, because untried and eternal, state on which they shall enter hereafter. Has the Redeemer the keys of death? Then this consideration ought to relieve our minds both of the anxieties and the regrets which we are too apt to feel, in reference to the changes of the present life.

It should mitigate the anxiety which often preys upon the mind when we look forward into futurity, and contemplate the prospect of our own death. We should remember, that as the Redeemer alone has the keys of death — nothing can happen to send us forth from the world before the time which he has appointed for our departure. Neither man nor devils can abridge the term of probation assigned to us by our gracious Master. Nor, until he is pleased to call us away, shall any power on earth or in Hell prevail against us. No accident, no hostile violence, no insidious snare, no dark conspiracy, can touch our life — but by his command. And surely, when we reflect on the numerous dangers to which human life is, in its greatest security, exposed — the frailty of our frame — the diseases to which it is subject — our constant exposure to fatal accidents — the malice of open or concealed enemies — it must be consolatory to know, that the key of death is in the Savior's hands, and that, come what may, we cannot be forced out of the world, until he opens the door and bids us to come to Him.

More especially, when we are visited with disease, and threatened with a speedy termination of life, the Savior's power over the keys of death should repress or assuage those violent anxieties as to the probability of death or of recovery, and those disquieting speculations as to the outcome of disease, and the mode of its treatment, in which we are too apt to indulge to an extent which unfits the mind for the serious exercises of religion, appropriate to a season of personal affliction. Who has not felt in the hours of languishing and sickness — that these painful and perplexing thoughts were even more harassing to his mind, than the pressure of disease itself, and that they diverted his attention, in a great measure, from the profitable contemplation of divine things?

Now, besides that they are injurious, as tending to divert the mind from what is certain — to what must necessarily be uncertain until the event shall disclose it — and useless, as being incapable of either ascertaining or altering the future outcome — it is our privilege, as Christians, to know that such anxieties are altogether groundless. For disease cannot kill, nor can medicine cure — without the appointment of Him who holds in his own hands the keys of life and of death! And if he has fixed the outcome of this disease, why should we be anxious?

If death is in our cup — that cup has been put into our hands at the time fixed by unerring wisdom and infinite love! And if the door of death is opening for our departure — it is because the tender Savior, whom we love and trust, is summoning us to be forever with Him! Shall we, then, rebel against His appointment? Shall we doubt the love and wisdom of His determination? Or, as ignorant as we are of what is before us in this world, and of what really concerns our best interests — can we entertain the wish, that the power of determining the time of our death were wrested out of His hands and placed in our own?

True, we may have many ties that attach us to this world. We may be young, and, with the optimistic hope of youth, may cleave to life. We may be prosperous, and surrounded with many comforts. We may have a young and engaging family, whom we are loath to leave behind us to the cold charities of the world. We may have many dependents on our industry or bounty, who will bitterly lament our loss. But do we imagine that these considerations are not known to the Redeemer, or that He has not weighed them all? And if, notwithstanding, it is His will to summon us home — are we not prepared to yield up our faulty judgment to his unerring wisdom? The same consideration should prevent or repress the anxiety which is too often felt respecting the mode and circumstances of our death — not less than respecting the time of its occurrence. A pensive mind is apt to be oppressed with melancholy forebodings as to the situation in which death may overtake it — and to muse on the thousand possibilities which imagination may conjure up in the darkness of the future — until it is overwhelmed with anxieties of its own creation!

We know as little of the mode of our death, as we do of the time of our departure hence; it may be that we shall leave the world with ease — or with difficulty; by a sudden stroke — or by protracted suffering. We may be, at the time, vividly conscious, or in a state of partial aberration, or totally insensible. We may die alone, or in the midst of friends. We may die by sea — or by land; at home — or abroad; on the highway — or in the solitary desert — or on our own pillow. These possibilities are apt to be converted, by a melancholy temperament, into the food of anxious disquietude and fretting care.

It is a very obvious consideration, that such anxieties, springing, as they do, from all possible forms of death, must, for the greater part, be groundless, as death can only meet us in one form at last. And that, even in reference to that form, in respect of which they may be well-founded, they are totally useless, as being of no avail to avert or alter it. That such people harass themselves respecting a matter which must be totally unknown, and which, were it known — is, nevertheless, beyond their control. That their present fears respecting it occasion a greater and more protracted suffering than the event itself could occasion, did it really occur in its most formidable shape. That fear is, in its very nature, an anticipation, and, in some measure, a foretaste of all possible evils — whereas in death, one form of that evil only is endured. And that such anxieties have the effect of spreading death, as it were, over the whole extent of life, according to the beautiful language of the apostle, when he speaks of some "who through the fear of death, are all their lifetime subject to bondage."

But, without dwelling on these obvious considerations, what does it matter, after all, where, or in what circumstances we die? Die where we may — we cannot be beyond the reach of the Redeemer's protection! Nay, the fact that he has in his own hand the key of death, is a proof that he is present with us, and that he is thinking of us, in whatever place, and at whatever time death may overtake us; for there, where we die, he summons us; and it is ours to be ready and willing to depart at his call. This consideration should repress, not only the anxieties which we feel in regard to the future — but also the regrets which we are too apt to cherish respecting the bereavements with which we have already been visited. It is not less instructive and consoling, when viewed, in reference to the death of relatives and friends, than when it is considered in respect to our own prospect of death. For it teaches us, that the duration of each man's existence here is determined by the Redeemer; that it belongs to him to appoint a longer or shorter period to each, as he will; and in doing so, we have reason to be satisfied, that he determines according to the dictates of

infallible wisdom, although the reasons of his procedure must necessarily be to us, for the present, inscrutable.

We cannot tell why one dies in infancy, another in boyhood, a third in the prime of manly vigor, and a fourth reserved to the period of old age; and above all, why the most promising in talent and character, and the most useful in their several stations, are taken away — while others of inferior worth are often left behind. But suffice it for us, that this happens not by chance, neither is it the result of caprice or carelessness — but flows from that unerring wisdom, whose counsels are formed on a view of all possible relations and consequences, whether as to the visible or invisible, the present or the future states of being. The power of death being in the hands of the Redeemer, the duration of human life is, in every instance, determined by him. And none, therefore, ought to entertain the thought, either that death is, in one case, unduly premature — or, in another, unduly delayed. None live, either for a longer or for a shorter period than infinite wisdom has assigned to them. Reason teaches, that to his appointment we must submit, however unwilling — it being irresistible, and far beyond our control. So, as Christians, we should learn to acquiesce in it cheerfully, as the appointment of one who cannot err. That the determined hour had arrived, is a reflection that should serve to banish every useless regret — but that this hour was fixed by one in whose wisdom we confide, and of whose interest in our welfare we have the strongest assurance — is a thought which should not only induce resignation — but inspire comfort and peace.

For, when death does seize any of our friends, whether in the ordinary course of disease and decay, or by violence or accident — how consolatory to the mourning relatives is the thought, that it came at the bidding of the Savior, and that it has not arrived without his sanction and appointment! Otherwise, we might be apt to reflect, with unavailing regret — on certain remedies whose virtues might have been tried; certain physicians high in professional reputation, who might have been consulted; or to dwell, with painful self-reproach, on certain accidents that might have been prevented, and injuries which timely care might have cured. The mind will often busy itself with such reflections after the loss of a near and dear friend; but the very intensity of feeling which is thus called forth, is a sufficient proof that any carelessness or negligence that may have been manifested, was far, very far, from being designed or willful. And although, where criminal negligence has been shown, no doctrine, however consolatory, can prevent regret, or should repress feelings of penitential sorrow. Yet, in other cases, where the heart bears witness to its own interest in the beloved object, the doctrine of Christ's absolute command over the keys of death, and the consideration that our friend was summoned away by a deliberate act of his sovereign wisdom — may well assuage the grief which such reflections on the commencement, progress, and treatment of the disease, are accustomed to awaken in the most sensitive and affectionate minds.

While this sublime statement should banish, or at least mitigate, the anxieties and regrets which we sometimes experience, in reference to the events of the present life — inasmuch as Christ's power over death implies a corresponding power over life and its affairs — it is equally fitted to fortify our minds for the last struggle, since it assures us that Christ will then be present with us. In the very article of death, it gives us comfort — for the Redeemer has the keys of death! Then he presides over that dark passage which leads from this world to the next; his power does not terminate with our present life — it extends from the world which is smiling in the cheerful light of day, to that mysterious passage which lies amidst the sepulchers of the dead, and which, to our

imperfect vision, is shrouded in impenetrable darkness. We know not the secrets of that passage. We cannot know what it is to die. The mind may then have views and feelings of which it is impossible for us at present to form any conception — for who shall attempt to describe what may be passing in the soul when the tie that binds it to the body is breaking, and nature is undergoing death? And what renders that scene still more solemn is, that we die alone — alone we enter on the dark valley. Friends and family may stand around our couch, and watch the progress of death — but they cannot accompany us, neither are they sensible of what we feel, nor able in any way to help or deliver us. The spirit departs alone; and in that solemn hour of separation from human fellowship — in that solitude of death, when, placed on the verge of the invisible world, we know that all behind must be forsaken, and are ignorant of what may meet us as we advance — Oh! how consolatory to reflect, that death itself is subject to the Redeemer's power — that he watches over the death of his people, and keeps his eye, not only on the busy scenes of life — but also on the secret mysteries of death.

Yes, "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." There he is, where most we need a friend and comforter, standing at the gate of death, with absolute power over every enemy that can assail us, and with unquenchable zeal for our welfare. Dark, then, as the passage is, and unknown as are its dangers and pains — surely we may venture to commit ourselves into his hands, and to say with the Psalmist, "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil — for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me!" for, says the Apostle, "all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or life — or death." But Christ has also the keys of the invisible world at large — all, without exception, are under his control. His kingdom on earth is but a small dependency, compared with his universal dominion in the invisible state, where already are congregated, of the human race, ten thousand times ten thousand more than are any where to be found on the earth's surface, besides the hosts of spiritual beings of whom we read in Scripture, as angels, elect or fallen, archangels, principalities, dominions and powers. Not one human spirit that ever lived on the earth's surface has been extinguished — they are all at this moment alive in one or other department of the invisible world — and, holy or unholy, happy or wretched, they are under the dominion of our Savior. And under the same dominion are placed all higher intelligences, fallen or unfallen, of whatever rank and in whatever station they may be. Could we form an estimate of the multitude of human spirits which must have passed into that vast region from our own world since the period of its creation — of the countless millions which every province of the earth, and every island of the sea, have yielded to swell the host of departed spirits — and could we, moreover, form any conception of the different orders of beings, purely spiritual, and the multitudes belonging to every order, together with their respective rank, and dignity, and power — could we conceive of the extent of that world, which is at once described as Heaven, the third heavens, and yet as stretching far above all heavens — then might we have some materials for forming an estimate of the grandeur and extent of the Redeemer's kingdom. But, unable as we are to comprehend a theme so vast in itself, and of which only a few glimpses are revealed in Scripture — surely it is consolatory to reflect, that whatever may be the extent of the invisible world — whatever the number, the rank, and the character of the various orders of its inhabitants — the whole of that vast region, and all these innumerable hosts, are under the dominion of him who was "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh," and who, as our Redeemer, has identified our interests with his own, by "dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification," and who is even now "at the right hand of God, making intercession for us." When we

come to enter on that spiritual world over which he presides, what reflection could so well support the mind in the prospect of such a destination as this — that, go where we may, we are still under the watchful eye of one who has given us the strongest assurances of his love? And may we not well believe, that, if we have trusted in him without being disappointed, while we sojourned in this remote province of his empire — then much more may we trust in his care, when we enter that invisible world where he is, and over which he reigns in the full manifestation of his mediatorial power and glory? As Christ has the key of the invisible world at large, so has he the key of each ward or department — the keys of both Heaven and of Hell. Has he the key of Hell? Then, knowing as we do, that there are rebellious spirits of great subtlety, and power, and malice, and that they are sometimes permitted to go about as roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour — we might have many an anxious fear, lest, in the dark hour of death, some such should be watching for our spirit, when it ventures alone into the invisible world. But "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" — to that death-bed the watchful eye of the Savior is directed; he can and will restrain the malice of our enemies; and his promise is, that "whoever believes on him shall never come into condemnation," and that "none shall pluck them out of his hand!" And has the Redeemer the keys of Heaven — that blessed asylum of purity and peace, where, in the midst of his redeemed, the Savior himself dwells? Then, in the hands of our best friend, one who is pledged to us by the sacredness of his Word, and by the shedding of his own blood — in his hands is the power of admitting us — and will he shut the door against us? — he who, for the opening of that door, descended from Heaven to earth, and whose prayer was and is, "Father, I will that those who you have given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory?" No, the door of Heaven is thrown open for the reception of his penitent and believing people. Even now is he "preparing a place for them in his Father's house, where there are many mansions." And thus will he receive and welcome them, on their departure hence, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world!" "Well done, good and faithful servants, enter into the joy of your Lord!"

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