

Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod -Part 2

by Thomas Brooks

Christians should be mute and silent under afflictions to hear and understand the voice of the rod, to distinguish themselves from wicked men, to be conformable to Christ, to avoid being given to a fretful spirit, to avoid striving with God, to practice patience, and to cross and frustrate Satan's design.

Scripture: Psalm 39:9, Isaiah 8:21, Micah 6:9

Topics: "Trusting God's Sovereignty", "Silence in Suffering"

Description

Thomas Brooks emphasizes the necessity for Christians to remain mute and silent during afflictions, drawing from Psalm 39:9 to illustrate that silence allows believers to hear the voice of God through their trials. He explains that being silent distinguishes them from the world, which often reacts with anger and frustration during hardships. Brooks encourages believers to emulate Christ's example of silence in suffering, asserting that a quiet spirit is of great worth in God's sight and essential for spiritual growth. He warns against the futility of murmuring and the dangers of sinning to escape troubles, urging Christians to trust in God's sovereign plan and to find peace in their afflictions.

Transcript

"Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod" or,

"The Silent Soul with Sovereign Antidotes"

by Thomas Brooks, 1659, London.

"I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for

You are the one who has done this!" Psalm 39:9

IV. WHY must Christians be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences, and sharpest trials which they meet with in this world? I answer,

Reason 1. That they may the better hear and understand the voice of the rod. As the word has a voice, the Spirit a voice, and conscience a voice--so God's rod has a voice. Afflictions are the rod of God's anger, the rod of his displeasure, and his rod of revenge. God gives a commission to his rod--to awaken his people--to reform his people--or else to revenge the quarrel of his covenant upon them, if they will not hear the rod, and kiss the rod, and sit mute and silent under the rod--Micah 6:9, 'The voice of the Lord calls out

to the city (and it is wise to fear Your name,) "Pay attention to the rod and the One who ordained it." God's rods are not mutes, they are all vocal, they are all speaking as well as smiting. Every twig has a voice. 'Ah! soul,' says one twig, 'you say it smarts. Well! tell me, is it good to provoke a jealous God?' Jer. 4:18. 'Ah! soul,' says another twig, 'you say it is bitter, it reaches to your heart; but have not your own doings procured these things?' Rom. 6:20, 21. 'Ah! soul,' says another twig, 'where is the profit, the pleasure, the sweet that you have found in wandering from God?' Hosea 2:7. 'Ah! soul,' says another twig, 'was it not best with you, when you were high in your communion with God, and when you were humble and close in your walking with God?' Micah 6:8. 'Ah! Christian,' says another twig, 'will you search your heart, and try your ways, and turn to the Lord your God?' Lam. 3:40. 'Ah! soul,' says another twig, 'will you die to sin more than ever, and to the world more than ever, and to relations more than ever, and to yourself more than ever?' Rom. 14:6-8; Gal. 6:18. 'Ah! soul,' says another twig, 'will you live more to Christ than ever, and cleave closer to Christ than ever, and prize Christ more than ever, and venture further for Christ than ever?' 'Ah! soul,' says another twig, 'will you love Christ with a more inflamed love, and hope in Christ with a more raised hope, and depend upon Christ with a greater confidence, and wait upon Christ with more invincible patience?'

Now, if the soul be not mute and silent under the rod, how is it possible that it should ever hear the voice of the rod, or that it should ever hearken to the voice of every twig of the rod? The rod that is in the hands of earthly fathers has a voice--but children hear it not, they understand it not, until they are hushed and quiet, and brought to kiss it, and sit silently under it; no more shall we hear or understand the voice of the rod that is in our heavenly Father's hand, until we come to kiss it, and sit silently under it. But,

Reason 2. Gracious souls should be mute and silent under their greatest afflictions and sharpest trials--that they may difference and distinguish themselves from the men of the world, who usually fret and fling, mutter or murmur, curse and swagger, when they are under the afflicting hand of God.

"They will wander through the land, dejected and hungry. When they are famished, they will become enraged, and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. They will look toward the earth and see only distress, darkness, and the gloom of affliction, and they will be driven into thick darkness." Isaiah 8:21-22. Ah! how fretful and froward, how disturbed and distracted, how mad and forlorn--are these poor wretches under the rebukes of God! They look upward and downward this way and that way, on this side and on that, and finding no help, no support, no support, no deliverance, like Bedlams, yes, like incarnate devils--they fall upon cursing of God!

"We all roar like bears; we moan mournfully like doves. We look for justice--but find none; for deliverance--but it is far away." Isaiah 59:11. They express their inward vexation and indignation by roaring like bears. When bears are robbed of their whelps, or taken in a pit, oh how dreadfully will they roar, rage, tear, and tumble! So when wicked people are fallen into the pit of affliction, oh how will they roar, rage, tear, and cry out! not of their sins--but of their punishments; as Cain, 'My punishment is greater than I am able to bear!' Gen. 4:13; Isaiah 51:20, 'Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as a wild bull in a net--they are full of the fury of the Lord, the rebuke of your God.' When the huntsman has taken the wild bull in his net, and so entangled him, that he is not able to wind himself out, oh, how fierce and furious will he be! how will he spend himself in struggling to get out! Such wild bulls are wicked men--when they are taken in the net of affliction.

It is said of Marcellus the Roman general, that he could not be quiet--neither conquered nor conqueror! It is so with wicked men; they cannot be quiet, neither full nor fasting, neither sick nor well, neither in wealth

nor want, neither in bonds nor at liberty, neither in prosperity nor in adversity--"Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives. Her people all roar like young lions, they growl like lion cubs." Jeremiah 51:37-38. When the lion roars, all the beasts of the field tremble, Amos 3:8. When the lion roars, many creatures that could outrun him are so amazed and astonished at the terror of his roar, that they are not able to stir from the place. Such roaring lions are wicked men, when they are under the smarting rod--"They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues--but they refused to repent and glorify him. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores--but they refused to repent of what they had done." Revelation 16:9-11

And therefore gracious souls have cause to be silent under their sorest trials, that they may difference and distinguish themselves from wicked men, who are 'like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt', Isaiah 57:20. The verb rasha signifies to make a stir, to be exceeding busy, unquiet, or troublesome. Ah! what a stir do wicked men make, when they are under the afflicting hand of God! Ah! the sea is restless and unquiet when there is no storm; it cannot stand still--but has its flux and reflex; so it is much more restless, when by tempest upon tempest it is made to roar and rage, to foam and cast up mire and dirt. The raging sea is a fit emblem of a wicked man, who is under God's afflicting hand.

Reason 3. A third reason why gracious souls should be silent and mute under their sharpest trials is, that they may be conformable to Christ their head, who was dumb and silent under his sorest trials.

"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, He did not open His mouth. Isaiah 53:7. Christ was tongue-tied under all his sorrows and sufferings--"He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth; when reviled, He did not revile in return; when suffering, He did not threaten--but committed Himself to the One who judges justly." 1 Peter 2:22-23. Christ upon the cross did not read us a lecture of patience and silence--but he has also set us a copy or pattern of both, to be transcribed and imitated by us when we are under the smarting rod. It will be our sin and shame if we do not bear up with patience and silence under all our sufferings, considering what an admirable copy Christ has set before us.

It is said of Antiochus, that before going to battle, he showed unto his elephants the blood of the grapes and mulberries--to provoke them the better to fight. So the Holy Spirit has set before us the injuries and abuses, the sorrows and sufferings, the pains and torments, the sweat and blood of our dearest Lord, and his invincible patience, and admirable silence under all--to provoke us and encourage us to imitate the Captain of our salvation, in patience and silence under all our sufferings.

Jerome having read the life and death of Hilarion--one that lived graciously and died comfortably--folded up the book, saying--Well! Hilarion shall be the champion that I will follow; his good life shall be my example, and his good death my precedent. Oh! how much more should we all say--We have read how Christ has been afflicted, oppressed, distressed, despised, persecuted, etc.; and we have read how speechless, how tongue-tied, how patient, and how silent he has been under all; oh! he shall be the copy which we shall write after, the pattern which we will walk by, the champion which we will follow! But, alas! alas! how rare is it to find a man that may be applauded with the eulogy of Salvian--an excellent disciple of a singular master. The heathens had this notion among them, as Lactantius reports, that the way to honor their gods was to be like them; and therefore some would be wicked, counting it a dishonor to their gods to be unlike to them. I am sure the way to honor our Christ, is in patience and silence to be like to Christ, especially when a smarting rod is upon our backs, and a bitter cup put into our hands.

Reason 4. The fourth reason why the people of God should be mute and silent under their afflictions, is this, because it is ten thousand times a greater judgment and affliction, to be given to a fretful spirit, a froward spirit, a muttering spirit under an affliction--than it is to be afflicted. This is both the devil's sin, and the devil's punishment. God is still afflicting, crossing and vexing him; and he is still a-fretting, repining, vexing, and rising up against God. No sin like the devil's sin, no punishment like the devil's punishment. A man were better to have all the afflictions of all the afflicted throughout the world at once upon him--than to be given up to a froward spirit--to a muttering, murmuring heart under the least affliction. When you see a soul fretting, vexing, and stamping under the mighty hand of God, you see one of Satan's first-born, one that resembles him to the life. No child can be so much like the father, as this froward soul is like to the father of lies.

Though he has been in chains almost this six thousand years, yet he has never lain still one day, nor one night, no nor one hour in all this time--but is still a-fretting vexing, tossing and tumbling in his chains, like a princely bedlam. He is a lion--not a lamb; a roaring lion--not a sleepy lion; not a lion standing still--but a lion going up and down; he is not satisfied with the prey he has already gotten--but is restless in his designs to fill hell with souls, 1 Pet. 5:8. He never lacks an apple for an Eve, nor a grape for a Noah, nor a change of clothing for a Gehazi, nor a wedge of gold for an Achan, nor a crown for an Absalom, nor a bag of silver for a Judas, nor a world for a Demas. If you look into one company, there you shall find Satan a-dishing out his meat to every palate; if you look into another company, there you shall find him fitting a lace to every shoe; if you look into a third company, there you shall find him suiting a garment to every back. He is under wrath, and cannot but be restless. Here, with Jael, he allures poor souls in with milk--and murders them with a nail! There, with Joab, he embraces with one hand--and stabs with another! Here with Judas, he kisses--and betrays! And there, with the whore of Babylon, he presents a golden cup--with poison in it! He cannot be quiet, though his bolts be always on!

And the more unquiet any are under the rebukes of God, the more such resemble Satan--whose whole life is filled up with vexing and fretting against the Lord. Let not any think, says Luther, that the devil is now dead, nor yet asleep, for as he who keeps Israel, so he who hates Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps. But; in the next place,

Reason 5. A fifth reason why gracious souls should be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions and sharpest trials that do befall them is this--because a holy, a prudent silence under afflictions, under miseries, does best capacitate and fit the afflicted for the receipt of miseries. When the rolling bottle lies still, you may pour into it your sweetest or your strongest waters; when the rolling, tumbling soul lies still, then God can best pour into it the sweet waters of mercy, and the strong waters of divine consolation. You read of the 'peaceable fruits of righteousness'--Heb. 12:11. 'Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous--but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby.' James 3:18, 'And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace, by those who make peace.'

The still and quiet soul is like a ship that lies still and quiet in the harbor; you may take in what goods, what commodities you please, while the ship lies quiet and still--so when the soul is quiet and still under the hand of God, it is most fitted and advantaged to take in much of God, of Christ, of heaven, of the promises, of ordinances, and of the love of God, the smiles of God, the communications of God, and the counsel of God. But when souls are unquiet, they are like a ship in a storm, they can take in nothing.

Luther, speaking of God, says, God does not dwell in Babylon--but in Salem. Babylon signifies confusion, and Salem signifies peace. Now God dwells not in spirits that are unquiet and in confusion--but he dwells in peaceable and quiet spirits. Unquiet spirits can take in neither counsel nor comfort, grace nor peace, etc.--Psalm 77:2, 'My soul refused to be comforted.' The impatient patient will take down no cordials; he has no eye to see, nor hand to take, nor palate to relish, nor stomach to digest--anything that makes for his health and welfare. When the man is sick and froward, nothing will relieve him; the sweetest music will make no melody in his ears--"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.' Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage." Exodus 6:6-9.

The choicest cordials and comforts that heaven or earth could afford are here held forth to them--but they have no hand to receive them. Here Moses' lips drops honey-combs--but they can taste no sweetness in them. Here the best of earth and the best of heaven is set before them--but their souls are shut up, and can receive nothing. Here is such ravishing music of paradise as might abundantly delight their hearts and please their ears--but they cannot hear. Here are soul-enlivening, soul-supporting, soul-strengthening, soul-comforting, soul-raising, and soul-refreshing words--but they cannot hearken to them--"Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage." They were under their anguish feverish fits, and so could neither hear nor see, taste nor take in--anything that might be mercy or a comfort to them. They were sick with impatience and discontent--and these humors being grown strong--nothing would work with them, nothing would agree with them. When people are under strong pangs of passion, they have no ears neither for reason nor piety.

Reason 6. A sixth reason why gracious souls should be silent under the smarting rod, is this, namely--because it is fruitless, it is futile to strive, to contest or contend with God. No man has ever got anything, by muttering or murmuring under the hand of God, except it has been more frowns, blows, and wounds. Such as will not lie quiet and still, when mercy has tied them with silken cords--justice will put them in iron chains! If golden fetters will not hold you, iron fetters shall! If Jonah will vex and fret and fling; justice will fling him overboard, to cool him, and quell him, and keep him prisoner in the whale's belly until he is vomited up, and his spirit made quiet before the Lord. What you get by struggling and grumbling--you may put in your eye, and weep it out when you are done--"But am I the one they are provoking? declares the Lord. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame? Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched." Jeremiah 7:19-20. 'Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?' 1 Cor. 10:22. Zanchy observes these two things from these words:

1. That it is foolish to be provoking God to wrath, because he is stronger than we.
2. That though God be stronger than we, yet there are those who do provoke him to wrath. And certainly there are none that do more provoke him than those who fume and fret when his hand is upon them!

Though the cup be bitter--yet it is put into your hand by your Father! Though the cross be heavy--yet he who has laid it on your shoulders will bear the heaviest end of it himself! Why, then, should you mutter?

Shall bears and lions take blows and knocks from their keepers, and will you not take a few blows and knocks from the keeper of Israel? Why should the clay contend with the potter, or the creature with his creator, or the servant with his master, or weakness with strength, or a poor nothing creature with an omnipotent God? Can stubble stand before the fire? Can chaff abide before the whirlwind? Can a worm ward off the blow of the Almighty?

A froward and impatient spirit under the hand of God will but add chain to chain, cross to cross, yoke to yoke, and burden to burden. The more men tumble and toss in their feverish fits, the worse they distemper; and the longer it will be before the cure be effected. The easiest and the surest way of cure is to lie still and quiet until the poison of the distemper be sweat out. Where patience has its perfect work, there the cure will be certain and easy. When a man has his broken leg set, he lies still and quiet, and so his cure is easily and speedily wrought; but when a horse's leg is set, he frets and flings, he flounces and flies out, unjointing it again and again, and so his cure is the more difficult and tedious. Such Christians that under the hand of God are like the horse or mule--fretting and flinging--will but add to their own sorrows and sufferings, and put the day of their deliverance further off.

Reason 7. A seventh reason why Christians should be mute and silent under their afflictions is, because hereby they shall cross and frustrate Satan's great design and expectation. In all the afflictions he brought upon Job, Satan's design was not so much to make Job a beggar--as it was to make him a blasphemer; it was not so much to make Job outwardly miserable--as it was to make Job inwardly miserable, by occasioning him to mutter and murmur against the righteous hand of God, that so he might have had some matter of accusation against him to the Lord. Satan is the unwearied accuser of the brethren--Rev. 12:10, 'The accuser of the brethren is cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night.' Satan is the great tempter and accuser between God and his children. He has a mint constantly going in hell, where, as an untiring mint-master, he is still a-coming and hammering out of accusations against the saints. First, he tempts and allures souls to sin--and then accuses them of those very sins he has tempted them to--that so he may disgrace them before God, and bring them, if it were possible, out of favor with God. And though he knows beforehand that God and his people are, by the bond of the covenant, and by the blood of the Redeemer--so closely united that they can never be severed--yet such is his rage and wrath, envy and malice, that he will endeavor that which he knows he shall never effect!

Could he but have made Job froward or fretting under the rod, he would have quickly carried the tidings to heaven, and have been so bold as to have asked God whether this was a posture befitting such a person, of whom God himself had given so glorious a character! Satan knows that there is more evil in the least sin--than there is in all the afflictions which can be inflicted upon a person; and if he could but have made a breach upon Job's patience, ah, how would he have insulted over God himself! Could he but have made Job a mutineer, he would quickly have pleaded for martial law to have been executed upon him; but Job, by remaining mute and silent under all his trials, puts Satan to a blush, and spoils all his projects at once. The best way to outwit the devil, is to be silent under the hand of God; he who mutters is foiled by him--but he who is silent overcomes him; and to conquer a devil is more than to conquer a world!

Reason 8. The eighth and last reason why Christians should be silent and mute under their sorest trials, is this--that they may be conformable to those noble patterns that are set before them by other saints, who have been patient and silent under the smarting rod. As Aaron, Lev. 10:3; so Eli, 1 Sam. 3:18; so David, 2 Sam. 16:7-13; so Job, chapter 1:21, 22; so Eliakim, Shebna, and Joab, Isaiah 36:11, 12. So those saints in that Acts 21:12-15; and that cloud of witnesses pointed at in Hebrews 12. Gracious examples are more awakening, more convincing, more quickening, more provoking, and more encouraging--than precepts;

because in them we see that the exercise of grace and godliness is possible, though it be difficult.

When we see Christians, who are subject to like infirmities with ourselves, mute and silent under the afflicting hand of God--we see that it is possible that we may attain to the same noble temper of being--tongue-tied under God's smarting rod. Certainly it is our greatest honor and glory, in this world, to be eyeing and imitating the highest and worthiest examples. What Plutarch said of Demosthenes, that he was excellent at praising the worthy acts of his ancestors--but not so good at imitating them--may be said of many in these days. Oh! they are very forward and excellent at praising the patience of Job--but not at imitating it; at praising the silence of Aaron--but not at imitating it; at praising David's silence--but not at imitating it; at praising Eli's muteness--but not at imitating it. It was the height of Caesar's glory to walk in the steps of Alexander; and of Selymus, a Turkish emperor, to walk in Caesar's steps; and of Themistocles to walk in Hiltiades's steps. Oh! how much more should we account it our highest glory to imitate the worthy examples of those worthies, of whom this world is not worthy! It speaks out much of God within, when men are striving to write after the fairest copies. And thus much for the reasons of the point. I come now to the,

V. APPLICATION

You see, beloved, by what has been said, that it is the greatest duty and concernment of Christians to be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences, and the sharpest trials that they meet with in this world. If this be so, then this truth looks sourly and wistly upon several sorts of people. As,

1. First, This looks sourly and sadly upon murmurers, upon such as do nothing but mutter and murmur under the afflicting hand of God. This was Israel's sin of old, and this is England's sin this day. Ah! what murmuring is there against God, what murmuring against instruments, and what murmuring against providences--is to be found among us! Some murmur at what they have lost, others murmur at what they fear they shall lose! Some murmur that they are no higher, others murmur because they are so low! Some murmur because such a party rules, and others mutter because they themselves are not in the saddle! Some murmur because their mercies are not so great as others' are; some murmur because their mercies are not so many as others' are! Some murmur because they are afflicted, and others murmur because such and such are not afflicted as well as they. Ah, England, England! had you no more sins upon you--your murmuring would be enough to undo you, did not God exercise much pity and compassion towards you! But more of this hereafter, and therefore let this touch for the present suffice.

2. Secondly, This truth looks sourly upon those who fret, chafe, and vex when they are under the afflicting hand of God. Many, when they feel the rod to smart--ah, how they do fret and fume! Isaiah 8:21, 'Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.' Prov. 19:3, 'A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.' The heart may be fretful and froward when the tongue does not blaspheme. Folly brings man into misery, and misery makes man to fret. Man in misery is more apt to fret and chafe against the Lord, than to fret and chafe against his sin which has brought him into sufferings, 2 Kings 6:33, Psalm 37:1, 7, 8.

A fretful soul dares fly at God himself! When Pharaoh is troubled with the frets, he dares spit in the very face of God himself--'Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?' Exod. 5:2. And when Jonah is in a fretting humour, he dares tell God to his face, 'that he does well to he angry,' Jonah 4:8. Jonah had done well if he

had been angry with his sin--but he did very ill to be angry with his God! God will vex every vein in that man's heart, before he has done with him, who fumes and frets, because he cannot snap in sunder the cords with which he is bound, Ezek. 16:43. Sometimes good men are sick of the frets--but when they are, it costs them dear, as Job and Jonah found by experience. No man has ever got anything by his fretting and flinging, except it has been harder blows or heavier chains; therefore fret not when God strikes!

3. Thirdly, This truth looks sourly upon those who charge God foolishly in the day of their adversity. "Why should any living man complain when punished for his sins?" Lamentations 3:39. He who has deserved a hanging--has no reason to charge the judge with cruelty if he escapes with a whipping! And we who have deserved a damning--have no reason to charge God for being too severe, if we escape with a fatherly lashing! Rather than a man will take the blame, and quietly bear the shame of his own folly--he will put it off upon God himself, Gen. 3:12. It is a very evil thing, when we shall go to accuse God, that we may excuse ourselves and unblame ourselves; that we may blame our God, and lay the fault anywhere rather than upon our own hearts and ways.

Job was a man of a more noble spirit--Job 1:22, 'In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.' When God smote some men--then they presently charge God foolishly; they put him to bear the brunt and blame of all; but this will be bitterness in the end. When you are under affliction, you may humbly tell God that you feel his hand heavy; but you must not blame him because his hand is heavy. No man has ever yet been able to make good a charge against God; and will you be able? Surely not! By charging God foolishly in the day of your calamity, you do but provoke the Lord to charge you through and through, more fiercely and furiously, with his most deadly darts of renewed misery! It is your greatest wisdom to blame your sins, and lay your hand upon your mouth; for why should folly charge innocence? That man is far off from being mute and silent under the hand of God--who dares charge God himself for laying his hand upon him! But,

4. Fourthly, This truth looks sourly and sadly upon such as will not be silent nor satisfied under the afflicting hand of God, except the Lord will give them the particular reasons why he lays his hand upon them. Good men sometimes dash their feet against this stumbling stone--Jer. 15:18, 'Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?' Though God has always reason for what he does--yet he is not bound to show us the reasons of his doings. Jeremiah's passion was up, his blood was hot; and now nothing will silence nor satisfy him but the reasons why his pain was perpetual, and his wound incurable. So Job, chapter 7:20, 'Why have you set me as a mark against you, so that I am a burden to myself?' It is an evil and a dangerous thing to cavil at, or to question God's proceedings, who is the chief Lord of all, and who may do with his own what he pleases, Rom. 9:20, Dan. 4:3, 36. He is unaccountable and uncontrollable; and therefore who shall say--Why are you doing this? As no man may question God's right to afflict him, nor his righteousness in afflicting of him; so no man may question the reasons why he afflicts him. As no man can compel God to give a reason of his doings, so no man may dare to ask him the particular reasons of his doings.

Kings are not bound to give their subjects a reason of their doings; and shall we bind God to give us a reason of his doings, who is the King of kings and Lord of Lords, and whose will is the true and only rule of justice? Eccles. 8:4, Rev. 1:5.

The general grounds and reasons which God has laid down in his word why he afflicts his people, as--that is for their profit, Heb. 12:10; for the purging away of their sins, Isaiah 1:25; for the reforming of their lives, Psalm 119:67, 71; and for the saving of their souls, 1 Cor. 11:32--should work them to be silent and

satisfied under all their afflictions; though God should never satisfy their curiosity in giving them an account of some more hidden causes which may lie secret in the abysses of his eternal knowledge and infallible will.

Curiosity is the spiritual drunkenness of the soul; and as the drunkard will never be satisfied, be the cup ever so deep, unless he see the bottom of it--so some curious Christians, whose souls are overspread with the leprosy of curiosity, will never be satisfied until they come to see the bottom and the most secret reasons of all God's dealings towards them. But they are fools in folio, who affect to know more than God would have them. Did not Adam's curiosity render him and his posterity fools in folio? And what pleasure can we take to see ourselves every day fools in print? As a man's eyes, by gazing at the sun, may grow dark and dim, and see less than otherwise he might; so many, by a curious prying into the secret reasons of God's dealings with them, come to grow so dark and dim, that they cannot see those plain reasons that God has laid down in his word why he afflicts and tries his children!

I have read of one Sir William Champney, who was the first man that ever built a turret on the top of his house--that he might the better overlook all his neighbors. But so it happened, that not long after he was struck blind--so that he who would not be satisfied to see as others saw--but must see more than others--saw nothing at all, through the just judgment of God upon him! And so it is a just and righteous thing with God to strike such with spiritual blindness, who will not be satisfied with seeing the reasons laid down in the word why God afflicts them--but they must be curiously prying and searching into the hidden and more secret reasons of his severity towards them!

Ah, Christian! it is your wisdom and duty to sit silent and mute under the afflicting hand of God upon the account of revealed reasons, without making any curious inquiry into those more secret reasons which are locked up in the golden cabinet of God's own bosom! "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." Deuteronomy 29:29

5. Fifthly, This truth looks sourly and sadly upon those who, instead of being silent and mute under their afflictions, use all sinful shifts and ways, to shift themselves out of their troubles; who care not though they break with God, and break with men, and break with their own consciences--so long as they may but break off the chains that are upon them; who care not by what means the prison door is opened, so long as they may but escape; nor by what hands their bolts are knocked off, so long as they may be at liberty. Job 36:21, 'Beware of turning to evil, which you seem to prefer to affliction.' He makes but an ill choice--who chooses sin rather than suffering! And yet such an ill choice good men have sometimes made, when troubles have compassed them round about. Though no lion roars like that in a man's own bosom--conscience; yet some, to deliver themselves from troubles without, have set that lion a-roaring within! Some, to deliver themselves from outward tortures, have put themselves under inward torments. He purchases his freedom from affliction at too dear a rate--who buys it with the loss of a good name or a good conscience.

Now, because there is even in good men sometimes too great an aptness and proneness to sin and shift themselves out of afflictions, when they should rather be mute and silent under them, give me leave to lay down these six considerations to prevent it:

(1.) First Consider, that there is infinitely more evil in the least sin--than there is in the greatest miseries and afflictions which can possibly come upon you! Yes, there is more evil in the least sin than there is in all the troubles that ever come upon the world; yes, than there is in all the miseries and torments of hell. The

least sin is an offence to the great God; it is a wrong to the immortal soul; it is a breach of God's righteous law; it cannot be washed away but by the blood of Jesus; it can shut the soul out of heaven, and shut the soul up as a prisoner in hell forever and ever! The least sin is rather to be avoided and prevented--than the greatest sufferings. If this cockatrice be not crushed in the egg--it will soon become a serpent! Sin, if but thought on and pondered--will break out into action--action into custom--custom into habit--and then both body and soul are lost irrecoverably to all eternity! The least sin is very dangerous. Caesar was stabbed to death with a small needle; Herod was eaten up by small worms; Pope Adrian was choked with a gnat; a mouse is but little, yet kills an elephant if he gets up into his trunk; a scorpion is little, yet able to sting a lion to death; though the leopard be great, yet he is poisoned with a head of garlic; the least spark may consume the greatest house; the least leak will sink the greatest ship; a whole arm has been gangrened by a pick of the little finger; a little opened door may betray the greatest city; a pinch of poison diffuses itself into all parts, until it strangles the vital spirits, and turns out the soul from the body. If the serpent can but wriggle in his tail by an evil thought, he will soon make a surprise of the soul--as you see in that sad instance of Adam and Eve.

'The trees of the forest,' says one in a parable, 'held a solemn parliament, wherein they addressed the innumerable wrongs which the axe had done them. They therefore made an act, that no tree should hereafter lend the axe-head even a twig. The axe-head traveled up and down the forest, begging wood from the cedar, oak, ash, elm, even of the poplar; but not one would lend him a chip. At last he asked for just a small twig from each the trees--so he could cut down the briars and bushes--alleging, that such shrubs did but suck away the juice of the ground, and hinder the growth, and obscure the glory of the beautiful and goodly trees. Upon these terms, the trees all agreed to give him a twig. The axe-head pretends a thorough reformation--but behold a sad deformation, for when he had got the twigs made into a handle--down went the cedar, oak, ash, elm, and all that had stood in his way!

Such are the subtle reaches of sin; it will promise to remove the briars of afflictions and troubles, which hinder the soul of that juice, sweetness, comfort, delight, and contentment, which otherwise it might enjoy. Oh! do but now yield a little to sin, and instead of removing your troubles--it will cut down your peace, your hopes, your comforts, yes, it will cut down your precious soul! What is the scratch on the hand--to a stab at the heart? No more are the greatest afflictions to the least sins! And therefore, Christians, never use sinful shifts to shift yourselves out of troubles--but rather be mute and silent under them, until the Lord shall work out your deliverance from them. But,

(2.) Secondly, Consider it is an impossible thing for any to sin themselves out of their troubles. Abraham, Job, and Jonah attempted it--but could not effect it. The devils have experienced this for nearly this six thousand years. They had not been now in chains--if they could have sinned themselves out of their chains. Could the damned in hell, sin themselves out of everlasting burning, there would have been none now a-roaring in that devouring unquenchable fire! Isaiah 33:14. Hell would have no inhabitants, could they but sin themselves out of it! Ah! Christians, devils and damned spirits shall as soon sin themselves out of hell--as you shall be able to sin yourselves out of your afflictions. Christians! you shall as soon stop the sun from running her course; fit the sea in a nut-shell; compass the earth with one step; and raise the dead at your pleasure--as ever you shall be able to sin yourselves out of your sufferings! And therefore it is better to be silent and quiet under them--than to attempt that which is impossible to accomplish. This second consideration will receive further confirmation by the next particular--

(3.) Thirdly, As it is an IMPOSSIBLE thing, so it is a very DAMAGING, a very DANGEROUS thing--to attempt to sin yourselves out of your troubles; for by attempting to sin yourselves out of your trouble--you

will sin yourselves into many troubles, as Jonah and Jacob did; and by laboring to sin yourselves out of less troubles--you will sin yourselves into greater troubles, as Saul did; and by endeavoring to sin yourselves from under outward troubles--you will sin yourselves under inward troubles and distresses, which are the sorest and saddest of all troubles. Some there have been, who, by laboring to sin themselves out of their present sufferings, have sinned themselves under such horrors and terrors of conscience, so that they could neither eat, nor drink, nor sleep--but have been ready to lay violent hands upon themselves.

Cyprian speaks of those who, forsaking the faith to avoid sufferings, were given over to be possessed by evil spirits, and died fearfully. O man! you do not know what deadly sin, what deadly temptation, what deadly judgment, what deadly stroke--you may fall under--if you attempt to sin yourself out of troubles. What is it to take Venice--and then to be hanged at the gates thereof? It is better to be silent and mute under your afflictions, than by using sinful shifts to sin yourself under greater afflictions.

(4.) Fourthly, Consider it is a very ignoble and unworthy thing to go to--to sin yourselves out of your troubles and straits. It argues a poor, a low, a weak, a dastardly, and an effeminate spirit, to use base shifts to shuffle yourselves out of your troubles. Men of noble, courageous, and magnanimous spirits will disdain and scorn it. As you may see in the three Hebrew children, David, and those worthies, in that 11th of the Hebrews, of whom 'this world was not worthy.' Jerome writes of a brave woman, who, being upon the rack, bade her persecutors do their worst, for she was resolved to die rather than lie. And the prince of Conde, being taken prisoner by Charles the Ninth, king of France, and put to his choice whether he would go to a Catholic mass--or be put to death--or suffer perpetual imprisonment; his noble answer was, that by God's help he would never choose the first; and for either of the latter, he left to the king's pleasure and God's providence.

A soul truly noble will sooner part with all, than the peace of a good conscience. Thus blessed Hooper desired rather to be discharged of his church office, than yield to certain unbiblical ceremonies.

I have read of Marcus Arethusus, all eminent servant of the Lord in gospel-work, who, in the time of Constantine, had been the cause of overthrowing an idol temple; but Julian, coming to be emperor, commanded the people of that place to build it up again. All were ready so to do, only he refused it. Whereupon his own people, to whom he had preached, fell upon him, stripped off all his clothes, then abused his naked body, and gave it up to children and school-boys to be lanced with their penknives. And when all this would not change his mind, they tied him up, having his naked body poured all over with honey, that so he might be bitten and stung to death by flies and wasps, while baking under the sun! All this cruelty they exercised upon him, because he would not give anything towards the rebuilding of that idol temple! No, they went so far, that if he would but give one halfpenny towards the temple, they would release him. But he refused it with a noble Christian disdain, though the advancing of an halfpenny might have saved his life. And in so doing, he did but live up to that noble principle that most commend--but few practice, that is--that Christians must choose rather to suffer the worst of torments, than commit the least of sins, whereby God should be dishonored, his name blasphemed, true religion reproached, profession scorned, weak saints discouraged, men's consciences wounded, and their souls endangered.

Now tell me, Christians, is it not better to be silent and mute under your sorest trials and troubles, than to sin, and shift yourselves out of them--and so proclaim to all the world, that you are people of very low, poor, and ignoble spirits? But

(5) Fifthly, Consider--sinful shifts and means, God has always cursed and blasted. Achan's golden wedge was but a wedge to cleave him--and his garments a shroud to shroud him. Ahab purchases a vineyard with the blood of the owner--but presently it was watered with his own blood, according to the word of the Lord. Gehazi must needs have the silver and two changes of clothing--obtained with a lie, I say with a lie. Well! he has them, and he has with them a leprosy which cleaved to him and his children forever, 2 Kings 5:22-27. With those very hands that Judas took money to betray his master--with those very hands he fitted a noose to hang himself. The rich and wretched glutton fared sumptuously, and lived opulently every day--but the next news you hear of him, is of his being in hell, crying out for a single drop of water, who, when he was on earth, would not give a crumb.

The coal that the eagle carried from the altar to her nest, set all on fire. Crassus did not long enjoy the fruit of his covetousness, for the Parthians capturing him--poured melted gold down his throat. Ah! Christians, Christians, is it not far better to sit quiet and silent under your afflictions, than to use such sinful shifts and means which God will certainly blast and curse? But,

(6.) Sixthly and lastly, Consider this, that your very attempting to sin and shift yourselves out of troubles and afflictions, will cost you dearly. It will cost you many prayers and tears, many sighs, many groans, many gripes, many terrors, and many horrors. Peter, by attempting to sin himself out of trouble, sins himself into a sea of sorrows--Mat. 26:75, 'He went forth and wept bitterly.'

Clement observes, that every time he heard a cock crow, he would fall upon his knees and weep bitterly. Others say, that his face was furrowed with continual tears. Were Abraham, David, Jacob, and Jonah now alive, they would tell you, that they have found this to be a truth in their own experience. Ah! Christians, it is far better to be quiet and silent under your sufferings, than to pay so dear for attempting to sin and shift yourselves out of your sufferings. A man will not buy gold too dear, and why then should he buy himself out of troubles at too dear a rate?

But now I shall come to that use that I intend to stand most upon, and that is, a use of EXHORTATION. Seeing it is the great duty and concernment of Christians to be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providence, and sharpest trials which they meet with in this world--oh that I could prevail with you, Christians, to mind this great duty, and to live up and live out this necessary truth. I now propound twelve considerations, to engage your souls to be mute and silent under your greatest troubles and your saddest trials.

1. Consider first, the greatness, sovereignty, majesty, and dignity of God--and let that move you to silence, Jer. 10:7; 5:22. "Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." Psalm 46:8-10. Who can cast his eye upon the greatness of God, the majesty of God, and not sit still before him? Zeph. 1:7, 'Hold your peace at the presence of the Lord God.' Oh, chatter not, murmur not, fret not--but stand mute before him! Shall the child be hushed before his father, the servant before the master, the subject before his prince, and the guilty person before the judge, when he majestically rises off his judgment seat, and composes his countenance into an aspect of terror and severity, that his sentence may fall upon the offender with the greater dread? Shall the sheep be hushed before the wolf, birds before the hawk, and all the beasts of the field before the lion? And shall not we be hushed and quiet before him, who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah? Rev. 5:5. God is mighty in power, and mighty in counsel, and mighty in working, and mighty in punishing; therefore be silent before him.

It appears that God is a mighty God, by the epithet that is added unto El, which is Gibbon--importing that he is a God of prevailing might. In Daniel he is called El Elim--the mighty of mighties. Moses magnifying of his might, says, 'Who is like unto you among the gods?' Now certainly this epithet should be a mighty motive to work souls to that which Habakkuk persuaded to--Hab. 2:20, 'The Lord is in his holy temple--let all the earth keep silence before him.' Upon this very consideration Moses commands Israel to hold their peace, Exod. 14:13, 14.

It is reported of Augustus the emperor, and likewise of Tamerlane that warlike Scythian, that in their eyes sat such a rare majesty, that many in talking with them, and often beholding of them, have become speechless. O my brethren, shall not the brightness and splendor of the majesty of the great God, whose sparkling glory and majesty dazzles the eyes of angels, and makes those princes of glory stand mute before him--move you much more to silence, to hold your peace, and lay your hands upon your mouths. Surely yes! But,

2. Secondly, Consider, That all your afflictions, troubles, and trials shall work for your good--Rom. 8:28, 'And we know that all things shall work together for good to those who love God.' Why then should you fret, fling, fume--seeing God designs you good in all? The bee sucks sweet honey out of the bitterest herbs; so God will by afflictions teach his children to suck sweet knowledge, sweet obedience, and sweet experiences, sweet humility--out of all the bitter afflictions and trials he exercises them with. That scouring and rubbing, which frets others, shall make them shine the brighter; and that weight which keeps others crushed, shall but make them, like the palm tree, grow better and higher; and that hammer which knocks others all in pieces, shall but knock them the nearer to Christ, the corner stone.

Stars shine brightest in the darkest night; torches give the best light when beaten; grapes yield most wine when most pressed; spices smell sweetest when pounded; vines are the better for bleeding; gold looks the brighter for scouring; juniper smells sweetest in the fire; camomile, the more you tread it the more you spread it; the salamander lives best in the fire; the Jews were best, when most afflicted; the Athenians would never mend, until they were in mourning. Christ's cross, says Luther, is no letter in the book, and yet, says he, it has taught me more than all the letters in the book. Afflictions are the saints' best benefactors to heavenly affections. Where afflictions hang heaviest, corruptions hang loosest. And grace that is hid in nature, as sweet water in rose leaves, is then most fragrant when the fire of affliction is put under to distill it out. Grace shines the brighter for scouring, and is most glorious when it is most clouded.

Pliny in his Natural History writes of certain trees growing in the Red Sea, which being battered by the roughness of the waves, stand like a rock, immovable. In the sea of afflictions, God will make his people stand like a rock; they shall be immovable and invincible, and the more the waves of afflictions beat upon them, the better they shall be, the more they shall thrive in grace and godliness.

Now how should this engage Christians to be mute and silent under all their troubles and trials in this world, considering that they shall all work for their good! God chastises our carcasses--to heal our consciences; he afflicts our bodies--to save our souls; he gives us gall and wormwood here--that the pleasures which are at his right hand may be more sweet hereafter; here he lays us upon a bed of thorns, that we may look and long more for that easy bed of down--his bosom in heaven.

As there is a curse wrapped up in the best things he gives the wicked--so there is a blessing wrapped up in the worst things he brings upon his own, Psalm 25:10, Deut. 26:16. As there is a curse wrapped up in a wicked man's health--so there is a blessing wrapped up in a godly man's sickness; as there is a curse

wrapped up in a wicked man's strength--so there is a blessing wrapped up in a godly man's weakness; as there is a curse wrapped up in a wicked man's wealth--so there is a blessing wrapped up in a godly man's wants; as there is a curse wrapped up in a wicked man's honor--so there is a blessing wrapped up in a godly man's reproach; as there is a curse wrapped up in all a wicked man's mercies--so there is a blessing wrapped up in all a godly man's crosses, losses, and changes! Why then should he not sit mute and silent before the Lord? But,

3. Thirdly, Consider, That a holy silence in that excellent precious grace--which lends a hand of support to every grace, Rom. 15:4. Silence is the helper of all other virtues; it lends a hand to faith, a hand to hope, a hand to love, a hand to humility, a hand to self-denial etc. A holy silence has its influences upon all other graces that are in the soul; it causes the rosebuds of grace to blossom and bud forth. Silence is a grace that keeps a man gracious in all conditions. In every condition silence is a Christian's right hand; in prosperity, it bears the soul up under all the envy, hatred, malice, and censures of the world; in adversity, it bears the soul up under all the neglect, scorn, and contempt that a Christian meets with in the world. It makes every bitter, sweet; every burden, light; and every yoke, easy. And this the very heathen seemed to intimate in placing the image of Angeronia with the mouth bound, upon the altar of Volupia to show that silence under sufferings was the ready way to attain true comfort, and make every bitter, sweet. No man honors God, nor no man justifies God at so high a rate--as he who lays his hand upon his mouth, when the rod of God is upon his back. But,

4. Fourthly, To move you to silence under your sorest and your sharpest trials, consider, That you have deserved greater and heavier afflictions than those you are under, Lam. 3:39; Micah 7:7-9. Has God taken away one mercy? You have deserved to be stripped of all. Has he taken away the delight of your eyes? He might have taken away the delight of your soul. Are you under outward wants? You have deserved to be under outward and inward together. Are you cast upon a sick bed? You have deserved a bed in hell. Are you under that ache and that pain? You have deserved to be under all aches and pains at once. Has God chastised you with whips? You have deserved to be chastised with scorpions, 1 Kings 12:14. Are you fallen from the highest pinnacle of honor to be the scorn and contempt of men? You have deserved to be scorned and condemned by God and angels. Are you under a severe whipping? You have deserved an utter damning. Ah Christian! let but your eyes be fixed upon your demerits, and your hands will be quickly upon your mouths; whatever is less than a final separation from God, whatever is less than hell, is mercy; and therefore you have cause to be silent under the sharpest dealings of God with you. But,

5. Fifthly, Consider, a quiet silent spirit is of great esteem with God. God sets the greatest value upon people of a quiet spirit--1 Peter 3:4. 'your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.' A quiet spirit is a spark of the divine nature, it is a ray, a beam of glory; it is a heaven-born spirit. No man is born with a holy silence in his heart, as he is born with a tongue in his mouth. This is a flower of paradise; it is a precious gem which God makes very great estimate of. A quiet spirit speaks a man most like to God; it capacitates a man for communion with God; it renders a man most serviceable to God; and it obliges a man to most accurate walking with God. A meek and quiet spirit is an incorruptible ornament, much more valuable than gold.

(1.) First, There is a mutual quietness, which proceeds from a good temper and constitution of body.

(2.) Secondly, There is a moral quietness, which proceeds from good education and breeding, which flows from good injunctions, instructions, and examples.

(3.) Thirdly, There is an artificial quietness; some have an art to imprison their passions, and to lay a law of restraint upon their anger and wrath, when they are all in a flame within--as you may see in Cain, Esau, Absalom, and Joab, who for a time cast a thick cloak over their malice, when their hearts were set on fire of hell. So Domitian would seem to love them best, whom he willed least should live.

(4.) Fourthly, There is a gracious quietness, which is of the Spirit's infusion, Gal. 5. Now this quietness of spirit, this spiritual frame of heart, is of great price in the sight of God. God values it above the world, and therefore who would not covet it more than the world, yes, more than life itself? Certainly the great God sets a great price upon nothing but that which is of an invaluable price; what stretching, struggling, and striving is there for those things that the great ones of the earth do highly prize! Ah! what stretching of wits, interests, and consciences is there this day, to gain and hold up that which justice will cast down! How much better would it be, if all people would in good earnest struggle and strive, even as for life, after a quiet and silent spirit, which the great and glorious God sets so great a price upon! This is a pearl of greatest price, and happy is he who purchases it, though it were with the loss of all. But,

6. Sixthly, Consider, That if you do not sit silent and quiet under your greatest troubles and your sorest trials, you will be found fighters against your own prayers. How often have you prayed that the will of God may be done, yes, that it may be done on the earth, as the angels, those glistening courtiers, those princes of glory, do it now in heaven! Mat. 6:10. When troubles and afflictions come upon you, the will of God is done, his will is accomplished. Why then should you fret, fling, and fume, and not rather quietly lie down in his will--whose will is a perfect will, a just and righteous will, a wise will, an overruling will, an infinite will, a sovereign will, a holy will, an immutable will, an uncontrollable will, an omnipotent will, and an eternal will? Certainly you will but add affliction to affliction, lay fighting against your own prayers--by vexing and fretting yourselves when the will of God is done.

It is sad to see a man to fight against his friends; it is sadder to see him fight against his relations; it is saddest of all to see him fight against his prayers. And yet this every Christian does, who murmurs and mutters when the rod of God is upon him. Some there be that pray against their prayers, as Augustine, who prayed for patience with a proviso--Lord! give me patience--but not yet! And some there are who fight against their prayers, as those who pray that the will of God may be done, and yet when his will is done upon them, they are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest--they are still fretting against the Lord. Ah, Christians! have you not sins to fight against, and temptations to fight against, and a devil to fight against, yes, a whole world to fight against? Why then should you be found fighting against your own prayers? But,

7. Seventhly, Consider, A holy silence under the heaviest burdens, the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences and changes--will make all tolerable and easy to a Christian. The silent soul can bear a burden--without a burden. Those burdens and troubles that will break a forward man's back--will not so much as break a silent man's sleep. Those afflictions which lie as heavy weights upon a murmurer--will lie as light as a feather upon a mute Christian, Micah 7:7-10, Psalm 92:1, 6. That bed of sorrow, which is as a bed of thorns to a fretful soul--will be as a bed of down to a silent soul. A holy silence unstings every affliction; it takes off the weight of every burden; it adds sweet to every bitter; it changes dark nights into sunshiny days, and terrible storms into desirable calms. The smallest sufferings will easily vanquish an unquiet spirit--but a quiet spirit will as easily triumph over the greatest sufferings. As little mercies are great mercies; so great sufferings are but little sufferings--in the eye of a silent soul. The silent soul never complains that his affliction is too great, his burden too heavy, his cross too weighty, his sufferings too many; silence makes him victorious over all. Therefore, as ever you would have heavy afflictions light, and be able to bear a burden without a burden--labor as for life after this holy silence!

8. Eighthly, Consider that a holy silence under afflictions will be your best armor against those temptations, which afflictions may expose you to. Times of afflictions often prove times of great temptations, and therefore afflictions are called temptations--James 1:12, 'Blessed is the man which endures temptations, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life,' etc. The Greek word *peirasmon*, is to be understood of temptations of probation, of afflicting temptations, and not of temptations of suggestion, of seduction; for they are not to be endured--but resisted and abhorred, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:9. Now, affliction is called temptation,

(1.) Because, as temptation tries what metal a Christian is made of, so do afflictions.

(2.) Because, as Satan usually has a great hand in all the temptations that come upon us--so he has a great hand in all the afflictions which befall us; as you see in that great instance of Job.

(3.) Because, as temptations drive men to God, 2 Cor. 12:7, 8, so do afflictions, Isaiah 26:16, Hosea 5:15.

(4.) But mainly because Satan chooses times of afflictions as the fittest seasons for his temptations. When Job was severely afflicted in his estate, children, wife, life--then Satan lets fly, and makes his fiercest assaults upon him. Now, Satan tempts him to entertain hard thoughts of God; to distrust, to impatience, to murmuring and muttering. As when Israel was feeble, faint, and weary--Amalek assaulted them, and smote them Deut. 25:17, 18; so when Christians are most afflicted, then usually they are most tempted.

Luther found this by experience when he said, I am without set upon by all the world, and within by the devil and all his demons. Satan is a cowardly and loves to strike us and trample upon us when afflictions have cast us down. When besieged towns, cities, and castles are in greatest straits and troubles--then the besiegers make their fiercest assaults; so when Christians are under the greatest straits and trials--then Satan assaults them most, like a roaring lion. Now, silence under afflictions is the best antidote and preservative against all those temptations which afflictions lay us open to. Silence in afflictions is a Christian's impregnable armor; it is that shield that no spear or dart of temptation can pierce. While a Christian lies silently under the rod, he is safe. Satan may tempt him--but he will not conquer him; he may assault him--but he cannot vanquish him. Satan may entice him to use sinful shifts to shift himself out of trouble--but he will choose rather to die, yes, die, in trouble, than get out upon Satan's terms. But,

9. Ninthly, Consider, That holy silence under afflictions and trials will give a man a quiet and peaceable possession of his own soul--'In patience possess your souls', Luke 21:19. Now, next to the possession of God, the possession of a man's own soul is the greatest mercy in this world. A man may possess honors, and riches, and dear relations and the favor and assistance of friends under his trials--but he will never come to a possession of his own soul under his troubles until he comes to be silent, and to lay his hand upon his mouth. Now what are all earthly possessions to the possession of a man's own soul? He who possesses himself possesses all; he who possesses not himself possesses nothing at all. He possesses not the use, the sweet, the comfort, the good, the blessing of anything he enjoys--who enjoys not himself. That man who is not master of himself--he is a master of nothing. Holy silence gives a man the greatest mastery over his own spirit; and mastery over a man's own spirit is the greatest mastery in the world, Prov. 16:32.

The Egyptian goddess they paint upon a rock standing in the sea, where the waves come roaring and dashing upon her, with this motto--'Storms shall not move me'. A holy silence will give a man such a quiet possession of his own soul, that all the storms of afflictions shall not move him; it will make him stand like a rock in a sea of troubles. Let a man but quietly possess himself, and troubles will never trouble him. But,

10. Tenthly, Consider the commands and instructions that God in his word has laid upon you to be silent, to be mute and quiet, under all the troubles, trials, and changes that have or may pass upon you--"Let all people be silent before the Lord, for He is coming from His holy dwelling." Zechariah 2:13. Isaiah 51:1, 'Keep silence before me, O islands.' Hab. 2:20, 'The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.' Amos 5:13, 'Therefore, the wise person will keep silent at such a time, for the days are evil.' Psalm 44:10, 'Be still, and know that I am God.' Psalm 4:4, 'Commune with your heart, and be still.' Exod. 14:13, 'Stand still, and see the salvation of God.' Job 37:14, 'Hearken unto this, O Job; stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.'

It is a dangerous thing for us to neglect one of his commands, who by another is able to command us into nothing, or into hell at pleasure. To act or run cross to God's express command, though under pretense of revelation from God, is as much as a man's life is worth, as you may see in that sad story, 1 Kings 13:24, etc. Divine commands must be put in speedy execution, without denying or delaying, without debating or disputing the difficulties that may attend our subjection to them. God's commands are spiritual, holy, just, and good; and therefore to be obeyed without muttering or murmurings. Divine commands are backed with the strongest reason, and attended with the highest encouragement

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