


The Rod and the Word,
A Treatise on Afflictions
Thomas Case, 1653

“Though He slays me, yet will I trust Him.” Job 13:15

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Author's Preface

Reader,

You have here in the following pages some *prison* thoughts, I wish I could say, experiences. If I have not written herein what I have *found*, I bless God—I have written what I have *sought*. I must humbly confess with holy Paul, “I count not myself to have apprehended;” yet through grace I can add with that blessed saint, “but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark” (Philippians 3:13-14).

God has taught me somewhat of the *doctrine*, I trust that he would be pleased to teach me the *use* of the doctrine. God has in some measure shown me what is to be gained by afflictions; if he would also teach me how to gain it, I would, with Moses, account my sufferings greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The discovery is sweet. If my heart deceives me not, I would not exchange it for the wealth of both the Indies! The possession is infinitely precious.

For your advantage I have been persuaded to print this little booklet. My prayers shall accompany my paper—that the God who quickens the dead, and calls things that are not, as though they were—would please to make those broken expressions answer the aim. And for the aim's sake, despise them not, but pray also; and when you pray, remember the chief of sinners, the poor and unworthy author, who, while yet in the land of the living, will be,

Yours to serve you in the gospel of Christ,
Thomas Case

Dr. Manton's Recommendation

To my reverend friend Mr. Thomas Case, I thank you for the favor you did me in affording me a sight of your paper. I had heard much of your notions concerning afflictions, and therefore was very thirsty until you were pleased to give me to drink of the fountain. I can now say as the queen of Sheba, "The half was not told me!" *We are perfect in no lessons, so much as those into which God whips us.* We cannot speak of any argument so warmly and feelingly, as when we speak out of present experience. To treat of afflictions, when we ourselves flourish and abound in ease and plenty—savors more of the orator, than the preacher; more of the brain, than the heart. Certainly *guess* and *imagination* cannot be so good a midwife to such conceptions, as *sense* and *feeling*.

It seems when you went into prison, the Spirit of God went into prison with you; and when you were shut up to others, you still lay open to the visits and free breathings of his grace. The restraints and enclosures of a prison cannot harm the freedom of God's operations. He is a blessed prisoner indeed, who is shut up not only from the society of men, but in converse with the Holy Spirit. I begin to see there is somewhat more than a strain and reach of wit in Tertullian's consolatory discourse to the martyrs: "You went out of prison," says he, "when you went into it, and were but sequestered from the world, that you might converse with God. The greatest prisoners and the most guilty are those that are at large, darkened with ignorance, chained with lusts, committed not by the proconsul, but God." The Lord often manifested himself to his prophets in a wilderness, and to you in your secession and retirement.

Sir, I could even envy your prison-comforts, and the sweet opportunities of a *pious privacy*. We that are abroad are harassed and worn out with constant public labors, and can seldom retire from the distraction of business for such free converse with God and our own souls. But we are not to choose our own portion—crosses will come soon enough without wishing for them; and if we were wise, we might make an advantage of every condition.

Good Sir, be persuaded to publish those discourses; the subject is useful, and your manner of handling it warm and affectionate; do not deprive the world of the comfort of your experiences. Certainly my heart is none of the tenderest; yet if heart answers heart, I can easily foresee much success, and that you will not repent of the publication. May the Lord bless your endeavors in the gospel of his dear Son.

I am, Sir, Yours in all Christian service,
Thomas Manton

Chapter 1. What LESSONS God Teaches by Affliction

“Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O LORD; and teach out of your law.” Psalm 94:12

This psalm being without a title, it is not so easily determined, when, or by whom it was penned. Probably by David, when himself and the rest of the godly, were under a sore and bitter persecution by Saul.

Briefly, in the psalm the prophet does these three things:

I. He appeals to God for vengeance on the persecutors, describing them by their pride (verse 2), their profaneness (verses 3-4), their intemperate virulence of speech (verse 4), their cruelty and bloody practices (verses 5-6), and lastly, by their atheistic security (verse 7).

II. He diverts to the enemies, endeavoring to convince them of the brutishness and folly of their atheism, the mother and nurse of the other impieties charged on them (verse 8), and that by a three-fold argument:

1. The *power* and skill of God in creating the hearing and seeing organs in man (verse 9).
2. The *sovereignty* of God, and the righteousness of his judgments, which he executes in the world (verse 10).
3. His *wisdom* and *knowledge*, in enduing man with such an excellent intellectual faculty, whereby even the creature itself is able to attain to admirable degrees of knowledge (verses 10-11).

III. He labors to comfort the godly against all the pressures and persecutions under which they groaned and languished.

The first argument which the psalmist uses to this purpose is in the text: *the sweet fruit which is to be gathered from the bitter root of affliction*. The root indeed is bitter, but the fruit is sweet, even divine instruction; which therefore is no longer to be esteemed a punishment, but a blessing, “Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord, and teach out of your law.”

This being the subject I intend to insist upon, I shall contract it into this doctrinal point of observation, namely:

The man whose chastisements are joined with divine teachings, is a blessed man. Or, it is a blessed thing when *correction* and *instruction* go together. The rod and the Word make up a complete blessing.

I shall take chastisements here in the utmost latitude, for all kinds and degrees of sufferings, whether from God, or man, or Satan; whether sufferings for sin, or sufferings for righteousness’ sake. And for the doctrinal part of the point, I shall endeavor these four things:

- I. To show you what those lessons are which God teaches his people by his chastisements.
- II. To show you what the nature and properties of divine teachings are.
- III. To show you what in what tendency correction lies in order unto these teachings; or, what use God makes of affliction for the carrying on of the work of instruction in the hearts of his people.
- IV. I shall lay down the grounds and demonstrations of the point; or considerations to evince the happiness of that man whom God is pleased to teach by his corrections.

I begin with the LESSONS which God usually teaches his people in a suffering condition. Among the many which may fall within the experience of the suffering saints, I shall observe unto you these twenty lessons:

1. In the school of affliction, God teaches compassion towards those who are in a suffering condition. Truly we are very prone to be insensible of our brethren’s sufferings, when we ourselves are at ease in Zion. This is partly by reason of that sensuality which is in our natures, whereby we lend out our hearts so inordinately to the creature-comforts which we possess, so as to quench the tenderness and sense which we ought to have of the miseries and hardships of other men. It is also partly out of the delicacy of self-love, which makes us unwilling to sour the relish of our own sweet enjoyments, with the bitter taste of strangers’ afflictions. It is partly through sluggishness of spirit, which makes us unwilling to rise up from the bed of ease and pleasure, to travel in the inquiry of the state of our brethren, either abroad or at home, so that (as the apostle says in another case) we are willingly ignorant, and are not only strangers, but are content to be strangers to their miseries and calamities.

One way or another, even Christians themselves, and such as are truly so called, are more or less guilty of the sin of the Gentiles—*without natural affection, unmerciful, without tender-heartedness, without compassion*.

Hence you may find that it was one of the errands upon which God sent Israel into Egypt, that, in the brick-kilns there—their hard hearts might be softened and melted into compassion towards strangers and captives. Therefore when God had turned their captivity, that was one of the first lessons of which he puts them in mind, “You shall not oppress a

stranger” (Exodus 23:9). There is the duty, which, though negatively expressed, yet (according to the rule of interpreting the commandments) includes all the affirmative duties of mercy and compassion. And the motive follows, “for you know the heart of a stranger” (verse 9b). How did they come to know it? “Seeing you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (verse 9c).

As if God had said, ‘I knew you had a heart of iron, and affections of brass within you, cruel and without compassion; and therefore I sent you into Egypt on purpose, that by the cruelty of the Egyptians I might make your hearts tender; and that by the experience of your own sufferings and miseries, you might learn to lay to heart the anguish and agonies of strangers and captives; that whenever you see a stranger in your habitations, you may say, ‘O here is a poor sojourner, an exile! I will surely have mercy upon him and show him kindness, for I myself have been a stranger and a bond-slave in Egypt.’

And upon this very account God still brings a variety of afflictions and sorrows upon his own children. He allows them to be plundered, banished, imprisoned, and reduced to great extremities, that by their own experience they may learn to draw out their souls to the hungry, and mercies towards such objects of pity that they might say within themselves, ‘I know by experience the heart of this afflicted soul. I know what it is to be plundered, to be rich one day, and the very next day to be stripped naked of all one’s comforts and accommodations. I know what it is to hear poor hunger-starved children cry for bread, when there is none to give them. I know what it is to be banished from dearest relations—to be like limbs torn out of the body, and to lie bleeding in their separation. I know what it is to be cast into prison, to be locked up alone in the dark, with no other company but one’s own fears and sorrows. I know what it is to receive the sentence of death in one’s self. Shall not I pity, and pray, and pour out my soul over such as are bleeding and languishing under the like miseries?’

And this argument makes a deeper impression when a Christian compares and measures his lighter burden of affliction, with another’s more grievous yoke; and reasons thus within himself: ‘Imprisonment was grievous to me—and yet I enjoyed many comforts and accommodations which others did not have; I had a sweet chamber and a soft bed, when some poor members of Jesus Christ, in the Spanish inquisition and the Islamic slavery, were cast into the dungeon and sunk into the mire; their feet were hurt in the stocks, and the irons entered into their soul. Others lie bleeding and gasping upon the cold ground with their undressed wounds, exposed to all the injuries of hunger and nakedness in the open air. But I saw the face of my Christian friends sometimes, enjoyed refreshment in converse with dearest relations; while some of God’s precious people were cast into dark and noisome prisons, and did not see the face of a Christian, not of a man in five, ten, or twenty years together, unless it be of their tormentors. I had fresh diet every day, not only for necessity, but for delight—while other precious servants of God lacked their necessary bread, and lie starving in the doleful places of their sorrowful confinement. Oh! Shall not my heart yearn, and my compassion be moved towards such objects of misery and pity?’

Truly, we see it daily in case of the stone, gout and the like evils—how experience of these melts the heart into tears of sympathy and fellow-feeling; while strangers to such sufferings stand wondering at, and almost deriding the heart-breaking lamentations of poor wretches.

Brethren, that you may not wonder at this, I beseech you to consider what the apostle speaks of Christ himself, “It behooved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren—that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God” (Hebrews 2:17). And again, “We do not have a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are” (Hebrews 4:15).

A man would say within himself, ‘Why, what need had the Lord Jesus to invest himself with a body of flesh, that he might know the infirmities of our nature—since he was God, and knew all things?’ Nay, but my brethren, it seems the knowledge which Christ had as God, was different from that knowledge which he had as man. That knowledge which he had as God was intuitive—that knowledge which he had as man was experimental. Experimental knowledge of misery is the heart-affecting knowledge. Therefore Christ himself would afflict his own heart, as Mediator, by his own experience. And if the Lord Jesus—who was mercy itself—would put himself into a suffering condition that he might the more sweetly and affectionately act those mercies towards his suffering members—then how much more do we—that by nature are selfish, uncharitable and cruel—need such practical teachings to work upon our own hearts? Certainly we cannot gain so much sense of the saints’ sufferings by the most exact relation that the tongue of men or angels is able to express, nor by all our Scripture knowledge, though sanctified—as we do by *one day’s experience* in the school of affliction, when God is pleased to be the school-master.

2. In the school of affliction, God teaches us how to prize our outward mercies and comforts more—and yet to dote upon them less. We are taught to be more thankful for them—and yet less ensnared by them. This is a mystery indeed to nature, and a paradox to the world. For naturally we are very prone either to slight or to surfeit God’s blessings. And yet (sad to consider) we can make a shift to do both at once! We can undervalue our mercies—even while we glut ourselves with them! We can despise them—even when we are surfeiting upon them.

Witness that caution by Moses and Joshua: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land He has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” Deuteronomy 8:10-18

Behold while men fill themselves with the mercies of God—they can neglect the God of their mercies! When God is most liberal in remembering us—then we are most ungrateful to forget him. Now therefore that we may know how to put a due estimate upon mercies, God often cuts us short—that we may learn to prize that by lack, which our foolish unthankful hearts slighted in the enjoyment.

Thus the *prodigal*, who while yet at home could despise the rich and well furnished table of his father; when God sent him to school to the swine-trough—would have gladly filled his belly with the pods which he was feeding to the swine! “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough, and to spare!” (Luke 15:17). He would have been glad of the reversion of broken pods that was cast into the common basket.

I do not believe *David* ever slighted the ordinances, yet certainly he never knew so well how to estimate them as when he was banished from them. Then the remembrance of the company of saints, the beauty of the ordinances, and the presence of God—fetched tears from his eyes and groans from his heart, in his sorrowful exile. Oh how amiable are the assemblies of the saints, and the ordinances of the Sabbath—when we are deprived of them!

“In those days the word of the Lord was precious!” (1 Samuel 3:1). When was it not precious? It was always precious in the worth of it—but now it was precious for the lack of it; prophets and prophecies were precious, because rare; so it follows, “there was no open vision.”

The absence of common mercies, will teach us the inestimable worth of them!

Our liberties and dearest relations, how cheap and common things they are, while we possess them without any check or restraint. While we have the keeping of our mercies in our own hands, we make but small reckoning of them. Oh, but let God threaten a divorce by death or banishment; let taskmasters be set over us and our comforts, who shall measure out unto us at their own pleasure; let us be locked up awhile under close imprisonment, and there be kept fasting from our dearest enjoyments; then the sight of a friend (though but through an iron grate), the exchange of a few common civilities with a yoke-fellow under the correction and control of a keeper—then how sweet and precious!

When months and years of God’s mercies and blessings are passed through—we scarcely take one serious view of them; we seldom send up one thankful prayer to God for them. We pass by our mercies as common things, scarcely worth the owning. Whereas in times of famine—the lees and dregs of those mercies will be precious, which while the vessel ran full and fresh, we could hardly relish. In famine the very gleanings of our comforts are better than the whole vintage in the years of plenty!

And as God teaches us to prize our mercies—so he also teaches us *moderation in the use of them*, and not to glut ourselves on them. Indeed it is the inordinate use of outward comforts, which renders us unfit to prize them; we lose our esteem of mercies, in the excess use of them. Gluttony usually render those things nauseous, which formerly had been our delicacies. By our excesses in creature enjoyments: *reason* is drowned in sense, *judgment* extinguished in appetite, and the *affections* being blunted by excess—even pleasures themselves become a burden.

Now this distemper, God many times cures by the sharp corrosive of affliction. By hardship, he teaches us moderation. God does this, partly by accustoming us to afflictions and needs, whereby what at first we considered necessity, afterwards grows to be our choice. Hence says the apostle, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” (Philippians 4:11-12). How is this? God has taught him to live off a little. In the same way, by feeding us sparingly—God abates and slackens the inordinancy of the appetite.

But especially, God takes off our hearts from inordinate indulgences in a suffering condition, by revealing richer and purer satisfactions in Jesus Christ. It is God’s design by withdrawing the creature—to fix the soul upon himself. The voice of the rod is, “O taste and see how good the Lord is!” (Psalm 34:8). When the soul has once perceived the beauty of Jesus—he thrusts the creature away with contempt and indignation! He opens his soul to God, saying, “Whom have I in Heaven, but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of you!” (Psalm 73:25).

Surely it was in the *school of affliction* that David learned that lesson, even when the wicked prospered—and himself, with the rest of the godly, “were plagued all the day long, and chastened every morning” (Psalm 73:14). “When I tried to

understand all this, it was oppressive to me—till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny!”
Psalm 73:16-17

3. In the school of affliction, God teaches SELF-DENIAL and OBEDIENT SUBMISSION to his will.

In our prosperity we are full of our own wills, and usually *we give God counsel*—when he looks for obedience; and so we dispute our cross—when we should take it up. But now by bearing a little affliction, we learn to bear more. The trial of our faith works patience. The more we suffer—the more God fits us for suffering:

a.) By working us off from our own wills, “Folly is bound up in the heart of (God’s) children; but the *rod of correction* drives it from them” (Proverbs 22:15).

b.) By accustoming us to the cross. The bullock which is unaccustomed to the yoke, is very impatient under the hand of the farmer; but after it is used to labor, it willingly puts its neck under the yoke.

And so it is with Christians; after a while the yoke of affliction begins to be well-settled. By bearing much, we learn to bear with quietness. A new cart makes a great noise and squeaking—but when once used, it goes silently under the greatest load. None murmur so much at sufferings, as those who have suffered least! Whereas on the contrary, we see many times that those who have the heaviest burden upon their backs are most patient. “He sits alone, and keeps silence, because he has borne it upon him” (Lamentations 3:28). In other words, he is patient, because he is acquainted with sorrows. When people cry out, ‘Oh, none ever had such sufferings as mine!’—it is an argument they are strangers to afflictions.

c.) Because by chastisements God works out by degrees, the delicateness and fragility which we contract in our prosperity. Prosperity makes us tender; those who are always kept in the warm house, dare not put their head out of doors in a storm. None are so unfit for sufferings—as those who have been always dandled upon the knee of providence. The most delicate constitutions, are most unfit for hardship.

d.) Lastly and chiefly, this comes to pass because by sufferings: We come to taste the fruit of sufferings. “No chastening for the present seems joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto those who are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

Thus, one way or another, *God works his children into a sweet obedient frame by their sufferings*. It is even said of Christ himself, “He learned obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). By his own experience, he came to know what it was to be subject to the will of his Father.

It is equally true of God’s adopted children—they learn obedience by the things which they suffer; and that not only in a passive sense, but in an active sense. By suffering God’s will, we learn to do God’s will. *God has no such obedient children as those whom he nurtures in the school of affliction*. At length God brings all his scholars to subscribe: *what God will, when God will, and how God will*.

“May Your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven” (Matthew 6:10). This is a blessed lesson indeed.

4. In the school of affliction, God teaches HUMILITY and MEEKNESS of spirit. It is one of God’s designs in affliction, to debase the pride of man. God intends to spread sackcloth upon all man’s glory, so that man may see no excellency (wherein to pride himself) in all the creature.

God led Israel forty years in the wilderness to humble them. *By the thorns of the wilderness, God pricked the bladder of pride, and let out the windiness of self-exaltation which was in their hearts*.

Prosperity usually makes men surly and haughty towards their poor brethren. The rich man answers roughly, even while the poor man uses entreaties and addresses him with all humility. He holds up his head or turns his back upon him with scorn and contempt, and thinks himself too good to give his poor neighbor a soft and peaceable answer.

Pride is a disposition which naturally runs in our veins, and it is nourished by ease and prosperity. And therefore, to tame this pride of spirit that is in man, God takes him into the house of correction, puts his feet in the stocks—and there teaches him to know himself. “He humbled you, and allowed you to hunger” (Deuteronomy 8:3). Hunger ate out that proud flesh which began to rankle in Israel’s stomach.

Hence it is, that if you take the children of God either yet in the furnace of affliction, or just come out it—you shall observe them to be the humblest, meekest creatures upon the earth; as it is said, “A little child may lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). Whereas before bring cast into this furnace of affliction—perhaps they were so proud and arrogant, that an angel of God could not tell how to deal with them. But now the lowest of God’s servants may reprove and counsel them.

David put his poor Ammonite prisoners and captives to death in cold blood (2 Samuel 12:31). But banishment and persecution made him so tame, that not only the righteous might reprove him; but even the wicked might reproach him,

yet he holds his peace; or if he speaks, it is in words of patience and submission: “So let him curse, because the Lord has said, ‘Curse David’” (2 Samuel 16).

A man by affliction, comes to know his own heart—which in prosperity he was a stranger to. He then sees the weakness of his grace—and the strength of his corruption. He then sees how nothing is weak but his grace—and nothing is strong but his sin. This lays him in the dust: “Oh what a wretched man I am!” (Romans 7:24). And truly when a man has learned this lesson, he is not far from deliverance; “Seek the Lord, all you *meek* of the earth, seek righteousness; seek meekness, it may be you shall be hid in the day of the Lord’s anger” (Zephaniah 2:3).

This is God’s design: first, to humble his people by affliction, and then to save them from it. “For the Lord takes pleasure in his people, he will beautify the meek with salvation” (Psalm 149:4).

5. In the school of affliction, God reveals the unknown corruption in the hearts of his people. “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years—to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” (Deuteronomy 8:2). In other words, to make you know what was in your heart: what pride, what impatience, what unbelief, what idolatry, what distrust of God, what murmuring, what unthankfulness was in your heart—which you never noticed.

Sin lies very hidden and deep, and is not easily discerned—until the *fire of affliction* comes and makes a separation of the precious from the vile. ‘What shall I do,’ says God, ‘for the daughter of my people? They are exceeding bad, and they know it not. What shall I do with them? I will melt them and try them. Into the *furnace* they shall go—and there I will show them what is in their hearts!’

In the furnace we see more corruption than ever appeared before, or was suspected. ‘Oh,’ says the poor soul whom God has taught in the school of affliction, ‘I never thought my heart so bad as now I see that it is. I could not have believed this vain world had had so much place in my heart—and Christ so little. I did not think my faith had been so weak—and my fears so strong. I find that faith weak in danger, which I thought had been strong out of danger. Little did I think the sight of death would have been so terrible; and parting with nearest friends and dearest relations so piercing to me. Oh how unskillful and unwise am I to manage a suffering condition, to discern God’s ends, to find out what God would have me to do, to moderate the inordinancies of my own passions, to apply the counsels and comforts of the Word for their proper ends and uses! Oh where is my patience, my love, my zeal, my rejoicing in tribulation? Ah, I never thought that I would find my heart so discomposed, my affections so out of command, my graces so weak—when I would fall into afflictions! What a great deal of self-love, pride, distrust in God, creature confidence, discontent, murmuring, rising of heart against the holy and righteous dispensations of God does my heart contain! There is seething and fretting within me! Woe is me, what a foul heart have I!’

And besides all this, in the hour of temptation God brings old sins to remembrance. “We are truly guilty concerning our brother” (Genesis 42:21). Joseph’s brethren could say this twenty years after they had sold him for a slave, when they were in danger to be questioned for their lives, as they supposed.

Thus when the Israelites cry to God in their sore distress for rescue and deliverance, God puts them in mind of their old apostasies: “You have forsaken me, and served other gods. Go, and cry to the gods whom you have chosen!” (Judges 10:13-14).

Suffering times are times of bringing sin to mind. “If they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captivity and say, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly!’” (2 Chronicles 6:37). Afflictions bring to heart the remembrance of sin—it is a time of turning in upon ourselves, and bringing back to heart our wayward doings. Thus David under the rod could call himself to account: “I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto your testimonies” (Psalm 119:59).

6. In the school of affliction, God teaches us to PRAY. Those who never prayed before, will pray in affliction. “Lord, in distress we searched for you. We prayed beneath the burden of your discipline.” (Isaiah 26:16). Those who kept their distance with God before, yes, that said to the Almighty ‘depart from us’—in their affliction they turn to God. Those who never prayed before, or at least did but now and then drop out a sleepy sluggish wish—can now pour out a prayer when chastisement is upon them. Rebels, fools, mariners, even the worst of men, often cry to God in their trouble. The heathen mariners fall to their prayers in a storm, and can awaken the sleepy prophet to this duty, “What do you mean, O sleeper! Arise and call upon your God!” (Jonah 1:6). Hence some say, “He who cannot pray—let him go to sea.”

Thus, I say, affliction opens dumb lips, and unties the strings of the tongue to call upon God. Those whom God teaches in affliction, learn to pray in another manner—more frequently and more fervently.

More FREQUENTLY. God’s people are vessels full of the spirit of prayer—and affliction is a piercer, whereby God draws it out. David was always a praying man, but now under persecution he did nothing else, “I *give* myself unto prayer”. As wicked men give themselves up to their wickedness—so David gave himself up to prayer, he made it his work. Hence you may observe that all *the Psalms are almost nothing else but the runnings out of David’s spirit in prayer*

under a variety of afflictions and persecutions. As his troubles were multiplied—so his prayers multiplied. The holy man was never in that condition wherein he could not pray.

Alas, it is sad to consider, that in our peace and tranquility, we pray by fits and starts many times—we allow every trifle to come and jostle out prayer; but in affliction God keeps us upon our knees, and as it were “ties the sacrifice to the horns of the altar” (Psalm 118:27).

More FERVENTLY. As he teaches us to pray more frequently, so also to pray more fervently. It is said even of Christ himself, that “being in an agony—he prayed more earnestly” (Luke 22:44), more intensely. He prayed until he sweat, yes until he sweat great drops of blood. The reason being because he had not only the pangs of death, but also the sense of his Father’s wrath to dread. So it is with believers many times. Outward afflictions are accompanied with inward desertions.

Truly Christians, those prayers which you contented yourselves with in the day of your peace and prosperity—will not serve your turn in the hour of temptation, when you will call to mind your short, slight, cold, dead, sleepy, formal devotions in your families and closets, and are ashamed of them. Then you will see need of praying all your prayers again, and stir up yourselves to take hold on God.

Indeed for this very end God sends his people into captivity, that he may draw out the spirit of prayer, which they have allowed to lie dead within them. “O my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely.” (Song of Solomon 2:14).

Christ’s dove never looks more beautiful in his eyes, than when her cheeks are bedewed with tears! Nor does she ever make sweeter music in his ears, than when she mourns to him from the clefts of the rock, in a dark and desolate condition. Then, says Christ, “Your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely!”

7. In the school of affliction, God brings his children into more acquaintance with the Word. “It is good for me that I have been afflicted—that I might learn your statutes” (Psalm 119:71). God sent David into the school of affliction, to learn his statutes there.

By correction, the people of God learn:

- a.) to *converse* with the Word of God more abundantly,
- b.) to *understand* it more clearly,
- c.) to *relish* it more sweetly.

a.) By affliction, we come to converse with the Word more abundantly. It is our duty at all times to study the Word, to “let it dwell richly in us in all wisdom” (Colossians 3:16). Job “esteemed the words of God’s mouth more than his necessary food” (Job 23:12). It is our happiness, as well as our duty. Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, “but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2).

But through distraction without, and distemper within—the children of God many times grow strangers to their Bibles. We allow diversions to interpose between the Word and our hearts, and therefore God deals with us as we do with our children—we whip them to their books by the rod of correction. “Princes sat and spoke against me” (Psalm 119:23a), says David. In other words, they sat in council to take away his life, that they might condemn him as a traitor against Saul. And what did he in the meantime? It follows, “but your servant meditated on your statutes” (verse 23b). And again, “Princes have persecuted me without a cause—but my heart stands in awe of your Word” (Psalm 119:161). While the persecutors are consulting with the oracles of Hell to sin against David—he is consulting with the oracles of Heaven, that he might not sin against God; while they sinned and feared not—David feared and sinned not.

b.) By affliction, we learn to understand the Word more clearly. As it was with the disciples in reference to Christ’s resurrection, “At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him.” (John 12:16). So it is with the people of God many times in reference to affliction—the rod expounds the Word, and providence interprets the promise. *We would never understand some Scriptures, had God not sent us into the school of affliction.* Then we can remember how it is written: we can bring God’s Word and his works together.

c.) Affliction makes us relish the Word more sweetly. In prosperity many times we allow the luscious enjoyments of the world, so to distemper our palates that we cannot relish the Word, nor taste any more sweetness in it than in the white of an egg, as Job speaks in another case (Job 6:6).

But when God has kept us for weeks, months, and years it may be, fasting from the world’s dainties; when we are thoroughly hunger-bitten in the creature, then “How sweet are your words to my taste! Sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103). These are the words which David spoke in his affliction. The rod sweetened the Word: ‘It is my delight, my joy, a nest of sweetnesses.’ “The full soul loathes the honey-comb;” when we are crammed with creature comforts, we nauseate many times the very Word itself; “but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Proverbs 27:7). Let God

famish the world round about us—then how cordial is a word of Scripture consolation! How precious then are the promises!

“Oh,” said a gracious woman reduced to great straits, “I have made many a meal upon the promises, when I have lacked bread.” The Word is never so sweet, as when the world is most bitter. Therefore God lays vinegar upon the treats of the world, that we might go to the breasts of the Word, and there “suck and be satisfied with the milk of consolation” (Isaiah 66:11). “This is my comfort in my affliction—for your Word has quickened me” (Psalm 119:50). *Blessed be God for that affliction which sweetens the Word unto us.*

8. God, in the school of affliction, especially in life-threatening dangers—shows them the necessity of sound evidence for Heaven and happiness.

Alas, with what easy and slight evidences do we often content ourselves in the time of our prosperity, when the candle of the Almighty shines in our tabernacles, and when all is peace and quiet round about us! The heart being taken up with other fruitions, we lack both the time and will to pursue the trial of our own estates. People mind only what will serve their turn for the present and quiet their hearts, so that they may follow their pleasures and profits with the less regret. Therefore to save themselves a labor, they take that for evidence, which their sluggish carnal heart wishes were so. But now in the hour of temptation, fig-leaves will cover nakedness no longer; nothing will serve the turn but what will be able to stand before God, and endure the trial of fire in the day of Christ.

O, then one clear and unquestionable evidence of saving interest in Christ, and the love of God, will be worth ten thousand worlds! Shadows and appearances of grace will vanish before the Searcher of Hearts. Only truth and soundness of grace, can give boldness in the day of judgment.

Ah, what lazy and deceitful hearts are in us, which can be satisfied with vain hopes, and venture to die upon them? And yet good and upright is the Lord, who will teach sinners his way—that by the thunderclaps of his righteous judgments will awaken the vain creature out of these foolish dreams in which if they should die, they were undone forever. Well, let us be still urging and pressing these questions upon our souls: ‘Will *this faith* save me when I come to stand before the throne of the Lamb? Will *this love* give me boldness in the day of judgment? Will *this evidence* serve my turn when I come to die?’ O Christians, let us be afraid to lie down with that evidence in our beds—with which we dare not lie down in our graves.

9. In the school of affliction, God causes us to see what an evil and bitter thing it is to grieve his good Spirit.

When we are in the bitterness of our spirits, and want the Comforter, then we begin to call to mind how often we have grieved the Spirit who would have been a Comforter to us and have sealed us to the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). We say within ourselves in reference to the Spirit of God, as once the sons of Jacob said one to another in reference to Joseph, “We are truly guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us” (Genesis 42:21).

In some such language, I say, will the soul in the hour of temptation bespeak itself. ‘Ah, I am truly guilty concerning that tender Spirit of Grace and Comfort who has often said, “O! Do not this abominable thing which I hate!” (Jeremiah 44:4); but I would not hear. Is not this He whose rebukes I have slighted, whose counsels I have despised, whose warnings I have neglected, yes whose comforts I have undervalued, and counted them as a small thing? Ah wretch! How just is it now that the Spirit of God should withdraw? How just is it that he should despise my sorrows, and laugh at my tears. How just is it that he should shut out my prayers, quench my smoking flax, and break my bruised reed? (cf. Isaiah 42:3). Well, if the Lord shall indeed be pleased to bring my soul out of trouble, and to revive my fainting spirit with his sweet consolations—then I hope I shall carry myself for the future more obedient to the counsels and rebukes of the Spirit of grace.

10. In the school of affliction, God draws the soul into sweet and near communion with himself. Outward prosperity is a great obstruction to our communion with God. Partly because by letting out our affections inordinately to the creature—we allow the world to come between God and our hearts, and so intercept that sweet and constant fellowship which should be between God and us. God’s people offend most in their lawful comforts, because there the snare being not so visible as in grosser sins, they are the easier taken in it. We are soonest surprised, where we are least jealous.

Outward prosperity also obstructs our communion with God, because we fail to keep watch against lesser sins. While our hearts are warmed with prosperity, we think many times small sins can do no great harm. But in this we woefully deceive ourselves—for the least sin has the nature of sin in it, as the least drop of poison is poison. In smaller sins, there is the greater contempt of God, inasmuch as we defy God for a trifle as we count it, and venture his displeasure for a little sensual satisfaction.

I say, besides these and many other considerations which may render our small sins great provocations, this is one unspeakable mischief: that small sins interrupt our communion with God as much as great sins, and sometimes more. For

whereas great sins, by making deep wounds upon conscience, make the soul go bleeding to the throne of grace, and there to mourn and lament, and never to give God rest until he gives rest to the soul, and by a fresh sprinkling of the blood of Christ, to recover peace and communion with God—smaller sins, not impressing such horror upon the conscience, are swallowed in silence with less regret, and so do insensibly alienate and estrange the heart from Jesus Christ.

The least hair casts its shadow; an acorn put directly in front of the eye, keeps out the light of the sun as well as a mountain. The eye of the soul that will see God, must be kept very clear: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). Little sins, though they do not disturb reason so much as great sins—yet they defile conscience, and the conscience under defilement (unlamented) is shy of God, and God shy of it.

But affliction sanctifies; as it deadens the heart to the world—so it awakens and softens the conscience against sin. The soul is made sensible of her departure from God, and of the bitter fruits of that departure, and now begins to lament after God in Augustine’s language, “Lord, you have made my heart for yourself, and it is restless and unquiet until it can rest in you.”

The soul has many turnings and windings, but like Noah’s dove, it can find no place for its foot to rest on, until it returns into the ark from whence it came. In the same way, when the soul has been weather-beaten abroad—if God is pleased to put forth his hand and take it into himself, if God comes and gives the soul a visit when the poor creature is in darkness and can see no light—then for God to lift up the light of his countenance and shine with a gracious smile upon the soul, and say unto it, “I am your salvation” (Psalm 35:3)—of what sweet and unspeakable refreshment and consolation is this to the afflicted heart?

What a gracious condescension is this in God, that in times of prosperity “when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ” (1 Timothy 5:11), and sported itself in unspouselike familiarities with strangers—Jesus Christ should send it into the *house of correction*, and there by the discipline of the rod, correct and work out the sensual desires of the flesh. And when he has made it fit for his presence, he takes it into sweet and social communion with himself again! This is astonishing mercy and goodness which cannot be paralleled in the whole creation!

11. In the school of affliction, God makes affliction the exercise and improvement of grace. In times of prosperity, grace many times lies dead in the soul—which affliction awakens and draws forth into exercise. The *winter* of our outward comforts, often proves the *spring* of our graces; frost and snow starve the weed—but nourish the good grain. Though faith and patience are of a universal influence in a holy life, yet affliction gives them their perfect work.

Of the times of persecution it is said, “Here is the patience and faith of the saints” (Revelation 14:12); that is, now is the time for the saints of God to exert their faith and patience, and to let them have their perfect work. There is a work of patience, and there is a perfect work, “the trial of faith works patience” (James 1:3). It *works*, or as the word signifies, it *perfects*. The cross exercises—and exercise perfects the grace of patience. As sufferings arise, so patience arises also, “Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord” (James 5:7)—in other words, bear the affliction until Christ comes and takes it off. *Let your patience be of the same extent with your sufferings*. As *patience* is perfected by afflictions, so *faith* is *perfected* by afflictions. Sometimes the soul finds its faith lively in a suffering condition—which before it questioned whether it were alive or not. Or if affliction does not *find* it lively, it *makes* it lively. In the same *furnace of affliction* wherein God tries our faith—he refines it, and *purifies* it more and more from the dross of worldliness.

They are the purest acts of faith, which the soul puts forth in the dark. Faith never believes more, than when it cannot see—because then the soul has nothing to stay itself upon but God. Sense, while it seems to help, renders the work of faith more difficult by doubling it. A man must first believe the insufficiency of what he sees, before he can believe the all-sufficiency of him who is invisible, “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Corinthians 4:18).

It is harder to live by faith in a state of abundance, than in poverty. The soul is a step nearer living upon God, when it has nothing to live upon but God. Yes, when God is not seen—he is most believed. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Observe, and you shall find a great deal more of precious faith in that desertion, than of complaint; faith breaks forth first, ‘My God,’ before ‘forsaken’. You have two words of faith, for one of despair, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Faith speaks twice before sense can speak once.

Again, faith speaks confidently and positively, you are ‘my God’. Sense speaks dubiously, ‘why have you?’ as if sense dared not call it a forsaking, while faith dares say, ‘my God.’ Surely faith is never so much faith, as in spiritual desertion. Faith’s triumphs lie in the midst of despair, and even in this sense also, “Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy!” (1 Peter 1:8).

How greatly is godly sorrow enlarged by sanctified affliction! That stream which was accustomed to run in the channel of worldly crosses, now is diverted into the channel of sin: “I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned” (Micah 7:9). Any burden is light in comparison to sin, the very indignation of God. The soul that God teaches by his

chastisements, can stand under the burden of God's indignation for sin—when it cannot stand under sin which has kindled that indignation.

Ah, cries Job upon the dunghill, "I have sinned, what shall I do unto you, O preserver of men?" (Job 7:20). He forgets his suffering in his sin; he says not, 'I have lost all my substance. I am now upon the dunghill as naked as ever I was born, save that I am clothed with scabs. My friends reproach me, my wife curses me, or that which is worse, she bids me curse God. Satan persecutes me, and God himself has become my enemy. All this has befallen me—what will you do unto me, O preserver of men?' But instead it is, "I have sinned, what shall I do unto you?" *Sufferings convict of sin—and the sense of sin swallows up the sense of sufferings.*

And what shall I say more? The time would fail to instance in other graces, love, fear, holiness, and so forth. "By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin" (Isaiah 27:9).

Grace is never more grace, than when besieged with afflictions. The battle draws forth that fortitude and bravery which in time of peace lay chilled in the veins for lack of opposition and exercise. Tribulation works patience.

12. In the school of affliction, the necessity and excellency of the *life of faith* is learned.

a.) The necessity of living by faith. Where sense ends—faith begins. "The just shall live by faith" (2 Corinthians 5:7). We live by faith—or die in despair. When God pulls away the bull-rushes of creature supports—the soul must either swim or sink. God teaches this lesson:

[1.] By the uncertainty of second causes, and the vicissitudes which are in creature expectations. We have a little hope today—but tomorrow we are reduced to despair. We have good news today: Pharaoh says that Israel shall go free—but bad news tomorrow: Pharaoh rages and swears that "if Moses sees his face any more, that he shall surely die" (Exodus 10:28).

O the ebbs and flows of sublunary hopes! One speaks a word of comfort—another speaks words of terror. Now we receive a parcel of good words—and shortly thereafter a solemn threatening. The sick man is in hopes of reviving today—but tomorrow at the point of death.

What a woeful heart-dividing life is a life of sense, a life that is worse than death itself; to be thus bandied up and down between hopes and fears; to be baffled to and fro between the maybe's of second causes! To be like mariners upon the billows and surges of the tempestuous sea! "Their ships were tossed to the heavens and plunged again to the depths; the sailors cringed in terror. They reeled and staggered like drunkards and were at their wits' end!" (Psalm 107:26-27).

[2.] By the disappointment of the creature. How often does the creature totally fail and disappoint our expectations! Like the deceitful brook, to which Job most elegantly compares his brethren, which mocks the traveler who comes for a draught of water to quench his thirst—but is sent away with confusion and shame. "Surely men of low degree are vanity, and men of high degree are a lie" (Psalm 62:9). Men of low degree would help, but cannot—there is vanity. Men of high degree can help many times, but will not—no, not when they have promised and sworn—there is a lie! Both disappoint, the one by the necessity, the other by deceit!

Disappointment is one of the greatest torments that a rational creature is capable of. Says *David*, "I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me." (Psalm 142:4). Peter-like, they "knew not the man" (Matthew 26:72)—they made as if they had never seen him before. Just so that churl Nabal, "Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?" (1 Samuel 25:10). And it was not Nabal only who stood at this distance from him, his nearest and dearest acquaintance cast him off: "You have taken away my companions and loved ones. Darkness is my closest friend." (Psalm 88:18). "Refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul!" (Psalm 142:4).

Paul was in no better condition in the persecution which befell him at Rome, "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me!" (2 Timothy 4:16). There was not a man of all them that sat under the famous apostle's ministry who would dare appear to speak a word for him, or to him. Oh bitter disappointment—had not he Paul had faith to support him under it! *Sorrow and shame are the fruits of creature-expectation.*

But now on the contrary, "Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces." (Psalm 34:5). Faith meets with no disappointment—for God is always better than our expectation, "Nevertheless the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me—and I was delivered from the mouth of the lion" (2 Timothy 4:17).

By such experiences do we learn the necessity of living by faith, "I would have perished in my affliction, unless your law had been my delight" (Psalm 119:92). Unless David had learned to live by God's promises, he would have been a dead man.

Surely he dies often, whose life is bound up in the dying creature. As often as the creature fails—his hope fails and his heart fails. When the creature dies, his hope is disappointed. He alone lives an unchangeable life, who by faith can live upon an unchangeable God.

We hear such things indeed in the Word; but we do not believe them until our own experience convinces us of our infidelity. A long time do we rely totally upon the creature, knowing no other life than that of sense and reason, “Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his dragnet” (Habakkuk 1:16).

And because the Word tells us much of *living by faith*, we would eagerly patch up a life between faith and sense, which indeed is not a life of faith. Though we may *use means*—we must trust God and trust him solely; and therefore to bring us to this, God allows us to be tried and vexed with the mockery of second causes. And when we have spent all upon these *physicians of no value*—then, and never until then, we resolve to live by faith.

When David had sufficiently experienced the falseness and hypocrisy of Saul and his parasites, “They delight in lies, they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly,” then he resolves never to trust a creature more: “My soul wait only upon God, he alone is my Rock and my salvation” (Psalm 62:4-6).

Unmixed trust in God—is the fruit of our experience of the creature’s vanity. We never resolve exclusively for God, until with the prodigal, we are whipped home naked to our father’s house. When the Church had run herself barefoot in following her lovers, who answered her expectation with nothing but fear, and sent her away with shame instead of glory—then she went home, and confessing her atheism and folly, gives up herself purely to divine protection: “Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say ‘Our gods’ to what our own hands have made, for in You the fatherless find compassion.” (Hosea 14:3).

b.) By the mutability and disappointment of the creature, God teaches his people the excellency of the life of faith. David, when he learns it in the school of affliction, publishes it for the use and benefit of after ages: “Blessed is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God” (Psalm 146:5). He had before entered a caveat against creature confidence, “Put not your trust in princes—nor in man;” and gives the reason of it, there is no help or salvation in the best of men—”nor in man, in whom there is no help” (verse 3).

Alas, man is but a little breathing clay; and when that breath goes forth, he returns to his native earth. When the breath is gone, there is nothing but a little lump of clay remaining. In that very day his thoughts perish. When the man dies, all his counsels and plots and projects die with him. Having thus put in his caution against creature dependence, and given in the account of the vanity thereof—David shows the difference between trust in a dying man, and a living God.

Only trust in God is able to make a man blessed. Those who have the great men of the world to trust in may seem happy, but only he who has the God of Heaven to trust is truly blessed, “Blessed is he who has the God of Jacob for his help.” Why so? Because while those who trust in princes shall be disappointed—those who trust in God shall never be disappointed; for he is Jehovah. His hope is in the Lord, or in Jehovah, his God: “He made Heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is” (verse 6); and he who gave *being* to every creature, can give being to his promise also. *Can anything be too hard for a creating God?* He keeps truth and promises forever. Heaven and earth may pass away, but not one jot or tittle of his promise shall pass away until all be fulfilled (Matthew 5:18).

Men may prove unfaithful, but God will never prove unfaithful. He keeps truth forever, “Faithful is he who has promised” (Hebrews 10:23). And thus the soul comes to see the sweetness and excellence of a life of faith, while others are mocked, abused, and slain, by disappointment from the second causes. “He is kept in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on God—because he trusts in him” (Isaiah 26:3). He lives indeed, who lives by faith in the ever faithful God.

THE EXCELLENCY OF A LIFE OF FAITH REVEALS ITSELF IN THESE FOUR PARTICULARS:

It is a *secure* life. It is a *sweet* life. It is an *easy* life. It is an *honorable* life.

[1.] The life of faith is a SECURE life. “This is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the impregnable rocks. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him.” (Isaiah 33:16). How securely does he dwell, whose fortifications are impregnable, inaccessible rocks! In the Hebrew it is, “He shall dwell in heights,” or rocks so *high* that none can scale them, rocks so *thick* that no breach can be made in them, rocks within rocks, “impregnable rocks”. Rocks so deep that none can undermine them. Surely a person thus defended on every side, need not fear storming.

OBJECTION. Yes, though rocks may be a good fence—they are but ill food, a man cannot feed on rocks; rocky places are barren, though impregnable; he may be starved, though he cannot be stormed!

ANSWER. No! The words following relieve that fear also, “His bread will be supplied” (verse 16). He shall have bread enough, and it shall cost him nothing—it shall be *given* to him.

And whereas a rock is but a *dry* situation, without either springs or streams, and thereupon a man might be exposed to perishing for lack of water. Thirst will slay, as well as hunger. Therefore it is likewise added, “His water will not fail him”

(verse 16). He shall have waters which neither summer's heat nor winter's frosts shall be able to dry up—never-failing waters shall fill his cisterns from day to day “His water will not fail him.”

Under such an excellent metaphor is the security of a life of faith described, and this metaphor is expounded in another place: “Our city is strong! We are surrounded by the walls of God's salvation.” (Isaiah 26:1). Walls shall not be their salvation, but salvation shall be their walls. How safely do they dwell, who are walled about with salvation itself! The walls are salvation, and that salvation is Jehovah; for so it follows, “Trust in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength” (verse 4). The Lord Jehovah is the rock of all ages! His refuge will be the impregnable rocks; and the Lord Jehovah is those rocks, a rock of ages. Ages pass away, one after another—but the rock abides, and abides forever. “In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength” (verse 4).

He who rained manna in the wilderness, will give bread; and he who fetched water out of the rock, will be a never-failing fountain—his water will not fail him.

[2.] The life of faith is SWEET. Is it not a sweet thing to fetch all our waters from the fountain, from the spring-head, before they are degenerated or muddied by the miry channel? Faith says to God, “All my fresh springs are in you!” (Psalm 87:7). Is it not sweet to be fixed and composed in the midst of all the changes and confusions under the sun? This is the privilege of him who lives by faith, “No evil tidings shall make him afraid, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord” (Psalm 112:7). And again, “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you” (Isaiah 26:3). The Hebrew has it “peace, peace”—that is, multiplied peace; pure, unmixed peace. Constant and everlasting peace, is the portion of him who lives by faith—so far as he lives by faith. Unless sense and reason break in to disquiet him—he lives in a most sweet and constant serenity.

[3.] The life of faith is an EASY life. It is an easy life to have all provisions brought in to a man, without any care or trouble. Such is the privilege of a believer; he has all his cares provided for. “In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). Faith leaves a believer nothing to do but to pray and give thanks! To *pray* for what he needs, and to *give thanks* for what he has—that is all he has to do.

It is true, believers must labor and travel in the use of means, as well as the rest of the sons of Adam—but it is without worry—without anxious, heart-rending, soul-distracting care. *Worry* is the thorn, the sting which the sin of man and the curse of God has thrust into all our labors. Faith pulls this thorn out, so now all the labor of faith is an easy labor, like the labor of Adam in paradise. Faith uses means, but trusts God. Faith obediently closes with the providence of means, but sweetly leaves the providence of success to God. Yes, faith can trust God when there are no means to use, and say; “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!” (Habakkuk 3:17-18).

Faith can live upon God, when there is a famine upon the whole creation. The peace of God fences the heart from all surprises of fear and trouble, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7). As faith enjoys God in all things in the greatest abundance—so she can enjoy all things in God in the deepest need.

[4.] The life of faith is an HONORABLE life. It is the honor of the court *favorite* that he can go immediately to his prince—when strangers are not admitted. Yes, without all question, it is an honorable life to live as God himself lives. This is the glory of God, that he lives in himself and of himself. And in their proportion, such honor have all his saints. They live in God and upon God here by *faith*—and they shall live in God and upon God hereafter by sight, in the beatific vision.

This is the excellency of the life of faith, and this the people of God experience by their sufferings, whereby God calls them out of the world, and taking them into himself, he reveals to them by degree, the mystery and privilege of living upon God, and upon God alone.

13. In the school of affliction and distresses, God takes us off from self-confidence, and teaches us to trust him more, and ourselves less.

This is the same with the former—except only that we speak now of trust in God—in opposition to confidence in ourselves, and not in others; a distemper that prevails much in our natures. Ever since we rendered ourselves able to do nothing but sin—we think ourselves able to do anything; we imagine to ourselves to have a kind of omnipotence. Naturally we are prone to entertain and nourish high presumptions of our own strength, and of our own wisdom.

a.) Of our own STRENGTH. In our prosperity we think ourselves able to carry any cross; we imagine ourselves strong enough to bear away even Samson's gates upon our shoulders, and prepared to encounter any affliction in the world. But when the hour of affliction actually comes, we find we are but like other men, and are ready to sink, with Peter, if but one wave rises higher than another.

Usually sufferings, before they come, are like a mountain at a great distance, which seems so small that we think we could almost jump over it. But upon nearer approaches, when we come to the foot of it, it appears as if it would fall upon us, and crush us in pieces.

Peter is so big with love to Christ, that he will die with him rather than forsake him. Yes, though all the rest should betake themselves to their heels—Peter will stand by Jesus to the last drop of blood. Yet behold, when it comes to the actual trial, a weak silly damsel is able with a single question to frighten him out of his confidence—and Peter not only forsakes, but forswears his Lord.

Pendleton, in the book of martyrs, boasts that he will fry his fat body in flames of martyrdom, rather than betray his religion; but when the hour comes that Christ and religion had most need of him—he had not one drop of all that fat to spare for either.

b.) As we are prone to presume of our own strength, so we are very apt to idolize our own WISDOM. We are prone to lean to our own understanding—and think by our sagacity, to wind ourselves out of any labyrinth of trouble and perplexity. But we find it otherwise when we actually come into the snare. We then are forced to cry out with the Church, "He has hedged me about that I cannot get out—he has made my chain heavy" (Lamentations 3:7). Like a malefactor who has broken out of prison—he thinks to run away, but he has a heavy chain upon his heel that spoils his haste; and being fenced in round about, he goes to this corner, hoping to find some gap, but there he finds the hedge made up with thorns; and to another corner, and there also the briars stop him.

But that is not all; read on in the Church's complaint, and you shall find greater obstructions, "He has enclosed my ways with hewn stones" (verse 9). Suppose a man would venture the scratching of his flesh to break through a hedge to save his life—yet that would not do, as God had taken away the hedge, and built a *wall* instead of it—a wall so *high* that they could not climb over, a wall so *thick* that they could not dig through.

The meaning is, man in affliction thinks to make his way through by his own art and cunning—but upon the attempt, he finds difficulties arising still higher and higher, so that when all is done, escape is impossible without an immediate rescue by the arm of omnipotence!

This was Paul's case, "We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." (2 Corinthians 1:8). In all probability, this was that uproar at Ephesus, wherein Paul was likely to have been pulled in pieces, for it was a trouble that befell him in Asia (Acts 23:10). It was a strait wherein the apostle was at his wit's end; he despaired even of life, 'We were bereft of all counsel how to expedite ourselves out of the danger.'

So David complains, "How long shall I take counsel in my soul?" (Psalm 13:2). When he was persecuted by Saul, and beset with innumerable dangers—he took counsel within himself. He thought of this means and the other means. He cast about this way and that way how to escape, but in vain; all his counsels left him as full of sorrow and despair as they found him. "How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart?" He had his sorrow for his pains.

Thus it was with the apostle, all his counsel left him in the hand of despair, "We despaired even of life". His case was no other than the prisoner at the bar, at the time the sentence of death is passed upon him. He looks upon himself (and so do bystanders) as a dead man; he is legally dead, dead to all intents and purposes of the law; there lacks nothing but the execution. So it was with Paul, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves" (2 Corinthians 1:9); the sentence was passed in his own heart, and now says Paul, 'I am but a dead man!'

This was his strait, and it seemed God had a design in it, and what was that? He himself will tell you, "We had the sentence of death in ourselves—that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead."

See here that the design is expressed both negatively and affirmatively.

NEGATIVELY, "that we might not trust in ourselves," for God saw even in that great apostle himself a disposition to self-confidence, a proneness to be exalted above measure, through the abundance of revelations. And therefore so as to *prick the bladder of pride*, God gave him a thorn in the flesh to work out this self-trust. God reduced him to a state of despair, as to outward and visible probabilities.

AFFIRMATIVELY, "But in God who raises the dead"—by this desperate experience, God would teach Paul ever after where strength and counsel were to be had in the like extremities—nowhere but in God—and in him abundantly. The God of resurrections can never be baffled. He who can raise the dead can conquer the greatest difficulty; he who can put life into dead men, can put life into dead hopes and raise up our expectations out of the very grave of despair. That God can put life into dead bones, is a consideration able to put life into a dead faith.

To this purpose it is observable that even those to whom God has indulged the largest proportions of faith and courage, he has allowed not only to languish under fears, but even to despair under insupportable difficulties—before they could recover holy confidence in God.

We find *David*, that great champion of Israel, more than once surprised with dreadful fear: “I said in my haste” (Psalm 31:22; 116:11). The Hebrew signifies, ‘in my trembling’—when I was almost beside myself for fear. Well, what did he say then? Why he said, “I am cut off from before your eyes” (Psalm 31:22). That is, ‘God has cast me out of his care, he looks no more after me, I am a lost man.’

And again, “I said in my haste: All men are liars” (Psalm 116:11). ‘Even Samuel himself, who told me I would be a king, he has seen but a false vision, and a lying divination; God never said so to him. No, I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul.’

And thus the prophet *Jeremiah* laments, “You drew near in the day that I called upon you; you said: Fear not” (Lamentations 3:57); but before God spoke a ‘fear not’ to his soul, he was afraid—hear what he says, “They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me; waters flowed over my head, then I said: I am cut off!” (verses 52-54). Mark, with Paul, he had received the sentence of death in himself, he looks upon himself as a dead man, yes as already in his grave, and his gravestone laid upon it, “They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me”—I am dead and buried, and a stone rolled to the mouth of the sepulcher.

And thus you may hear *Jonah* crying in the whale’s belly, “I am cast out of your sight!” (Jonah 2:4).

And thus you may hear *Zion*, in the dust, tuning her lamentations, “The Lord has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me!” (Isaiah 49:14). It were easy to multiply instances.

Now this is continually our case—and this is still God’s design. We are proud creatures, full of self-confidence, and therefore God, by strange and unexpected providences, hedges up our way with thorns, and walls up our path with hewn stones—bringing to despair even of life, bereaving us of counsel, driving us from all our own shifts and policies, bringing us under the very sentence of death—all that we might not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.

He unbottoms us by despair. He convinces us of our impotence and folly. He shows us what babes and fools we are in ourselves—so that in all our future hazards and fears, we might know nothing but God, “Go in the strength of the Lord, and make mention of his righteousness, and of his alone” (Psalm 71:16).

And thus you see *Peter*, who before was so confident that he thought all the world might forsake Christ sooner than himself—afterward he was convinced of his own infirmity and instability, when Christ, to put him in mind of his three-fold denial, put him upon that three-fold interrogatory: “Simon Peter, do you love me more than these?” (John 21). In other words, ‘do you love me more than the rest of your fellow disciples?’ He dared make no other answer but this, “Lord, you know!”—he pleads nothing but his sincerity; and for that also, he casts himself rather upon Christ’s trial, than his own: “Lord, you know.”

14. In the school of affliction, God makes himself known unto his people. How long do we *hear* of God, before we *experimentally know* him? We often get more experimental knowledge of God by one affliction, than by many sermons. “I have *heard* of you often by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye *sees* you! Therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes,” cries Job upon the dunghill (Job 42:5-6). In the Word we do but *hear* of God—in affliction we *see* him.

Prosperity is the nurse of unbelief. The understanding being clouded with the streams and vapors of those lusts which are incident to a prosperous estate—men grow brutish, and the reverence and sense of God is little by little defaced. But now by affliction, the soul (being taken off from sense-pleasing objects) has a greater disposition and liberty to retire into itself. And being freed from the attractive force of worldly allurements—the mind is accustomed to be more serious and fertile—and so more capable of receiving divine illumination.

The clearer the glass is—the more fully does it receive in the beams of the sun. When the warm breath of the world has blown upon us—we are not so capable of the visions of God.

The wicked, through the pride of his heart, will not know God. They say to the Almighty, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of your ways!” (Job 21:14). “Who is the Lord?” says Pharaoh (Exodus 5:2).

Likewise, the very godly themselves are exceeding dark and low in the apprehensions of God—our ignorance of God being never perfectly cured until we come to Heaven, where we shall see him face to face, and know him as we are known (1 Corinthians 13:12). In the meantime, by the strokes of *divine vengeance* God makes the wicked know him to their *cost*. In the same way, by the *rod of correction*, he makes his people to know him to their *comfort*. As God brought all his plagues upon Pharaoh’s heart, that he might know who the Lord was in a way of wrath—so he lays affliction upon his people, that they may know him in a way of love: “Israel shall cry unto me, ‘My God, we know you’” (Hosea 8:2).

Moses never saw God so clearly, as when he descended in a *cloud*. And truly that dispensation was but a type of the method which God uses in making himself known unto his saints. He puts them into the clefts of the rock, covers them with his hand while he passes by, and then proclaims his name before them, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious” (Exodus 33:19-23).

The people of God have the most sensible experience of God's attributes in their sufferings: His holiness, His justice, His faithfulness, His mercy, and His all-sufficiency.

a.) His HOLINESS. Affliction shows what a sin-hating God our God is; for though his chastisements on his Church are in love to themselves—they are in hatred to their corruptions. While he saves the sinner, he destroys the sin, “By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away his sin” (Isaiah 27:9). If the soul is to live—then sin must die.

b.) His JUSTICE. Afflictions are correction to the godly—and punishment to the wicked. In both God, is righteous. Thus Israel knew God; “Howbeit you are just in all that has come upon us, for you have done right, but we have done wickedly” (Nehemiah 9:33). In the severest dispensations, they judge themselves and justify God. Yes, when they cannot discern his meaning—then they adore his righteousness: “You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?” (Jeremiah 12:1). When the soul is unsatisfied—yet God is not unjustified.

c.) His FAITHFULNESS. We see God's faithfulness in the very affliction itself, “I know, Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me!” (Psalm 119:75).

We see God's faithfulness to his covenant—for affliction is not so much threatened as *promised* to believers; but of this hereafter. The more David was afflicted, the more God's faithfulness appeared. ‘Oh,’ says the holy man, ‘I could not have lacked a stroke of all that discipline with which my heavenly Father has chastised me.’

We see God's faithfulness in hearing prayer. “This poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.” Even when David lacked faith, God lacked not faithfulness. “I said in my haste: I am cut off from before your eyes’—nevertheless you heard the voice of my supplications when I cried unto you” (Psalm 31:22). Unbelief itself cannot nullify the faithfulness of God. I conceive these words of the apostle to bear this sense, “If we believe not—yet he abides faithful, for he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). It is not to be understood of a *state* of unbelief, but of an *act* of unbelief; not of a lack *of* faith, but a lack *in* faith; neither of which can render God unfaithful, who is engaged not so much to our faith, as to his own faithfulness to himself, to hear the prayer of his troubled servants. “Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me” (Psalm 50:15).

Believers experience the faithfulness of God best in their sufferings, because:

[1.] Then they are most prayerful. When our elder brother Esau is upon us—then we can wrestle with our elder brother Jesus, and not let him go until he bless us.

[2.] Then they are most vigilant to observe the *returns* of prayer. “My voice shall you hear in the morning, in the morning will I direct my prayer unto you, and will look up” (Psalm 5:3). In adversity, we are early with God in prayer, “In the morning shall you hear my voice, in the morning will I direct my prayer”. This implies double earliness, and double earnestness in prayer.

And when we have done praying, we shall begin *waiting*, “I will look up.” In prosperity, we put up many a prayer that we never look after; God may deny or grant, and we hardly take notice of it. But in affliction, we can press God for the returns of prayer, “Hear me speedily, O Lord, my spirit fails, hide not your face from me, lest I be like to those who go down into the pit” (Psalm 143:7). Not only *denials*, but *delays* kill us—then we can hearken for the echo of our voice from Heaven, “I will hearken what God the Lord will say, for he will speak peace to his people” (Psalm 85:8).

As God cannot easily deny the prayer of an afflicted soul, so if he grants, we can take notice of it, and know our prayers when we see them again; “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him” (Psalm 34:6)—and this endears the heart to God and to prayer. “I love the Lord, because he heard my voice and my supplications; because he has inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live” (Psalm 116:1-2).

As faithfulness in hearing prayer, so also in making good the promise. The afflicted soul can witness unto God, “as we have heard—so have we seen” (Psalm 48:8). What we have heard in the promise—we have seen in the accomplishment; God was never worse than his word. As affliction is a furnace to try the faith of God's people—so it is also to try the faithfulness of God in his promises. And upon the trial, the Church brings in her experience, “The words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6). Let a man cast the promise a thousand times into the furnace, it will still come out full weight! “As for God, his way is perfect, the word of the Lord is tried” (Psalm 18:30). It is to be understood in both places of the word of the promise. A man may set Heaven and earth upon a promise, and it will bear them up.

d.) His MERCY. God is merciful in the MODERATION of chastisements. In the midst of judgment, he remembers mercy. “It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not” (Lamentations 3:22), cries

the Church in Babylon. It is banishment—but it might have been destruction! We are in Babylon—but we might have been in Hell! It is of the Lord’s mercies, and his mercies alone, that we are not there.

So says the afflicted soul: ‘If my burning fever had been the burning lake of fire; if my prison had been the bottomless pit; if my banishment from society had been expulsion (with Cain) from the presence of God, and that forever—then God would have been righteous in it.’ It is never so bad with the people of God, but it might have been worse! *Anything on this side Hell is pure mercy.*

And as there is mercy in God *moderating* the afflictions of his people—so there is mercy in SUPPORTING his people under afflictions. “When I said my foot slips”—now I sink, I shall never be able to stand under this affliction, I cannot bear it, “Your mercy, O Lord, held me up” (Psalm 94:18). When David was sinking, God put under him his everlasting arms and held him up—just as Christ stretched forth his hand to save Peter when he began to sink. Even when God’s suffering people have not any great raptures—yet then they find sweet supports, “His left hand was under me, his right hand embraced me” (Song of Solomon 2:6).

And yet it is not supporting mercy only which they experience in their sufferings—but often his REFRESHING, his rejoicing mercy. So it follows in the psalm above cited, “In the multitude of my thoughts within me, your comforts delight my soul” (Psalm 94:19). My thoughts were dark and doleful, and full of despair, and not a few of them; multitudes broke in upon me, and even swallowed me up. But your comforts were light and life, and delight to my soul. My thoughts did not sink me so deep, but your comforts raised me up as high. My thoughts were a Hell, but your comforts were a Heaven within me.

The soul *hears* of God’s mercy in prosperity—but it *tastes* of his mercy in affliction. And as it were overcome with enjoyments, can call to others, “O taste and see how good the Lord is!” (Psalm 34:8). Hence it is, that of all the days of the year the apostle would choose as it were a Good-Friday—a passion day, to rejoice in: “God forbid I should rejoice in anything but in the *cross* of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14); Christ’s sufferings for him—and his sufferings for Christ.

e.) The ALL-SUFFICIENCY of God is the last attribute I mentioned, which God proclaims before his suffering people. “Now you shall see,” says God to Moses, “what I will do to Pharaoh” (Exodus 6:1). Hitherto you have seen what Pharaoh has done to Israel—now you shall see what I can do to Pharaoh. And so they did see that the doubling of their burdens. was the dissolving of their bondage; the extinguishing of their nation, was the multiplying of their seed; the same waters which were Israel’s rocks—were the Egyptians’ grave.

“I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them!” (Exodus 15:9)—so boasts the proud tyrant. ‘I will, I will, I will’. But not so fast Pharaoh, let God speak the next word, “But You blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters!” (Exodus 15:10). O sudden turn! There lies Pharaoh with all his boastings, drowned in the sea. Thus did God appear to his oppressed Israel in the very nick of their extremities. “Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians; and the people feared the Lord” (Exodus 14:31).

“Israel saw.” In prosperity God works—but we see him not. Affliction opens our eyes! When we see our dangers, then we can see God in our deliverances. God could have brought Israel into the Land of Promise by a shorter way, in forty days. But he leads them about in a howling wilderness forty years (not a more likely place in all the world to have starved them and their flocks), and why? But to proclaim to Israel and all succeeding generations, “He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” (Deuteronomy 8:3).

Israel learned more of God’s all-sufficiency in a land of drought, than she could have learned in the land flowing with milk and honey; namely, that God can feed without bread, and satisfy thirst without streams of water; that he can make the clouds rain down food, and the rock give out rivers; that the creature can do nothing without God, but God can do whatever he pleases without the creature.

Instances are endless—In a word, *suffering time is the time wherein God makes his attributes visible*, “The Lord will be a refuge to his people, a refuge in time of trouble;” and what follows? “And those who know your name will put their trust in you” (Psalm 9:9-10). In the *school of affliction* God reads lectures upon his attributes, and expounds himself unto his people—so that many times they come to know more of God by half a year’s sufferings, than by many years’ sermons.

15. In the school of affliction, God teaches them to mind the duties of a suffering condition, to study duty more than deliverance, and seriously to inquire what it is which God calls for under the present dispensation. The soul cries out with Paul, when laid for dead at Christ’s feet, “Lord, what will you have me to do?” (Acts 9:6). There is no condition or trial in the world, but it gives a man opportunity for the exercise of some special grace, and the doing of some special duty. It is the work of a Christian in every new state, and in every new trial—to mind what new duty God expects, and what new grace he is to exert and exercise.

To mind deliverance alone, is self-love, which is natural to man, “The captive exile hastens that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit” (Isaiah 51:14). Man in affliction would eagerly be delivered, have the burden taken off, and the yoke broken; he makes more haste to get his afflictions *removed*, than *sanctified*. ‘O,’ thinks one, ‘if God would heal me of this sickness, deliver me out of this distress—I would walk more closely with him; I would be more abundant in family duties; I would be more fruitful in my converse; I would do thus and thus,’ and so on.

Now though men should sit down in their afflictions, consider their ways, and make new resolutions for better things if God shall give better times—yet if this is all, it may be nothing else but a wile of the deceitful heart, a temptation and snare of the devil; a mere diversion to turn aside the heart from the present duty which God expects. And therefore when God intends good and happiness to the soul by the present chastisement, he pitches the soul upon the present duty, which is to “hear the rod, and he who has appointed it” (Micah 6:9); to discern God’s aim, and to find out the meaning of the present dispensation—to say to God, “I am guilty, but will offend no more. Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I will not do so again.” (Job 34:31-32). To reflect upon our ways and hearts; to complain of *sin*—and not of punishment, “Why does a living man complain? A man for the punishment of his sin? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord” (Lamentations 3:39-40). To think the present condition as the best, “I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11). In patience to possess our souls, to rejoice in God even in tribulation. To mind the public calamities of the Church more, and our private sufferings less; to pray for the welfare of Zion, “In your good pleasure do good unto Zion” (Psalm 51:18). To live upon Jesus Christ, and to make him glorious by our afflictions, “That Christ may be magnified in our bodies, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:20). Paul studied more how to *adorn* the cross, than to *avoid* it; how to render persecution amiable; and if he must suffer for Christ, yet that Christ might not suffer by him; that Christ might be exalted, and the Church edified. And lastly, to commit the keeping of our souls to God in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

16. In the school of affliction, another lecture which the Holy Spirit teaches is, the fruits and advantages of a suffering condition. There is in every state of life a snare and a privilege; and it is the folly and misery of man, left to himself, that he willingly runs into the former but misses the latter. He is only able to add to his own misery, and to make his condition worse than he finds it.

Those whom God loves, he teaches. He teaches them to study, as the *duty* of their present state, so the *advantage*. When God takes away creature comforts, he does not only necessitate, but by the secret impressions of love upon the heart, he emboldens the soul to look out for reparations, and to urge God for a recruit in some richer accommodations. “Lord,” says Abraham, “what will you give me, seeing I go childless?” (Genesis 15:2).

In like manner, ‘Lord, what will you give me,’ says a suffering saint, ‘since I go wifeless, and friendless, and pennyless, and houseless,’ and so forth. So the disciples, “Lord, we have forsaken all and followed you—what shall we have therefore?” (Matthew 19:27). Faith may be a loser for Christ, but it will not be a loser by Christ. And accordingly Christ makes answer, “Truly I say unto you, there is no man who has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel’s—but he shall receive a hundred-fold now in this life” (Mark 10:29-30).

Advantage enough! A hundred for one was the best year that ever Isaac had—but how shall this be made good? Why with “a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.” (verse 30): this must make up the account. It is very observable, that year wherein Isaac received his hundred-fold, was Isaac’s suffering year; the year wherein famine had banished him from his own country to sojourn with Abimelech in Gerer; yet Isaac’s best harvest was in a year of famine; and this was typical to all the children of promise: they must receive Isaac’s increase, “a hundred-fold—and with them, persecutions.”

And I conceive our Savior may allude to this type in this promise. In persecution, the people of God find their hundred fold; when they make a Scripture inquiry, they find sufferings, especially those for Christ’s sake, to be . . .

their letters testimonial for Heaven; the pledge of adoption; a purge for corruption; the improvement of holiness; and, the enhancement of glory.

In a word, whatever the affliction is, that shall be the soul’s gain, “All things work together for good to those who love God” (Romans 8:28). This God teaches his people; it is the very design of the eighth chapter to the Romans, and of the twelve first verses of the twelfth chapter to the Hebrews, to show that God’s *rod* and God’s *love* go both together. This quiets the heart, and supports the soul under its burden, “For this cause we faint not”. Why? because “though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

As if he had said, ‘What we lose in our bodies, we gain in our souls; what we lose in our estates, we get in grace’; thus they bear up and comfort themselves in their deepest sorrows, while those who lie poring upon their afflictions, only aggravate every circumstance of a suffering condition, sink their own spirits, vex their souls, dishonor God by slandering his dispensations, and bring up an evil report upon the Cross of Jesus Christ.

The spiritual privileges of God's suffering people are therefore called, "the peaceable fruits of righteousness" (Hebrews 12:11) because the taste of this fruit brings such peace and comfort into the soul as makes it rejoice not in God only, but in tribulation; and in all these things to account itself "more than conqueror through him who has loved us!" (Romans 8:37).

17. In the school of affliction, God teaches what Christ taught Martha—that is, the one thing needful. Affliction reveals how much we are mistaken about our *necessities*. In our health and strength and liberty, we think this and that thing must be done; we think riches, honors, and a good name in the world to be necessary; we must get estates and lay up large portions for our children; we must raise our families and call our lands after our own names, and the like. But in the day of adversity, when death looks us in the face, when God causes the horror of the grave, the dread of the last judgment, and the terrors of eternity to pass before us—then we can "put our mouths in the dust, smite upon our thigh, and groan with broken heart and bitter grief." (Lamentations 3:29; Jeremiah 31:19; Ezekiel 21:6). O how have I been mistaken? "How have I fed upon ashes, and a deceived heart turned me aside, so that I could not deliver my soul, nor say: Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isaiah 44:20)

Only then can we see that pardon of sin, a saving interest in Christ, a sense of God's love, a life of grace, and an assurance of glory, are the only *indispensables*. In a word, that Christ alone, is the one thing needful—and that all other things are but "loss and dung" in comparison of "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, and of a saving interest in him, and in his righteousness" (Philippians 3:8), without which the soul is undone to all eternity!

Oh that Christians would be wise, that they would not "spend their money for that which is not bread, nor their labor for that which satisfies not" (Isaiah 55:2)—but labor for faith which might realize and substantiate unseen and spiritual things! Those who will not learn this lesson in the school of the Word—shall learn it in the school of affliction if they belong to God. Therefore set your heart to it.

18. In the school of affliction, the redemption of TIME is another lesson which God teaches. In our tranquility, how many golden hours do we throw down the stream, which we are likely never to see again; for one moment whereof in the future, when we would give rivers of oil, the wealth of both the Indies, mountains of precious stones (if they were our own)—and yet neither would they be found a sufficient price for the redemption of any one lost moment.

It was the complaint of the heathen moralist, and may be much more our complaint, "Who is there among us that knows how to value time, and prize a day at a due rate?" Most men study rather how to pass away their time—than to redeem it. They are prodigal of their precious hours, as if they had more than they could tell what to do with them. Our life is short, and we make it shorter by wasting our time. How sad a thing is it to hear men complain, 'O what shall we do to pass away the time?'

Alas, even Sabbath-time, the purest, the most refined part of time—time consecrated by divine sanction—how cheap and common is it in most men's eyes, while many do sin away, and the most do idle away—those hallowed hours?

Seneca was accustomed to jeer the Jews for their ill husbandry, in that they lost one day in seven, meaning their Sabbath. Truly it is too true of the most of Christians, they lose one day in seven, the Sabbath for the most part is but a lost day; while some spend it totally upon their lust, and the most, I had almost said the best, do fill up the void spaces and intervals of the Sabbath from public worship, with idleness and vanity!

But oh, when trouble comes, and danger comes, and death comes—when the sword is at the heart, the pistol at the breast, the knife at the throat, death at the door—then how precious would one of those despised hours be?

Evil days cry with a loud voice in our ears, 'Redeem the time!' That caution was written from the tower in Rome, "Redeem the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). In life-threatening dangers, when God threatens as it were, that time shall be no more—then we can think of redeeming time for prayer, for reading, for meditation; for studying and clearing our evidences for Heaven; for doing and receiving good, according to opportunities presented; yes, then we can gather up the very broken fragments of time, that nothing may be lost. Then God teaches the soul what a choice piece of wisdom it is for us to be before-hand with time; for usually it comes to pass through our unskillfulness and unwatchfulness, that we are surprised with death; and we that reckoned upon *years*—many years yet to come, have not possibly so many hours to make ready our accounts. It may be this night the summons may come, and then if our time is done, and our work to is begun—in what a case are we! The soul must needs be in perplexity at the hour of death—that sees the day spent, and its work yet to do.

A traveler that sees the sun setting when he is but entering on his journey, cannot but be aghast. The evening of our day, and the morning of our task—do not well agree together. The time which remains, is too short to lament the loss of past time. By such hazards God comes upon the soul as the angel upon Peter in prison, and smites upon our sides, bids us rise up quickly and gird up ourselves; and bind on our sandals, that we may redeem lost opportunities, and do much work in a little time. It is a pity to lose anything of that which is so precious and so short, as time.

19. In the school of affliction, God teaches us how to estimate, or at least to make some remote and imperfect guess, at the sufferings of Jesus Christ. In our prosperity we pass by the Cross carelessly and regardlessly; at the best we do but shake our heads a little. The reading of the story of Christ's passion stirs us up some pity towards Him—but it is quickly gone; we forget as soon as we get into the world again.

But now let God pinch our flesh with some sore affliction; let Him fill our bones with pain, and set us on fire with a burning fever; let our feet be hurt in the stocks, and the irons enter into our souls; let our souls be exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud; let us be destitute, afflicted, tormented, and so forth—then we sit down and look upon Him whom we have pierced, and begin to say within ourselves: “Are the *chips* of the cross so heavy? What then was the cross itself, which my Redeemer bore? Are a few bodily pains so bitter? What then were those agonies which the Lord of glory sustained in His soul? Is the wrath of man so piercing? What was the wrath of God, which scorched His righteous soul, and forced His very heart's blood through His flesh in a cold winter's night, so that His sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground? Are the buffetings of men so grievous? What were the buffetings of Satan, which our Lord sustained, when all the brood of the serpent lay nibbling at His heels? Is a burning fever so hot? How then did the flames even of Hell itself scald my Savior's soul? Is it such a heart-piercing affliction, to be deserted of friends? What was it then for him, that was the Son of God's love, the darling of his bosom, to be deserted of his Father, which made him cry out to the astonishment of Heaven and earth, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Is a chain so heavy, a prison so loathsome, the sentence and execution of death so dreadful? O what was it for Him who made Heaven and earth to be bound with a chain, hurried up and down from one unrighteous judge to another, mocked, abused, spit upon, buffeted, reviled, cast into prison, arraigned, condemned, and executed in a most shameful and accursed manner?

O what was it for him to endure all this contradiction of sinners, rage of the devil, and wrath of God—in comparison of whom the most righteous person that ever was, may say with the penitent thief on the cross, “And we indeed suffer justly—but he, what evil has he done? He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (Luke 23:41; Isaiah 53:9).

Blessed be God my prison is not the bottomless pit, my burnings are not unquenchable flames, my cup is not filled with wrath.

In a word, my sufferings are not Hell. Blessed be God for Jesus Christ, by whom I am delivered from wrath to come.

And thus, as the Lord Jesus by the sensible experience of his own passion, came perfectly to understand what his poor members suffer while they are in the body—so we by the remainders of his cross, which he has bequeathed us as a legacy, come in some measure to understand the sufferings of Christ, or at least by comparing things of such vast disproportion, to guess at what we cannot understand.

20. The last lesson which God teaches in the school of affliction, is how to prize and long for Heaven. In our prosperity, when the candle of God shines in our tabernacles, “when we wash our steps in butter, and the rock pours us out rivers of oil” (Job 29:6)—we could set down with the present world, and even say with the disciple (though not upon so good an account), “It is good for us to be here; let us build tabernacles here” (Matthew 17:4). While life is sweet—death is bitter. Heaven itself is no enticement—while the world gives us her alluring entertainments.

But when poverty and imprisonment, reproach and persecution, sickness and sore diseases, pinch and vex our hearts with a variety of aggravations—then we are not so fond of the creature, and are pleased to parley with death, and take Heaven into our consideration. Not that merely to desire to be in Heaven, because we are weary of the world, is an argument of grace, or a lesson which needs divine teaching; self-love will prompt as much. But because like foolish travelers, we love our *way* though it be troublesome, rather than our *country*. God by putting us in the school of affliction, takes off our hearts by degrees from this present world, and makes us look homeward; being burdened we groan—and with the dove we return to the ark, when the world is sinking round about us.

When David was driven from his palace, then “Woe is me that my pilgrimage is prolonged” (Psalm 120:5-6). We would be contented with the garlic and flesh-pots of Egypt—if God did not set cruel taskmasters over us to double our burdens. And when God thus lessens our esteem of the world, He reveals to us the excellency of heavenly comforts, and draws out the desires of the soul to a full fruition: “When shall I come and appear in Your presence?” (Psalm 42:2). “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

Afflictions make Heaven appear as Heaven indeed. To the weary, Heaven is rest; to the banished, it is home; to the scorned and reproached, it is glory; to the captive, it is liberty; to the soldier, it is conquest; to the hungry, it is hidden manna; to the thirsty, it is the fountain of life; to the grieved, it is fullness of joy; and to the mourner, it is pleasures forevermore.

In a word, to those who have lain upon the dunghill of affliction, and walked in holiness—Heaven is the throne on which they shall sit and reign with Christ forever and ever!

Surely beloved, Heaven thus proportioned to every state of the afflicted soul, cannot but be very precious—and will make the soul desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is best of all. A Christian indeed is comforted by faith, but not satisfied; for here we are absent from the Lord, and walk by faith, not by sight. Hope, though it keeps life in the soul, yet it is not able to fill it; he longs, and thinks every day a year until he is at home. Those who walk by faith, cannot be quiet until they are in the sight of those things which they believe.

Jacob, when he heard that Joseph was alive, though he did believe it, yet could not be satisfied with hearing of it; but says he, “I will go and see him before I die” (Genesis 45:28): so the believing soul, ‘He, whom my soul loves, was dead, but is alive, and behold he lives forevermore. I will die that I may go and see him!’ Just as Augustine, upon that answer of God to Moses, “You cannot see my face and live” (Exodus 33:20), makes this quick and sweet reply: “Then Lord let me die that I may see your face.”

Thus have I presented you with those twenty various lessons which Jesus Christ, the great Prophet of his Church, teaches his afflicted ones in the school of affliction.

Chapter 2. The Nature or Properties of Divine Teaching

“Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD your God, Who *teaches* you to profit, Who *leads* you by the way you should go.” Isaiah 48:17

I now come to the second thing—namely, the nature or properties of divine teaching.

It is not every teaching that will make or evidence a man to be a blessed man under affliction. There is hardly any man that is under affliction, but he learns *something* by it—and yet few are blessed. The reason is, because it matters not so much what a man is taught, as who is the teacher, whether he is taught of God or not. Yes, that is not all either, for we are not to inquire only whether we are taught of God—but how we are taught. There is a twofold teaching of God:

There is a *common* teaching which even the heathen, wicked men, hypocrites, and reprobates within the Church, may have.

There is a *special* teaching, proper and peculiar only to the children of promise. A covenant teaching; “All your children shall be taught of God” (Isaiah 54:13); it is the covenant of God with the Redeemer. Without this special teaching, there is no profit, “I am the Lord your God, Who teaches you to profit”—so to profit by chastisements and corrections. So it follows, “Who *leads* you by the way you should go.” God’s teachings are not only *directing* teachings, but *leading* teachings. They not only to *show* the way, but to *enable* to go in the way.

Now this teaching has six properties:

1. Divine teaching is an INWARD teaching.

a.) Inward in respect of the OBJECT. So our Savior, concerning the saving teaching of the Holy Spirit, “When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you *into* all truth” (John 16:13). Man may lead you *unto* truth, but it is the Spirit of God only that can lead you *into* truth. He alone has the “key of David—who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens” (Isaiah 22:22). He can open to you the door of truth, and show you the inside of truth.

Great is the difference between these two teachings. He who comes to a stately house or palace, sees only the outward fabric and structure; and even that may take much. But he who comes *into* it, sees all the inward contrivances and conveniences; he sees all the rich furniture and adornings of the several rooms and offices of the house which are not only for use, but for delight and ornament.

Surely the very outside of truth is goodly; but, like the king’s daughter, “it is all glorious within” (Psalm 45:13); not pleasing only, but ravishing. Those who are led into truth see this, by virtue whereof David saw wonderful things in the law, objects which filled his soul with wonder and delight (Psalm 119:18). And as the teachings of the covenant are inward in respect of the *object*, so also—

b.) Inward in respect of the SUBJECT. “In the hidden part you have made me to know wisdom” (Psalm 51:6). And again, “I thank the Lord who gave me counsel, my heart also instructs me in the night seasons” (Psalm 16:7). The *heart* is the most inward part of the body, and the night season the most retired and private time; both express the intimacy of divine teaching. “God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6); it is a full expression, and holds forth the inward teachings of God, both in reference to the subject, and to the object.

In reference to the subject, he who “commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts”. Man’s light may shine into the *head*—but God’s light shines into the *heart*. God has his throne in Heaven; but his chair—his pulpit—is in the heart; he has “shined into our hearts.”

And then you have the inwardness of divine teaching in respect of the object; he has given us “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Man may give knowledge, confused general knowledge—but God gives the light of knowledge in the luster and brightness of it. “In your light, we shall see light” (Psalm 36:9). Here is not only knowledge and light of knowledge, but the glory of that light—the light which God brings into the sanctified understanding is a glorious light, a marvelous light; the soul that the Spirit of God takes by the hand and leads into truth, stands wondering at the glory and excellency of that light which shines round about it.

And then lastly, all this “in the face of Jesus Christ”—the face is the full discovery of a person. Moses could not see God’s face, but only his back parts. But now by the flesh of Jesus Christ, God has put a veil upon his face; the veil of his flesh, through which we may see the face of God; for now in Christ it is God manifest in the flesh, the human nature of Jesus Christ has made God visible. In this face now of Jesus Christ do they whom God teaches by a saving gospel teaching, see divine truth; they see it now—not only by borrowed representations and natural resemblances, but in its own native beauty and luster—as the truth is in Jesus.

2. Divine teaching is a CLEAR, CONVINCING teaching. So our Savior said of the Spirit, “When he has come, he shall convict the world” (John 16:8)—the word signifies a clear demonstrative conviction. So the apostle defines faith to be the evidence, or demonstration—the evident demonstration of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1).

The Holy Spirit, in his teachings, brings in divine truths with such a clear and convincing light, that the soul sits under it fully satisfied; the soul freely acquiesces in the present truths. “Now I know,” says Moses’ father-in-law, “that the Lord is greater than all gods” (Exodus 18:11). He had *heard* that before, but now he is thoroughly *convinced*.

So said David concerning his afflictions, “I know, Lord, that your judgments are right, and that of faithfulness you have afflicted me” (Psalm 119:75). He was fully satisfied both of the equity and fidelity of God’s chastisements; right in respect of the merit, and faithful in respect of the end.

And thus in all the lessons before presented to your view—what God teaches, he teaches with such a clear evidence of truth, that the soul is fully convinced: “Our gospel came unto you, not in word only, but in power and in the Holy Spirit, and in full assurance” (1 Thessalonians 1:5).

Common teaching may so convince, that a man cannot tell how to gainsay or contradict, but the understanding may remain doubtful still. There is not a full and clear assent in the understanding to the truths propounded; but a man remains, in the apostle’s language, “a double-minded man” (James 1:8); or as the word signifies, ‘a double-souled man’—a man of a double or divided spirit, floating between different opinions; one soul (as it were) believes this way, and another soul believes that way; one, while he believes there is a God, and shortly thereafter the fool says in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1); sometimes he calls sin evil; and then again he thinks it good. He believes, and he believes not; sometimes what he hears from the Word is the truth of God, sometimes he thinks again it is but an invention of man.

But now the teachings of God set a man beyond all those fluctuations and unsettledness in judgment. There is that which the apostle calls “the riches of the full assurance of understanding to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God” (Colossians 2:2); assurance of principles, even when the soul may possibly lack the assurance of application.

3. Divine teaching is EXPERIMENTAL teaching. The soul can speak experimentally of the truths it knows, “It is good for me,” says David, “that I have been afflicted” (Psalm 119:71). But may not any man say as much as that? Yes, most men have the notion in their heads and in their lips; but mark, the psalmist speaks *experimentally* to the point, and instances the good which he had gained by affliction, “I have learned your statutes.” He had learned more acquaintance with, delight in, and conformity to the Word—he knew it more, and loved it better, and was more transformed into the nature of it than ever.

So again, “The Lord preserves the simple” (Psalm 116:6), in other words, God stands by his upright-hearted ones to secure them from violence. This a good notion, and any man may have it in the head. But David has it in the *experience*, “I was brought low and he helped me”. My faith, my comfort, and my resolutions were brought low, “my feet had well-near slipped” (Psalm 73:2)—but God helped my faith, revived my comfort, strengthened my resolutions, and established my feet.

Thus Paul said, “I know whom I have believed” (2 Timothy 1:12)—I have experienced his faithfulness and his all-sufficiency; I dare trust my all with him. “I am sure he will keep it safe to that day.”

And thus those who are taught of God in affliction, can speak *experimentally*, in one degree or another, of the gains and privileges of a suffering condition. They can speak experimentally of communion with God, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (Psalm 23:4). Why? “For you are with me”. I have had comfortable experience of your upholding, counseling, comforting presence with me in my deepest desertions. Just so with other fruits of affliction—this I have got by my sufferings. I bless God, I have learned more patience, humility and self-denial. I have learned to be more sensible of my brethren’s sufferings. I have learned to sit looser to the world, to mind Christian duty, and to trust safety with God. I have learned to prepare for death, and to provide for eternity.

Common knowledge rests in generals, and lies more in propositions than in application. But those who are taught of God can say, “As we have heard—so have we seen” (Psalm 48:8). They can go along with every truth, and say, ‘It is so, I have *experienced* this word upon my own heart,’ they can set to their seal, that God is true.

4. Divine teaching is a POWERFUL teaching. After a man has got many truths into the understanding—the main work is yet to do. And that is to bring down holy truths to action, and to draw forth divine principles into practice.

A natural man may know much, he may have a heap of truths in his understanding; but they all lie strengthless in the brain; he has no power to *live* the truths he knows.

Covenant teachings convey strength as well as light. This is the privilege of the children of promise—strength goes out from the covenant with instruction, the Lord “who commands light to shine out of darkness, has shined into our hearts” (2 Corinthians 4:6). God has taught us by such a word, as that whereby he made the world, a creating word, a word that gives strength as well as counsel.

And it is this teaching which the prophet David so frequently importunes in his prayers, “Teach me, O LORD, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes.” (Psalm 119:33-36). Mark that, not only *teach* me the way, but teach me to follow; not only teach me your will, but teach me to *do* your will. Common teaching may teach the way, but only saving teaching teaches to follow in that way. An unregenerate man may know the will of God, but he knows not how to follow that will.

5. The teachings of God are SWEET and PLEASANT teachings. “You have taught me;” what follows? “How sweet are your words unto my taste! Sweeter than honey unto my mouth” (Psalm 119:102-103). David rolled the Word and promises as sugar under his tongue, and sucked from thence more sweetness than Sampson did from the honey-comb.

Luther said he would not live in paradise, if he must live without the Word; but with the Word, says he, “I could live in Hell itself.”

There is much spiritual joy in divine teaching, because the Spirit accompanies the truths, and so irradiates them with his own beauty and glory, that they do not only affect, but ravish the heart, “Your word is pure, therefore your servant *loves* it” (Psalm 119:140). The prophet saw a beam of divine excellency sitting upon the Word, and that happily engaged his soul.

Truth is burdensome to unsound spirits, because convicting; and they labor to extinguish that light which disturbs their quiet, “They hold the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18); they imprison the truth, and will not allow it to do its office.

But saving teaching is sweet and delightful, because it is suitable to the renewed part; to which it comes in with fresh supports, to relieve and fortify it against the assaults of opposite corruption. I say, it is always sweet in that respect; but never more sweet than in affliction—the bitterness of adversity giving a more delicate relish unto the Word, by healing the distempers of the spiritual palate. Then the soul cries out with Jeremiah in the prison, “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your Word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart!” (Jeremiah 15:16).

6. And lastly, divine teaching is an ABIDING teaching. “The anointing which you have received from him *abides* in you” (1 John 2:27). Mere *notional* knowledge is transitory and inconsistent, leaving the soul dubious and uncertain. Observe how the apostle James expresses it, speaking of the mere notional hearer, “He beholds himself, and goes his way, and immediately forgets what kind of man he is” (James 1:24). Observe, he does not only forget what he heard, but he forgets what he is. The looking-glass, whether the Word or affliction, revealed to him his spots—showed him his pride, his covetousness, the impurity of heart and life, and so forth. But he went away and forgot what manner of man he is—he forgets the Word, he forgets the rod, and what both rod and Word revealed to him, together with the resolutions and promises made to God in both.

A godly man may forget the Word (a gracious heart may have a bad memory) but he will not so easily forget himself—he does not forget his spots, and that keeps him in continual work, to wash and purge himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, “Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall—my soul has them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me” (Lamentations 3:19-20).

“Teach me, O Lord,” says David, “the way of your statutes, and I will *keep* it unto the end” (Psalm 119:33). He dares promise perseverance—if God will undertake instruction; and accordingly he made good his promise, upon this very account, “I have not departed from your judgment—for you have taught me” (Psalm 119:102). Observe: he does not say, ‘I *will* keep your statutes’; but he can say, and that many years after, “I *have* kept your statutes.”

Many will say in their affliction, ‘I *will* keep your statutes’. They will promise fair, if God will but deliver them. But how few can say with David, “I *have* kept”—I have not departed from your judgments”!

“Of old time,” says God, “I have broken your yoke, and burst your bonds; and you said, ‘I will not transgress’; when upon every high hill, and under every green tree you wander, playing the harlot” (Jeremiah 2:20).

Good words in trouble—but poor performance out of trouble! They are no sooner out of affliction, but they fall again to their old course of spiritual adultery against God! No sooner do their old hearts and their old temptations meet—but they embrace one another! “They were as undependable as a crooked bow!” (Psalm 78:57).

But David was taught of God, and therefore he is as careful to make *good* his vows, as to make *good* vows: “I will *pay* you my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth has spoken, when I was in trouble” (Psalm 66:13-14). The after-part of David’s life was much more exact than the former: “I have not departed from your judgments, for you have taught me!” (Psalm 119:102).

These are the PROPERTIES of divine teachings; but lest I should lay a snare before the blind, and make the heart sad which God would not have made sad—I must of necessity lay in a few brief **CAUTIONS**.

1. This must not be understood as if God taught all at first—either all truth, or all of any one truth. God does not teach all his lessons at the first entrance into the school of affliction (at least not usually—for we dare not limit him). The fruits of affliction are not all gathered presently, “No chastening for the present seems joyous, but grievous; nevertheless *afterwards* it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

Teaching is the fruit of affliction—it must have a *ripening* time. Therefore, O discouraged soul, do not say that God does not teach you at all—if he does not teach you all at once. “The *entrance* of your word gives light” (Psalm 119:130). God lets in light by degrees; usually he teaches his children, as we teach ours: now a little, and then a little; something this week, and more next week; something by this affliction, and more by the next affliction.

It is not to be despised, if God reveals to the soul the *need* of divine teaching, and engages the heart in holy desires and longings after it—so that the afflicted soul can say in sincerity, “My soul breaks for the longing that it has unto your judgments at all times” (Psalm 119:20).

2. It is not to be understood as if God taught all alike. God has several grades in the school of affliction, as well as in the school of the Word. There are *fathers* for experience, *young men* for strength, and *babes* for the truth and being of grace. And therefore if God has not taught you so much as another, then do not say he has not taught you at all.

“As one star differs from another in glory” (1 Corinthians 15:41)—so also is the school of Christ. It is of free grace that you are a star—though you are not a star of the first or second magnitude. It is of free grace that God has let in some divine light—though not so much light as another may possibly have. It is of free grace that you are in God’s school—though it may not be in the highest grade. In point of holy desire—we should look at the degrees of grace; but in point of thankfulness and comfort—we should look at the *truth* and *being* of grace.

3. When we say that God teaches powerfully and abidingly—it is not to be understood as if these teachings put the soul into an immutable evenness of spirit, or free it from all insurrections and disturbances from opposite corruption. Such a frame of soul is only the privilege of the *glorified* state, wherein we shall see God face to face, and dwell in immutability itself to all eternity.

Here on earth, the Church (like the moon) has its *fulls* and its *wanes*. David had his sinkings, and Job his impatient fits. We “have heard of the patience of Job” (James 5:11), yes, and of his impatience too! Moved, the taught of God may be—but not removed; they may fall—but not fall away; they may fall fearfully, but not finally; they may fall terribly, but not totally. But these things are inseparable with covenant teaching.

a.) The soul is thereby made sensible of the least stirrings and whisperings of corruption. “I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind” (Romans 7:23). Others have it, but they do not find it; they are not sensible of the law in their members, and so forth.

b.) They are exceedingly displeased with the opposition they find in their natures against the teachings of God, and rise up in indignation against all that contradiction which is in the unregenerate part, in any kind whatever. “Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you so disquieted within me?” (Psalm 43:5). Is there cause for this despondency? Is this done like a David? Like “a man after God’s own heart” (Acts 13:22)? Is this the fruit of all the experiences of God’s faithfulness and all-sufficiency? And so in other cases, the soul chides distempers and improper workings of spirit; the soul is full of displeasure against itself; “So foolish was I, and ignorant. I was as a beast before you!” (Psalm 73:22). The soul cannot find words bad enough to give itself.

c.) And if that will not do, then they go to God in prayer, and spread their distress before the Lord, “O my God, my soul is cast down within me” (Psalm 42:6). When they cannot calm the storm, and still the tempest by their own word—then, with the disciples in the ship, they go to Christ, and beseech him by his powerful word to rebuke it, that there may be a calm. They go and pray out their distempers, and pray their hearts into a better frame; as once it was said of Luther, that when he found distempers upon his spirit, he would never give over praying until he had prayed his heart into that frame he prayed for.

d.) By virtue of the teachings of God, they are enabled to maintain opposition against all that opposition which they find in their own spirits. “As the flesh wars against the spirit—so the spirit wars against the flesh” (Galatians 5:17). The spiritual regenerate part as naturally rises up and makes war against the flesh, and fleshly motions—as the flesh does against the teachings of God in the spiritual part. Opposition is not maintained only by precept and rules—but naturally, and by virtue of a *native inward antipathy*. The spirit wars—this spiritual opposition is as suitable and agreeable to the new nature, as the sinful opposition is to the old nature. Hence is the life of a believer called a *wrestling*, and a *warfare* (Ephesians 6:12).

e.) **Not only so, but by the help of divine teaching the soul gains ground on that fleshly opposition with which it is molested, by degrees.** “In the day when I cried, you answered me; and strengthened me with strength in my soul” (Psalm 138:3). Prayer brought in God, and God brought in strength—whereby he gained ground of his distempers. And though all was not done at first, yet his comfort was that all should be done in God’s time. “The Lord will *perfect* that which concerns me” (Psalm 138:8); I am not perfect—but I shall be perfected; “He who has begun a good work, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

f.) **Though the soul is not always the same for temper and acting—yet it is always the same for purpose and design.** “Then I shall not be ashamed, when I have respect unto *all* your commandments” (Psalm 119:6). Though he could not *keep* all, he could *respect* all the commandments of God.

“My soul presses hard after God” (Psalm 63:8). Crowds of opposition intercepted and disturbed his sweet and constant communion with God at times; but he broke through that crowd to recover God’s presence again, “My soul presses hard after you.” Paul is ever pressing after perfection—though he could never attain it.

g.) **And lastly, the soul has not always the same relish and taste of divine truths and ordinances—but it has the same estimate of them.** It keeps up high thoughts of spiritual things, and when it cannot relish them, yet even then it *hungers* after them, “My soul breaks for the longings it has unto your judgments at all times” (Psalm 119:20).

And yet even in reference to these dispositions, which I call *inseparable concomitants to saving teachings*, I must add this one caution in close of all: namely, that allowance be made in case of spiritual desertion.

A child of God, for causes which here we cannot mention, may be cast into so deep a state of spiritual desertion for a time, that he may (as the apostle speaks) “forget that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Peter 1:9). *A child of light may walk in darkness.* And though there is no such decay in the new man, wherein both habits and acts cease—yet they may be so stupefied by the impressions of the present temptations, as the poor soul shall be sensible of neither, but reduced as it were into such a state as when grace was but an embryo in the womb—that spiritual life shall be almost extinguished; there may be life, but no *sense* of that life.

More might be added, but I am sensible how this discourse swells beyond the proportion I intended, and therefore I must hasten. Thus much, therefore, for the second thing propounded in the doctrinal part, the *nature* and *properties* of divine teaching.

Chapter 3. How Affliction Produces this Spiritual Instruction

I come now to the third thing propounded, namely, to inquire how affliction produces this spiritual instruction. What tendency does chastisement have to promote the teachings of God in the soul? What use does God make of correction to this end?

It is true, there is need for an arm of omnipotence to make chastisement have a saving influence upon the heart; and likewise with reading the Word itself. The means of grace do not save by an intrinsic virtue, or power of their own, but there is an instrumental fitness in them to serve omnipotence for divine and saving ends; a fitness of *instrumentality*, as there is in a saw to cut, and in a wedge to cleave, and so forth. The instrument can do nothing alone, but there is a fitness in it to serve the hand of the workman.

Thus it is, in a proportion, with affliction. It is true, there is not so immediate and direct a tendency in the rod, as there is in the Word, to teach and instruct the children of God; yet there is in chastisement a subserviency to prepare the heart of man, and to put it into a better disposition to comply with divine teaching, than naturally it is capable of. Christ works in the hot furnace—the most excellent vessels of honor are formed there. Manasseh, Paul, and the jailer were all chosen in this fire; as God says, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction” (Isaiah 48:10). Grace works in a powerful, yet in an instrumental way. God speaks when we are most apt to hear, congruously yet forcibly, by a fit accommodation of circumstances, which you may discover in these four particulars:

1. By affliction, God takes down the pride of man’s heart. There is not a greater obstruction to saving knowledge, than pride and self-opinion, whereby man either thinks he knows enough, or that what God teaches is not worth learning. Therefore it is proclaimed before the word, “Hear and give ear, be not proud, for the Lord has spoken” (Jeremiah 13:15). In divine matters, as well as human, “only by pride comes contention” (Proverbs 13:10). It is pride which raises objections against the Word, and disputes the commands, when it should obey them.

The proud men in Jeremiah, when they could elude the message of God by his prophet no longer, at length stiffened into downright rebellion. First, they shift, “You speak falsely” (Jeremiah 43:2); and then they resolve, “As for the word you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto you;” be it Baruch, or be it God, we will have none of it: “But we will certainly do whatever goes forth of our own mouth” (Jeremiah 44:16-17).

Such a *masterpiece of obduration* is the heart of man, that it stands like a mountain before the Word, and cannot be moved until God comes with his instruments of affliction, and digging down those mountains of pride, levels them—and then God may stand, as it were, upon even ground, and talk with man. This pride of heart speaks loud in the wicked, and whispers too audibly even in the godly; it is a folly bound up even in the hearts of God’s children, until the rod of correction drives it out; and then the poor bleeding wretch cries, “Lord, what will you have me to do?” (Acts 9:6).

2. Affliction is God’s forge, wherein he softens the iron heart. There is no dealing with the iron while it remains in its own native coldness and hardness. But put it into the fire, make it red-hot there, and you may stamp upon it any figure or impression you please. “God makes my heart soft” (Job 23:16), says Job; melted vessels are impressible to any form.

So it is with the heart of man! Naturally it is colder and harder than the northern iron, and that native hardness is much increased by prosperity, and the patience of God towards sinners; the iron sinew will rather break than bend. It is only the hot furnace which can make it pliable and impressible to God’s counsels. Therefore God resolves on this course, “See, I will melt them down in a crucible and test them like metal. What else can I do with the sin of my people?” (Jeremiah 9:7). Sometimes God is forced to make the furnace seven times hotter, to work out that dross which renders men so unconformable to the ministry of the Word, while “God sends his prophets, rising up early, and sending them; and yet they will not incline their ear, but they harden their necks against divine instruction” (Jeremiah 25:4, 17:23).

When the earthly heart of a man is so dried and hardened by a long sunshine of prosperity, that the plough of the spiritual gardener cannot enter—then God softens it with showers of adversity, making it capable of receiving the immortal seed, and blesses the springing thereof. The seed falls upon stony ground—until God turns the stone into a heart of flesh.

3. By affliction, man is made more attentive unto God. In prosperity, the world makes such a noise in a man’s ears that God cannot be heard, “He speaks indeed once and twice,” again and again, very often, “yet man perceives it not” (Job 33:14). He is so busy in the crowd of worldly affairs, that God is not heeded.

In the godly themselves there is much unsettledness and giddiness of mind. Our thoughts are naturally vain and scattered, and the mind is slippery and inconsistent. This is a great impediment to our clear and full comprehensions of spiritual things. Therefore God deals with man as a father with his child playing in the marketplace, who will not hear or mind his father’s call. He comes and takes him out of the noise of the tumult, carries him home, lays him upon his knee

with the rod in his hand, and then the father can be heard. So does God with his children, “He opens their ears” (Job 36:10) which the *world* had stopped, and then instruction will enter.

When Joab would not come to Absalom—Joab sets Absalom’s field on fire. In the same way, after many neglects of God—He brings us to Himself by affliction. God says, as it were, “Come, let us reason together” (Isaiah 1:18); and the soul echoes back again, “Speak, Lord, for your servant hears” (1 Samuel 3:10): and when the soul is thus silent unto God, he comes and seals instruction by his Spirit.

4. And lastly, affliction is an eye-salve, whereby God opens the eye of the soul to see the need and excellency of divine teaching—by the discovery of its own brutish ignorance of God, and of his ways, under all divine administrations. Just as Ephraim once bemoaned himself to the Lord, “I have been as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jeremiah 31:18). The prophet David will interpret it, “So foolish was I, and ignorant, and like a beast before you” (Psalm 73:22). By means of this discovery, God draws out the heart into humble and holy supplication for divine teaching, “Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I will not do so again” (Job 34:32).

When or how does the sinner come to ask for instruction? “Why,” says he, “I have borne chastisement” (verse 31a). Correction discovered the need of instruction, “Teach me what I cannot see” (verse 32a); and thus Ephraim, “You have chastised me, and I was chastised” (Jeremiah 31:18a). But blows alone will not do it; therefore it follows, “Turn me—and I shall be turned” (verse 18b). Though chastisement alone could not turn Ephraim, yet it made him see an absolute necessity of divine power to his conversion.

And when God has brought the heart once into this frame, to see and be affected with the sense of its own ignorance and impotency, and to lie in the dust at God’s feet, humbly importuning an effectual teaching from Heaven—then God will cause his ear to hear. When God has engaged the heart in holy desires of saving instruction, it is not only mercy in God, but faithfulness, to satisfy the desire of his own creation, “Good and upright is the Lord, and therefore he will teach sinners in the way” (Psalm 25:8).

Thus much for the third particular thing propounded for the opening of the doctrine; I come now to the fourth and last point.

Chapter 4. The Grounds and Demonstrations of the Point

It must needs be a blessed thing when correction and instruction meet, if we consider:

1. The lessons themselves which God teaches his people. These are, as above shown: sympathy, moderation, self-denial, humility, self-knowledge, prayer, the Scriptures, evidences for Heaven, evil of sin, communion with God, exercise of grace, life of faith, self-diffidence, knowledge of God, duties of suffering, privilege of suffering, the one thing necessary, time redemption, the sufferings of Christ, and the value of Heaven.

Behold Christians! To be taught of God when chastised by him, is a blessedness compounded of twenty several precious ingredients.

2. The nature and properties of divine teaching; which is inwardly, clearly, experimentally, powerfully, sweetly, and abidingly.

This must needs be a blessed teaching; it being a teaching which possesses the soul of the excellencies which it discovers. Doctrinal and notional knowledge is a blessing, “Blessed,” says Christ to his hearers, “are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear” (Matthew 13:16): but to be taught these lessons with these qualifications; to be taught into the nature and image of the truth; to be taught into the possession of divine excellencies—this is blessedness indeed; blessedness in being; full, perfect, fruitful blessedness.

3. A teaching chastisement is the fruit of God’s distinguishing love. Chastisements, simply considered in themselves, lie in common to all the sons and daughters of Adam since the fall. They are the fruit of that first apostasy, as well as of actual and personal departures from God.

Yes and deliverance also lies in common. Providence dispenses deliverance to the worst of men. The 106th psalm is a psalm of promises made to the Church; but the next psalm is a psalm of providential dispensations to the world; and there, as you find affliction, so you may find deliverance also out of those afflictions, to be the portion of wicked men. Rebels, fools, and seamen—for the most part, not the most religious order in the world—all these are delivered out of their troubles. The worst of men, I say, share in this fruit of God’s providential goodness, deliverance; but a teaching sanctified affliction is the privy seal of special love, “My loving kindness will I not take from him” (Psalm 89:33); “whom the Lord loves he chastens” (Proverbs 3:12); that is to say, with a teaching chastisement. When Word and rod meet together, when correction and instruction kiss each other, they are the fruit of paternal affection, and therefore must needs have a blessing bound up in them.

4. A teaching correction is a branch of the covenant of grace, which God has made in Christ for the children of promise; “All your children shall be taught of God. They shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest” (Hebrews 8:11). By virtue of divine teaching, affliction is adopted a branch in the covenant of grace. The 89th psalm is a song of the new covenant, “I will sing of the mercies of the Lord” (verse 1)—what mercies? Not providenced mercies only, but promise mercies, covenant-mercies; “I have made a covenant with my chosen” (verse 3). And among the rest of the branches of the covenant, you shall find the rod and the whip have their place. “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments, then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (verses 30-32). Behold rod and stripes standing here, not upon Mount Ebal, the mount of curses, as branches of a covenant of works, but upon Mount Gerizim, the mount of blessings, as branches of the covenant of grace. Affliction is not so much threatened as promised to Christ’s seed: “My covenant will I not break” (verse 34). When God seems even to break the bones and hearts of his people by sore and heavy strokes of correction, yet he does not break his covenant, “My covenant will I not break;” it is in order to the covenant when God chastises his children, and instructs them by his chastisements. Affliction separated from instruction, is pure wrath; but by a matrimonial covenant those two Scriptures, “I will visit—I will teach”, are married together, and made one spirit, as in my text, and then they are pure grace. The covenant is the magna carta of Heaven, and contains a list of whatever the Father has purposed, the Son has purchased, and the Holy Spirit applies to the heirs of promise. The breasts of the covenant run nothing but the milk of spiritual blessings to the children of God.

5. A teaching affliction is the purchase of Christ’s death and bloodshed. Christ died not to exempt his redeemed from suffering, but to sanctify their sufferings with his own blood; “I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil” (John 17:15): whatever Christ purchased, he prayed for; and this was one main privilege, not freedom from the evil of affliction, but from the evil of sin; “Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth” (verse 17): Christ’s blood purchased nothing for us but blessings.

6. And lastly, a teaching affliction is the result of all the offices of Jesus Christ. As a king he chastens, as a prophet he teaches, and as a priest he has purchased this grace of his Father, that the rod might blossom, that correction might be consecrated for instruction unto the redeemed. Behold, a sanctified affliction is a cup into which Jesus Christ has wrung and pressed the juice and virtue of all his mediatory offices; surely that must be a cup of generous and royal wine, like that in the supper, a cup of blessing to the people of God.

And thus I have finished the fourth particular, propounded for the clearing and confirming of the doctrine, namely, the grounds and demonstrations of the point; and with it the whole doctrinal part of this great and blessed truth, namely, that it is a blessed thing when correction and instruction, Word and rod, go together.

Chapter 5. Use of INFORMATION

I come now to the use, for the improvement of the point. And it may serve for information and exhortation.

1. Affliction alone, is not enough to evidence a man to be blessed by God. No man is therefore blessed because he is chastened; blows alone are not enough, either to evince or to effect a state of blessedness. “You have chastised me, and I was chastised” (Jeremiah 31:18), cried repenting Ephraim; as if he had said, ‘I have had blows enough—if blows would have done me good. Nay, but under all the strokes and smittings of your displeasure, I have been as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke—unreachable and intractable. You have drawn one way, and I have drawn another. You have pulled forward, and I have pulled backward. All your chastisements have left me just as they found me—brutish and rebellious.’

Surely blows only may break the neck, sooner than the heart! They are in themselves the fruit of divine wrath, a branch of the curse, and therefore cannot possibly of themselves make the least argument of God’s love to the soul. Bastards have blows as well as children; and fools because of their transgression are afflicted.

And yet it is very sad to consider that this is the best evidence that the most of men have for Heaven. Because they suffer in this world—they think they shall be freed from sufferings in the world to come. Because they have a Hell here—they imagine that they shall escape Hell hereafter—they hope they shall not have two Hells. Yes, poor, deluded soul, you may and must have two Hells, without better evidence for Heaven. Cain, and Judas, and millions of reprobate men and women, have two Hells—one in this life, in torments of body, and horror of conscience; and another in the life to come, in unquenchable fire. And so must you, unless you get better evidence for Heaven than the present misery which is upon you. You may have a prison on earth—and a dungeon in Hell. You may now lack a crumb of bread—and hereafter lack a drop of water. You may now be the reproach of men—and hereafter the scorn of men and angels, and of God himself.

Therefore “be wise to salvation, by working it out with fear and trembling, and giving all diligence, make your calling and election sure” (2 Timothy 3:15; Philippians 2:12; 2 Peter 1:10). God forbid that a man should take that for his security from Hell—which may be but the foretaste of Hell! Present afflictions may be the pledge of endless misery.

OBJECTION. But does not the Scripture say, “Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12:6)? And again, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Revelation 3:19)?

ANSWER. Yes, but mark, I beseech you: though the Scripture says, “Whom the Lord loves, he chastens”—it does not say, ‘Whoever the Lord chastens, he loves.’

Though it says, “He scourges every son whom he receives”—it does not say, ‘Whoever he scourges, he receives as a son.’

Christ says, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten”—but he says not, ‘As many as I rebuke and chasten, I love.’

These Scriptures include His redeemed children, but they do not exclude bastards. They tie chastening to sonship—but not sonship to chastening. The sons are chastened—but all the chastened are not, therefore, sons. The beloved are rebuked—but all that are rebuked are not, consequently, beloved.

But that place in Job seems to say as much, “Behold, blessed is the man whom God corrects” (Job 5:17).

It is true—but one Scripture must interpret another. David must expound Eliphaz: “Blessed is the man whom God corrects,” when instruction goes along with correction, when chastisement and teaching accompany one another: “Blessed is the man whom you *chasten*, O Lord—and *teach* out of your law” (Psalm 94:12). The Scripture does not usually give things their names, but when they are made up of all their integrals; “Whoever finds a wife, finds a good thing, and obtains favor of the Lord” (Proverbs 18:22), in other words, a wife made up of Scripture qualifications; otherwise a man may, and many men do, find a plague in a wife, and have her from the Lord in *wrath*, and not in *love*!

Indeed chastening and affliction is an opportunity of mercy, a may-be to happiness, but not (singly) an evidence of happiness. Lay no more upon affliction than it will bear; it is an opportunity, improve it; it is no more, do not trust it.

2. This doctrine informs us, that as affliction simply considered is not enough to make or evidence a man to be blessed by God—so neither is it sufficient to conclude a man to be forever miserable. No man is therefore miserable, because afflicted. It may prove to be a *teaching* affliction, and then he is blessed. Yet this is another mistake among men; and that both in reference to others, and to ourselves.

a.) In reference to **others**. People are very prone to judge them wretched, whom they see afflicted. It was the miserable mistake of Job’s friends, to conclude him miserable, because smitten; cursed, because chastened.

b.) In reference to **ourselves**. It is a merciless mistake, sometimes even of God’s own children, to sit down under affliction, especially if sore and of long continuance—and conclude that God does not love them because he corrects them.

It seems to be the very case of the believing Hebrews; they judged themselves out of God's favor, because under God's frowns. They thought themselves to be not at all beloved, because they were so greatly afflicted and persecuted. And therefore it is that upon which the apostle, after he presented them with a large catalogue and list of the primitive martyrs before Christ, in the eleventh chapter, bestows the first part of the next chapter—to prove by reasons drawn from nature, and instances taken out of Scripture (the first whereof is that unparalleled instance of Jesus Christ)—that God's *love* and God's *rod* may stand together.

The truth is, my brethren, there is nothing that can make a man miserable but sin! It is sin which poisons our afflictions. "The sting of death is sin" (1 Corinthians 15:56), and so we may say of all other evils, which militate under death as soldiers under their general: the sting of *sickness* is sin; and the sting of *poverty* is sin; and the sting of *imprisonment* and *banishment* is sin—just so of every affliction. Take the sting out (which is done by the blood of Christ, and evidenced by divine teaching), "and they cannot hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:9).

Therefore let no children of God be rash, to conclude hard things against themselves—and to make evidences of wrath where God has made none. Let Christians look further than the affliction itself; the Holy Spirit having long since determined this controversy by a peremptory decision, "No man knows either love or hatred by all that is before them" (Ecclesiastes 9:1). In other words, no man can make a judgment, either of God's love or hatred towards him—by any of these outward dispensations.

"He causes his sun to shine upon the evil, and upon the good; and sends rain on the just, and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). The sun of prosperity shines upon the dunghill—as well as upon the bed of spices. And the rain of adversity falls upon the fruitful garden—as well as upon the barren wilderness. He judges truly of his estate, who judges by the Word, and not by providence. Evidences of grace, do not consist in outward dispensations.

3. Deliverance out of trouble is not enough to evidence or make a man blessed. It is not said, 'Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord, *and deliver out of trouble*'—but, "Blessed is the man whom you chasten and *teach*" (Psalm 94:12). A man may get rid of the affliction—and yet miss of the blessing. All the bread which men may eat without the sweat of their brows, is not therefore hallowed; abundance may flow in without labor—and yet not without a curse. A woman may be delivered from the *pain* of child-bearing—and yet lie under the *curse* of child-bearing. An easy child-bearing is not an infallible symptom of a state of reconciliation with God. If there is not faith in Christ—who has borne and borne away the curse—a speedy and easy child-bearing is no more than God gives to the brute creatures; for "by him the deer calve, and the wild donkeys bring forth their young" (Job 39:1). A miscarrying womb may be a mercy—when a mature and easy birth may be in judgment. A man may leave his chains and his blessing behind him in prison. The fire of a fever may be extinguished, when the fire of Hell is being prepared for the sinner! It is good to be *thankful* for—but extremely dangerous to be *contented* with—a bare deliverance.

I shall conclude this branch with this note, which alone might have stood for a distinct observation: that those prayers in troubles are not best heard, which are answered with a *deliverance*. Those prayers are best heard, which are answered with *instruction*. Even of our blessed Savior it is said, "In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him who was able to save him from death, and was heard, in that he feared" (Hebrews 5:7). How was he heard? Not in that, "Save me from this hour," but in that, "Father glorify your name" (John 12:27-28). Not in deliverance, but in instruction. For that he gives thanks, "I will bless the Lord who has given me *counsel*; my thoughts also instruct me in the night season" (Psalm 16:7). His Father taught him and strengthened him in his passion—and this was the hearing of his supplications. That is the best return of prayers which works our *good*—not our *wills*. When God does not answer in the *letter*, if he answers in the *better*—we are no losers by our prayers. Therefore when we have prayed, let us refer it unto God to determine the answer.

4. Hence we may learn how to judge of our afflictions, and of our deliverances from them. For you need not, as the Scripture speaks in another case, say "Who shall ascend up into Heaven" (Romans 10:6)—to look into God's book of life and death? Or, "Who shall descend into the deep" (verse 7)—the deep of God's secret counsels, to make report hereof unto us? But what says the Scripture? "The word is near you" (verse 8a)—the word of resolution to this inquiry, it is near you, "even in your mouth and in your heart" (verse 8b). That is to say, if you can evidence this to your own soul, that instruction has accompanied correction, that God has *taught* you as well as *chastened* you—then you are a blessed man indeed, and you shall be saved. You have the word of him who is the author of blessedness, and is blessedness itself; "Blessed is the man whom the Lord *chastens*, and *teaches* out of his law" (Psalm 94:12).

And therefore peruse, I beseech you, that model of divine instructions or lessons, presented to you in the *doctrinal* part of this discourse above. And then consider the *properties* of divine covenant teaching—and compare your hearts and those lessons together. And if the Spirit of God can bear witness to your spirit, that you are thus *taught*—then blessed are you! Bless the Lord, for the Lord has indeed blessed you.

But now on the other side, when there is no interpreter to accompany affliction—to expound unto man the meaning of the Almighty in his chastisements; when there is not a divine sentence in the lips of correction; when the rod is silent, or the creature deaf, and cannot hear the rod, and the One who has appointed it—then it is much to be feared that the stroke is not the stroke of God’s children.

O my brethren, it is sad when men come *out* of affliction the same as they went *in*. Yet it is much sadder, when it may be said of a man, as once it was said of Ahaz, “In the time of his distress, he sinned yet more against the Lord” (2 Chronicles 28:22). It was an aggravation of wickedness, concerning which we may say (as our Savior of the alabaster box poured on his head), wherever the Scripture shall be preached in the world; there shall also this which this man did be published, “This is that King Ahaz!” (verse 22b). Surely it is a standing and a dreadful monument of reproach and infamy unto him unto all generations.

Christians, it is sad and dangerous beyond all expression, when affliction serves but as an outlet to give vent to the pride and murmur—and to manifest the atheism and enmity which is in men’s hearts against the Lord, when afflictions are but as oil unto the fire to stir up corruption, and make it blaze more fiercely. To continue in habitual sins—against such proclamations to desist—is open rebellion against God.

The prophet brought a heavy indictment against Jerusalem when he said, “O LORD, You have struck them, but they felt no pain; You crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.” (Jeremiah 5:3). In such cases it is to be feared that the cup of affliction, is a vial of wrath—and that the plagues of this life, are but some drops of that coming storm of fire and brimstone, wherein impenitent sinners shall be scorched and tormented forever!

That Scripture speaks dreadfully to this purpose in Jeremiah, “They are all grievous revolters” (Jeremiah 6:28). The prophet Isaiah expounds it, “You revolt more and more” (Isaiah 1:5). Walking with slanders, they do not only revolt—but slander those that reprove their revolting, “They hate him who reproves in the gate” (Amos 5:10).

They slander the prophets and their words. Nay, God himself does not escape the lash of their tongues. They say, “The way of the Lord is not equal” (Ezekiel 18:25). When they should condemn their own ways—they censure God’s holy and righteous ways.

“They are brass and iron” (Jeremiah 6:28)—they would pass for silver and gold, a sincere and holy people, while they are a degenerate and hypocritical generation. “They are all corrupters” (verse 28b)—they have deeply corrupted themselves. “They have corrupted all their doings” (Zephaniah 3:7). “They have corrupted the covenant of Levi” (Malachi 2:8)—in other words, the worship, the ordinances, the truths of God. “The bellows are burnt in the fire” (Jeremiah 6:29)—that is, the lungs of the prophets, which have preached unto them in the name of the Lord, rising up early, and lifting up their voices like trumpets, “to tell Israel their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isaiah 58:1); and stretching forth their hands unto them all the day long, they are spent. “The lead is consumed” (Jeremiah 6:29)—that is, all the melting judgments and chastisements, which (as lead is cast into the furnace to make it the hotter) God added to the ministry of the prophets, to make the Word more operative, will do no good.

All this while, “The founder melts in vain” (verse 29), whether God the master-founder, or the prophets, God’s founders—they all melt in vain. All their labor is lost; neither Word, nor rod, neither judgments nor ordinances, can stir the rebels. They refuse to receive correction, they will not be taught. “The wicked are not plucked away” (verse 29)—they are the same that they ever were. The *swearer* is a swearer still, and the *drunkard* is a drunkard still, and the immoral person is immoral still. “The vile person will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the Lord” (Isaiah 32:6). The unjust are unjust still, and the ignorant are ignorant still. Nothing will better them—wicked they are, and wicked they will be!

What follows? A formidable sentence; “They are called reprobate silver, because the LORD has rejected them.” (Jeremiah 6:30). They would be counted as silver—but it is *reprobate* silver, refuse silver, dross rather than pure metal. Their hypocrisy shall be made known to all men, “They are called reprobate silver”—and blessed are they, if it were but the censure of mistaking men only. Nay, but the searcher of hearts has no better thoughts of them—men do but *call* them so, because God called them so first, “They are called reprobate silver, because the LORD has rejected them.” God has cast them out as the founder casts out his dross to the dunghill, and they shall never stand among the vessels of honor, in whom the Lord will be glorified. A fearful sentence!

The sum is this—that when divine teaching does not go along with correction—when men come out of the furnace, and lose nothing of their dross—it is a sad indication of a reprobate spirit. Without timely and serious reflection, they are near unto cursing. “O consider this, you who forget God and his chastisements—lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver!” (Psalm 50:22).

5. We may learn that they may be blessed by God—whom the world accounts miserable. The men of the world are incompetent judges of the estate and condition of God’s children. The godly man’s happiness or misery is not to be judged by the world’s sense and feeling—but by his own; it lies inward, but only so far as by the fruits it is discernible.

But the world's faculty of judging is only outward, made up of sense and reason. "Therefore," said the apostle, "the spiritual man judges all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (1 Corinthians 2:15). That is, he is able to judge of the condition of the men of the world—but the men of the world are not able to judge of his condition, because it is above their faculty.

The natural man *thinks* the spiritual man under affliction to be miserable—but the spiritual man *knows* the natural man, in the midst of his greatest abundance and bravery, to be miserable indeed! Therefore may the saints in their trouble think with Paul, that it is "a very small thing to be judged of man's judgment" (1 Corinthians 4:3). This is but man's day of judging; so the word signifies. God's day is coming, when things and people shall be valued at another rate. Christ in his day shall not judge "after the sight of the eyes" (Isaiah 11:3)—that is, not as things appear to sense and reason; "nor after the hearing of the ears" (verse 3b)—that is, according to the report of the world—"but with righteousness he shall judge" (verse 4)—he shall judge of things and people as they *are*, and not as they *appear*.

In the meantime, this is also another comfort, "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16)—the judgment of Christ, by virtue whereof we are enabled, in our measure, to judge of things and persons, as Christ himself judges.

6. Is chastisement a blessing when accompanied with divine instruction? See then and admire the wisdom, power and goodness of God—who can make his people better by their sufferings!

Behold, I show you a gospel mystery!

God can extract gold, out of clay!

God can draw the richest wine, out of gall and wormwood!

God can turn the greatest evil of the body, to the greatest good of the soul!

God can turn the chastening itself, into a blessing!

God can make the withered rod of affliction to bud into a harvest of righteousness and peace!

Sin brought affliction into the world—and God makes affliction carry sin out of the world. Persecution is but the pruning of Christ's vine. The almond tree is said to be made fruitful by driving nails into it, thereby letting out a noxious gum which hinders its fruitfulness. God never intends more good to his children, than when he seems to deal most severely with them! The very heathen has observed to us, "God does not love his children with a weak effeminate affection, but with a strong masculine love, and had rather they suffer hardship than perish!" (Seneca).

"Whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives" (Hebrews 12:6). God will rather fetch blood—than lose one of His sons! God will rather break Ephraim's bones—than allow him to go on in the frowardness of his heart. God will rather destroy the flesh—that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. "We are chastened by the Lord—that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:32).

His discipline is made up of severity and love. He *chastises*, but he will *teach* also—that his children may inherit the blessing. The discipline is sharp—but the end is sweet. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits" (Psalm 103:1-2).

7. It shows us that a suffering condition is not so formidable a thing as flesh and blood represents it. It is ignorance and unbelief which slander the dispensations of God, and cast reproach upon him. He who heard the words of God, could by way of holy triumph ask this question, "Why should I fear in the days of evil?" (Psalm 49:5) as if he had said, 'What is there in an afflicted estate so much to be dreaded? Let any man show me a reason—then I will give way to fear and despondency.'

O that the children of God in affliction, or entering upon sufferings, would sit down and dwell upon the fruit and advantage which God knows how to bring out of all their sorrows. This would keep them from despondencies and dejections of spirit; "For this cause we faint not," says the apostle—for what cause? "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Corinthians 4:16,18). That is to say, we do not look at the visible sufferings—but at the invisible fruit and advantage of our sufferings. This holds up the head and keeps up the heart, and makes the soul not only to be patient, but to "glory in tribulation; knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope makes not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (Romans 5:3-5). This is the way to counterpoise the affliction; and in the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, to come in to the support of the better part.

8. It shows us the reason why God keeps some of his people so long under the discipline of the rod. Truly God not only brings his children into his school of affliction, but many times keeps them long there. History and experience will afford instances without number. Hence you have the people of God so often at their 'How-longs' in their sufferings:

“How long will you forget me, O Lord, forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?” (Psalm 13:1-2).

In this psalm where my text is, “How long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?” (Psalm 94:3). Twice “how long,” before he can vent his complaint; and yet again the third time, “How long shall they utter and speak hard things?” (Verse 4).

“How long,” cries Jeremiah, “shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?” (Jeremiah 4:21). And Zechariah, “O Lord Almighty, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem, and on the cities of Judah?” (Zechariah 1:12). The souls under the altar cry with a loud voice, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, before you avenge our blood on those who dwell on earth?” (Revelation 6:10).

Truly, God keeps his people sometimes so long under their pressures, that they begin at length even to give themselves up to despair, and to conclude they shall never see deliverance. Thus you find not only the common multitude of the Jews in the Babylonian captivity, concluding desperately, “Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off completely” (Ezekiel 37:11). Dry bones may as well live, as our captivity has an end; but even the prophet Jeremiah himself, “They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me” (Lamentations 3:53). He seems to himself to be in the condition of a man that is dead and buried, and the grave stone rolled to the mouth of the sepulcher—a metaphor expressing a hopeless and desperate condition.

Yes, hence it is that when deliverance is near, they cannot believe it, though a prophet of God, or an angel from Heaven should report it: “You will rise up and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her—the appointed time has come!” (Psalm 102:13), sings someone that lived near the expiration of the seventy years’ captivity. Yet in the meantime the Jews reply as before, “Our bones are dried, our hope is lost, we are cut off completely!”—as much as to say, ‘Tell not us of God’s arising; we shall never see Zion again, we are but dead men.’

Observe, that those who would not believe the *captivity* while it was in the threatening—would not believe *deliverance* when it was in the promise. This is a just judgment upon them, that those who would not believe God threatening—should not believe God promising.

But that is not all, deliverance was so incredible after so long a captivity, that they could not believe it when they saw it, “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we are like those who dream” (Psalm 126:1). They knew not (as it fared with Peter), whether it was true, or whether they only saw a vision. ‘Is this a real deliverance—or are we in a dream only?’

Our Savior tells us, that “When the Son of Man shall come,” with particular deliverances to his Church, “he shall not find faith on the earth” (Luke 18:8)—there will not be faith enough in the people to believe it, by reason of the long pressure and persecutions which have been upon them.

Now, what is the reason that God permits affliction to lie so long upon the backs of his children? Truly one is, because they have lived so long in sin. They have been long a-sinning, and therefore God is long a-correcting. God puts them to their “how longs,” because they have put God to his “how longs.” “How long do you refuse to keep my commandments, and my laws?” (Exodus 16:28). “How long will this people provoke me? How long will it be before they believe?” (Numbers 14:11). “How long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?” (Jeremiah 4:14). “How long will it be before they attain to purity?” (Hosea 8:5). And truly if they have made God complain of their “how longs”—then it is no wonder that God makes them complain of his.

But then again, another and the main reason is: Because the work is not yet done. They do not receive instruction by their correction, else affliction would quickly cease. God gives not a blow, he draws not a drop of blood, more than is necessary, “For a season *if needs be*, you are in heaviness” (1 Peter 1:6). If there is heaviness—then there is need of it. If heaviness continues long—then there is need of it. It is not to gratify their enemies, that God keeps them so long under their lash—but to teach them. It is not that God afflicts them willingly (Lamentations 3:33), but that he may “do them good in their latter end” (Deuteronomy 8:16).

Then they shall wait no longer for their deliverance. God will open the prison doors, and throw the rod into the fire. It is infinite mercy that they are not delivered, until they are bettered. It is infinite mercy that God will not cease chastening, until they are willing to cease sinning, saying, “I have borne afflictions, I will offend no more” (Job 34:31).

9. Notice from this, what unteachable creatures we are by nature—who will not set our hearts to receive instruction until we be whipped to it by the rod of correction, and hardly even then! Unless God multiplies stripes, it is not multiplying of precepts that will do us good. There must be stripe upon stripe, and affliction upon affliction, as well as “line upon line, and precept upon precept” (Isaiah 28:10)—or else it is in vain. We would say that it was a very bad child—who will be taught no longer than the rod is upon his back! Such are we! We are so unteachable that we put God, as it were, to study what methods and courses to take with us. “Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says: See, I will refine and test them—for what else can I do because of the sin of my people?” (Jeremiah 9:7).

10. And lastly, it shows us on the contrary, how much gracious hearts are in love with the Word for the improvement of their spiritual knowledge—when they can put such an estimate upon their sufferings, and account that affliction their blessing, which other men call their misery. “*Blessed* is the man whom you chasten and teach” (Psalm 94:12). The psalmist in another place speaks warmly to this purpose, “It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted,” Why? “That I might learn your statutes” (Psalm 119:71). He loves the Word so dearly, that for the Word’s sake, he is in love with affliction. *The whip, the rod, the prison, the wilderness, anything is precious that brings divine instruction with it.*

Carnal people can be content to die in their ignorance—just so that they may die in their nest. Whereas gracious hearts think it not much to go to school to a prison; and even while the blood is running down the back—they can say that it is good, because they are *taught* by it. O the different account that *grace* and *nature* make of the same dispensation! It is proud disdain to scorn to be taught by the lowest of God’s afflictions; the treasure is precious though in an earthen vessel (2 Corinthians 4:7).

There are none too old, none too wise, none too high—to be put into the worst school on this side Heaven.

Chapter 6. Use of EXHORTATION

I have done with the use of information, I come now in the second place to the use of exhortation:

Firstly, too such as are yet *free* from sufferings.

Secondly, too such as are *under* sufferings.

Finally, too such as are come *out* of a suffering condition.

1. The first branch of exhortation is too such as through the patience and forbearance of God, are yet *free* from chastisement and affliction. The candle of the Almighty shines in their tabernacle, and they “wash their steps in butter” (Job 29:6). Now, would you prevent chastisement, and keep off the strokes of divine displeasure from yourselves or families? Let me commend unto you, a two-fold caution from this doctrine:

a.) If you would prevent chastisements, study these and the like lessons well, while you are under the teachings of the Word. Therefore God sends us into the school of affliction, because we have been non-proficients in the school of the gospel; because we will not hear the Word, God turns us over to a severer discipline, and to have our ears bored with affliction; and then says God, now hear the rod, and who has appointed it. O my beloved, labor I beseech you, to profit much by the teachings of Jesus Christ in the gospel; set your hearts to all truths and counsels of God revealed to you therein. The gospel is the model or platform of sound words, able to make you sound Christians, wise to salvation; O let your profiting be made known unto all men. In special, set you hearts to those instructions or lessons first propounded; for the neglect whereof God sends his people into captivity, that there he may teach them with the briars and thorns of the wilderness, in particular.

Learn in the time of your peace and tranquility to lay to heart the sufferings of the rest of your brethren that are in the world. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; put your souls in their souls’ steads; and content not yourselves with those loose, fruitless, and transient glances which those that are at ease in Zion do usually cast upon men in misery; a cold ‘Lord have mercy upon them,’ and there’s an end. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and that you may know you are not to confine your compassion to prisoners only, it follows, and them that suffer adversity. Learn to sympathize with all the people of God under any adversity whatever; hide not your eyes, and shut not up your affections of compassion from any that are in a suffering condition; and that upon this account, as being yourselves in the body; if the duty respect your brother, the motive respects yourself; you are yet in the body; and while you remain in the flesh, you cannot promise yourselves one hour’s exemption from troubles; but are exposed to the same common calamities which attend a state of mortality.

As it is an argument of comfort to them that are in affliction, that their temptations and trials are common to men (1 Corinthians 10:13); God does not single them out to encounter with unparalleled affliction. So on the other side it is an incentive to compassion to them that are free, to consider that they are liable to the same temptations; and therefore should measure out the same compassions to their suffering brethren, that they would expect in the same trials; not knowing how soon the cup of trembling may be put into their own hand: to be sure, insensibleness of other men’s miseries will hasten it. “They put far away the evil day” (Amos 6:3). They give themselves up to all manner of sensuality, and thereby drown the sense of their brethren’s miseries. They are not grieved for the affliction of the Church, it never cost them an hour’s sleep, they abated nothing of all their sensual excesses; they never turn aside to shed one tear over bleeding Zion in secret. What follows? “Why,” says God, “Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed” (verse 7); as if God should have said, ‘As I live, because you have not pitied your brethren in captivity, you yourselves shall be led away captive, and the next turn shall be yours; and there you shall learn by sense what you would not feel by sympathy.’

And therefore, Christians, set your hearts to the afflictions of the Church and people of God; it is the great duty which the times call for, and I am afraid God is now visiting England and London for the neglect of this duty. We are guilty concerning our brethren in Germany, in Ireland, in England, and Scotland, and in other places. “In that we saw the anguish of their souls, when they besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us” (Genesis 42:21); we have not grieved their sorrows, nor wept their tears, nor sighed their groans, nor bled their blood; and therefore may fear, lest God should say unto us also, even unto us, with the next that go into captivity, ‘They shall go into captivity; with the next that are plundered and spoiled, London shall be plundered and spoiled; with the next that shall be imprisoned, you shall be taken prisoners; with the next that shall be slain with the sword, you shall be slain with the sword; your wives shall be made widows, and your children shall be made fatherless, and your dwellings shall cast you out, and be left desolate’; and therefore let us look to it, and know in this our day the things of our peace, before they be hid from our eyes. Show compassion, that you may not need compassion; or if you need it, you may find it.

In like manner set your hearts to the other lessons which God teaches by his chastisements.

Prize creature comforts more, and surfeit upon them less; be more thankful and less sensual; especially prize a gospel while you have a gospel; prize it by its worth, that you may not prize it by the want; prize it that you may keep it, lest you prize it one day when you cannot recover it. It is a dreadful word, "I will send a famine, not of bread, nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord, and they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (Amos 8:11-12).

Study self-denial and meekness of spirit. Labor to discover the hidden corruptions of your own hearts. Continue digging into that dunghill and you will find it a bottomless pit; "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? I the Lord search the heart" (Jeremiah 17:9-10). Oh entreat the Lord to discover your hearts to you.

Study Scripture evidence for your interest in Christ. Rest not in any evidence which you will not venture your souls upon, if you were to die this moment.

Labor to maintain sweet communion with God; to be able to say with the apostle, and to say truly, "Our communion is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Make God your choice, and not your necessity; and labor to maintain such constant converse with him that when you die, you may change your place only, but not your company.

Live up in the exercises of your graces. "Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity" (2 Peter 1:5-7). Be adding one grace to another, and one degree of grace to another, and one exercise of grace to another exercise of grace, that God may not add affliction to affliction, and sorrow to sorrow. While others are adding sin to sin, drunkenness to thirst, add grace to grace, "Be steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Acquaint yourselves with God, and good shall come thereby (Job 22:21). Study to know God more and love him better; "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord" (Hosea 6:3).

Mind, I beseech you, while you are in your strength and peace, the one thing necessary. O take heed of industrious folly, and dishearten not yourselves in the pursuit of trifles! Mind your work.

"Redeem the time, the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16); O that Christians would study the worth of time! Value a day—say of every hour, yes of every moment, 'This is time.' Redeem time while it may do you good; "Evil days are coming, wherein you will say 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Yes, the days are evil; evil with sin, evil with sorrow; redeem the time to do good, to receive good, that neither you may be the worse for the times, nor the times for you. Blessed shall that man be called who contributes not to the heap of the God-provoking abominations, nor receives impressions from the hypocrisy and prevarication of the present generation.

Study the sufferings of Jesus Christ. Resolve with Paul, "to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). A due contemplation of the cross will heighten Christ's love, and lesson your own sufferings. And labor to get your conversation in Heaven, looking for, and hastening to the coming of Christ (2 Peter 3:11-12); say, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly" (Revelation 22:20).

In a word, brethren, study, and study thoroughly, the sinfulness of sin, emptiness of the creature, and the fullness of Christ.

And in all these and the like lessons, labor for an inward, convincing, experimental, powerful, sweet, abiding teaching.

Content not yourselves, Christians, with a general, slight, superficial, unsavory, powerless, flitting knowledge. Rest not in notions; be not satisfied with expressions without impressions; nor with impressions that are not abiding impressions, that are like figures written in the sand; this is the ruin of professors. Those professors shall have their names written in the dust, who write divine instructions in the dust.

Know this, if God has a mind to do you good, expect that he should send you into the house of correction, and there teach you with scourges, and write his instructions as it were in blood.

And therefore if you would prevent so severe a discipline, improve your time well in the school of the Word. "While you have the light, walk in the light, lest darkness come upon you" (John 12:35); while you sit under the teachings of the gospel, labor to get knowledge answerable to the means, and grace answerable to your knowledge.

b.) If you would prevent affliction, labor to be instructed by the chastisements which you see upon *other* men. God deals with his children as tutors do with the children of princes, he corrects them upon strangers' backs. Thus God scourged Israel upon the back of the nations round about them; "I have cut off the nations, their towers are desolate, I made their streets waste that none passes by, their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, that there is none inhabitant" (Zephaniah 3:6). Their punishment was Israel's caution; "I said, 'Surely you will fear me, you will receive instruction'" (verse 7). The world's judgments are the Church's instructions, and God expected that his people should have made that use of his practical doctrine. God had gracious ends in this dispensation; his severity to strangers was his tender mercy towards Israel; "Behold," as the apostle says in another case, "the goodness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22); severity to the nations, but goodness towards Israel, had they continued in his goodness and received instruction by their neighbor's destruction. And as God punished Israel upon the nations' backs, so God punished Judah upon Israel's

back: “Go you now to my place in Shiloh, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel” (Jeremiah 7:12).

Israel’s chastisements should have been Jerusalem’s teachings, and by their stripes she should have been healed. For the neglect whereof God is highly displeased, and speaks concerning this in a very angry dialect, “And I saw when, for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also” (Jeremiah 3:8). God took it ill that Jerusalem should slight the kindness of such a caution, and despise the counsel which was written to her in her sister’s blood; as if he had said, ‘I would have made Jerusalem wise by Samaria’s harms, and taught her by a rod which she only saw; but she feared not; she hardened her heart through unbelief, and either would not understand the caution, or dared me to my face to do my worst, while by her shameless whoredoms she went on to provoke me to jealousy.’ This hastened that judgment upon herself which she despised on others; Judah must feel Israel’s rod because she would not hear it; as Israel must suffer those judgments on the nations which she herself would not use to her improvement; by those very nations by whom she would not be instructed, she must be destroyed.

So Judah must feel what she feared not at a distance. She that would not tremble at her sister’s divorce must suffer divorce herself, and “be judged as women that break wedlock—and bear her own shame for her sins that she had committed more abominable than they” (Ezekiel 16:38,52).

Beloved Christians, if we would prevent the like severity, let us take heed of the like security. God has been a long time scourging England upon Germany’s back, and upon Ireland’s back, and upon Scotland’s back. God has for these many years scourged London on the back of all the cities and countries round about us, and God daily scourges every one of us in particular upon the back of our suffering brethren, in diverse kinds. His design is that we should fear him, that we should receive instruction. If we altogether fail, we may fear the same rods are preparing for our backs, with which they have bled, yes that their rods shall be turned into scorpions to us. We sin worse than others when we sin those very sins for which others have been punished before our faces, and add contempt to their transgressions; and how just will it be with God, if as we aggravate their sins, to aggravate upon us their plagues; that we that would not see and learn, should feel and perish; even particular judgments should be our warnings. Remember Lot’s wife; her pillar of salt should season our hearts, that when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth, we that are the inhabitants, not of the earth only—but of Zion also, may learn righteousness.

Even those judgments which the magistrate executes by God’s appointment are chiefly for caution to standers by, that others may hear and fear, and do no more any such wickedness; how much more those judgments which the Lord himself executes?

2. I come to the second branch of exhortation, which is too such as yet lie under affliction, and the chastisements of the Almighty.

Take notice, O afflicted soul, what God’s *design* is in afflicting you—and make it your design, that you may be taught. “Hear the rod and the One who has appointed it” (Micah 6:9). It is the great mistake and folly of men, that they make more haste to get their afflictions *removed* than *sanctified*, “The captive exile hastens that he may be loosed, that he should not die in the pit” (Isaiah 51:14). Men would gladly break prison, or escape at the window—before God opens the door; but this their way, is their folly. Men indeed would gladly be delivered, but they take not the right course. Deliverance belongs unto God: “I am the Lord your God who divided the sea,” and made it a way for my ransomed to pass over, and that when it was most tempestuous, “when the waves thereof roared”. When I will deliver, no obstruction can stand in the way—and yet Israel now in captivity will not look to me: “I am the Lord Almighty” (verse 15), who has all the armies in Heaven and earth at my command. And yet when they are besieged with troubles and dangers, I do not hear from them. They run to the creature and neglect God. Or if they cry to me in their distresses, it is for *deliverance* only, but not for teaching. Though “I have put my words in your mouth” (verse 16)—that is, though I have given them my laws and statutes, wherein I have made known my design in affliction, that I might humble them, and prove them, and make them know what is in their heart. This is the shortest way to deliverance, and if they had trod in this path, I would have said to Zion, ‘You are my people.’

This is God’s method wherein he will own his people, and wherein if they meet him—they shall not wait long for their deliverance. And therefore be wise, O afflicted ones, tossed with tempest, and not comforted. Be instructed, lest God’s soul departs from you. Make more haste to be taught, than to be delivered, and choose rather to have your affliction sanctified, than removed. That is observable in Elihu’s speech: “Hypocrites in heart heap up wrath”—they add to their own calamities—why? “even when he fetters them, they do not cry for help” (Job 36:13).

Consider *that God’s design is that he might teach you by his chastisements*—and if you cross God’s design, it is just with him to cross your design. The only way to delay it, is to make too much haste to be delivered, and “he who believes will not make haste” (Isaiah 28:16).

Consider that bare deliverance is not the blessing. I told you before that deliverance is but the common bounty; I tell you more now—deliverance alone may be the fruit of the curse. A man may be delivered in wrath, and not in love; deliverance from one affliction may but make way for another and greater affliction. Affliction may return, like the unclean spirit, with seven more worse than itself; so God threatens an unteachable people, “If by these things you will not be reformed, but will walk contrary to me,” by crossing my design in my chastisements, “then will I walk contrary to you”—I will cross your design, and instead of deliverance, “I will punish you yet seven times more for your sins” (Leviticus 26:23-24). The blessing of correction, is *instruction*. O do not let God go until he bless you (Genesis 32:26).

It is a sad thing to have *affliction*—but not the *blessing* of affliction. It is a sad thing to feel the *wood* of the cross, but not the *good* of the cross. It is a sad thing to taste the *bitter root*, but not the *sweet fruit* of a suffering condition. It is a sad thing have the *curse*, but not the *cordial*. Truly in such a case one affliction may not only make way for another, for more, for greater afflictions; but affliction here on earth, may make way for damnation hereafter! As one says, “By all the fire of affliction in this world—a man may be made fuel for eternal fire.” Therefore mind instruction, study the lessons of a suffering condition (as above) and be importunate for nothing so much as to be taught of God, with that special saving teaching which changes the soul into the nature of the truth; and makes the soul holy as that is holy, and pure as that is pure.

3. To those who have come out of affliction and fiery trials. Sit down, Christian, and reflect upon yourself; turn in upon your own heart, and examine yourself. Have divine teachings accompanied chastisements? Has the rod budded? Cast up your accounts—what have you learned in the school of affliction? Has God revealed to you the sinfulness of sin, the emptiness of the creature, and the fullness of Christ?

Is no evil like the evil of sin? Is no good like the goodness of Jesus Christ? Has the world become an empty vanity, a mockery, a nothing in your eyes? Can you say, “It is *good* that I have been afflicted” (Psalm 119:71)? Can you point out that good, and say, ‘This I have got by my sufferings: I know divine truth more inwardly, more clearly, it has a more abiding impression upon my heart’? I would here speak a word to those who through grace do find the *fruit of affliction* in the savory and saving teachings of God upon their hearts. Let me, by way of exhortation, commend these duties to you.

a.) Study to be thankful. Has God *taught* you as well as *chastised* you? O say with David, “What shall I render to the Lord?” (Psalm 116:12). For consider how great things God has done to your soul:

God has done more for you than if he had never brought you into affliction and trouble—or than if he had brought you out of affliction on the same day on which he sent you in. If he had delivered you upon the first prayer that ever you made in your affliction, it had not been a comparable mercy to his teaching you by it. Prevention and deliverance may be in wrath, but God never teaches the soul, unless it is in love.

Again, God has doubled his mercy and loving-kindness to you; he has commanded deliverance *and* instruction too. Yes, as deliverance and instruction were the return of prayer—this is a multiplied mercy; which should make the heart sing with David, “I will love the Lord, because he has heard the voice of my supplication” (Psalm 116:1). Double, triple, and multiplied mercy calls for double, triple, and multiplied thankfulness. When God loads us with mercy—then we should load him with our praises.

Again, instruction is the seal of God, which set upon correction, seals up adoption and sonship to those who are exercised thereby. The children of affliction are by divine teaching sealed up as the children of promise: “If his children forsake my law,” speaking of Christ’s spiritual seed, “I will visit their transgressions with a rod” (Psalm 89:30, 32). That is, I will *teach* them with the rod; it shall be a rod of *instruction* to them. That is the children’s portion: “If his children forsake me,” God deals with you as with sons.

Behold, O Christian! God has done that for you in your sufferings which possibly may be denied you in your prosperity—he has given you an evidence of sonship; he has made your *suffering* time your *sealing* time; he has allured you and brought you into the wilderness, and there has spoken comfortably to your heart (Job 36:16). Your *Patmos* has been your *paradise*, wherein he has given you his loves.

God has *consecrated* your sufferings by his teachings. Afflictions have taken orders as it were, and stand no longer in the rank of ordinary providences, but serve now in the order of gospel ordinances, officiating in the holy garment of divine promises, and to the same uses.

What is the great end and design of the promises? The apostle tells us “that we might be partakers of a divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4)—of gracious dispositions and qualities which make the soul resemble God. What the apostle Peter affirms of the promises, the very same Paul affirms of God’s chastisements, “He chastens us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10). See by virtue of divine teaching: afflictions are advanced to the same degree and office with gospel ordinances and promises—so that we may give those titles of honor to afflictions, which the apostle here gives to the promises, and say, ‘There are given unto us exceeding great and precious *afflictions*—that by them we might be partakers of the divine nature,’ that is, ‘made partakers of his holiness.’

See, O afflicted soul, by *teaching* God has changed the very nature of affliction! He has turned your water, into wine! He has turned your prison, your bed of sickness—into a school, into a temple, wherein he has taught you into his own likeness.

And as God has consecrated your sufferings—so likewise he has consecrated *you* also by your sufferings. As it is said of Christ, “He made the captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10)—he consummated, or perfected him. Christ became a perfect mediator by his cross; hence you hear him cry upon it, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

And thus also it may be said of the members of Christ, they are “perfected by sufferings.” Chastisement coupled with *teaching* is the consecration and consummation of the saints, “I fill up,” says Paul, “in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.” (Colossians 1:24)—the after-sufferings of Christ. As Christ as a mediator is perfected through sufferings, so Christ as one body with his members is completed by sufferings. Christ is not full, until all his members have had their measure of sufferings. “You have need of patience, that when you have done the will of God, you may inherit the promises” (Hebrews 10:36). When we have done God’s will, all is not done—there is something to be suffered, without which the Christian is not in a capacity to receive his inheritance. You have need of patience to carry you through the *suffering* part of your work, as well as the *doing*—that so being perfect, you may inherit the promises.

Finally, by adding instruction to correction, God has crowned you with the blessing. “Blessed is the man whom you chasten and teach” (Psalm 94:12). God has turned the crown of thorns into a crown of gold, and set it on your head—and now brings you forth wearing this crown, and shows you, as it were, to the world, as a monument of free grace; proclaiming before you, “Thus shall it be done to the man whom God delights to honor!” (cf. Esther 6:6).

Well then, Christian, sit down and consult with your own soul, what to render to God for so rich a mercy; and behold, it is resolved to your hand, “I will deliver you—and you shall glorify me” (Psalm 50:15). God has not only delivered, but taught you; now therefore he expects glory from you.

Glorify God with your LIPS, ‘I cried to him with my lips, and he was glorified with my tongue.’ Let the lip of prayer, be turned into the tongue of praise. Make your tongues your glory, by proclaiming God’s glory. Be telling what great things God has done for you; say with David, “Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for my soul! Abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, make his praise glorious” (Psalm 66:16,145:7).

Glorify God with your LIFE, and live his praise. Put all the lessons which you have learned into print: “*Show* forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9); put them in such a legible character, that who so runs may read. *Lip*-praise is good, but *life*-praise is better: “He who offers me praise glorifies me, and to him who orders his conduct aright, I will show the salvation of God” (Psalm 50:23). It is good to speak so that bystanders may be God’s witnesses and yours, that you are taught of God; and say, “Behold! what has God wrought!” (Numbers 23:23).

How holily, and humbly, and fruitfully, and self-denyingly do these servants of God walk since they came out of tribulation? Live so that you may take off the scandal of the cross of Christ, and bring men into love with a suffering condition. “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Again, now that God has taught you—be ready to teach others. It is a debt which you owe to all you converse with, “When you are turned, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:32). Communicate what God has taught you to your wife, children, and others, upon all seasonable opportunities. Sanctified knowledge is communicative, “freely you have received—freely give” (Matthew 10:8). God never lighted this candle that it should be put under the bed of pleasure, or the basket of profit—but that it may be put into the candlestick of your conduct, and so “shine before men, that they may see and glorify your Father who is in Heaven” (Matthew 5:16). This is indeed to glorify God.

b.) Labor to preserve the teachings of God upon YOUR heart. Study how to *maintain* that sweet gracious frame of heart into which God has taught you by affliction. It is the duty which Christians should practice as often as they come from the Word, or any other divine ordinance. When we come out of a Sabbath, we should sit down and observe with what frame of spirit God sends us away from the ordinance. If the ordinance has left no savory gracious impression upon the heart—then lie in the dust, and mourn, and commune with our own hearts, and lament after God.

If there is an ordinance frame—then we should rejoice in it, bless God for it, and labor to keep up such a frame upon the heart until the next solemn approach to God. And how much more should it be our care, when we come out of *God’s furnace*, to labor to maintain that melting frame of heart—that life and vigor which we have brought with us out of affliction. “Look to yourselves, that you lose not those things which God has wrought in you” (2 John 1:8). To that end, take these helps:

[1.] Be often reading over the *lessons* which God has taught you. Frequently revive the remembrance of them in your *heads*, and work the impressions of them upon your *hearts*. You have need to take much pains with yourselves, to keep the teachings of God alive upon your spirits, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). There is much of a Pharaoh-like disposition in every man—very prone to harden when the storm is over. It is sad and astonishing to consider how a corruption will lie as if it were quite dead, while danger and death are before us—and how suddenly and powerfully it will revive and betray the soul when the danger is over.

That caution which God gave the Israelites in the wilderness, may make every wise Christian tremble, “I know their imaginations, which they go about even now, before I have brought them into the land, which I swore” (Deuteronomy 31:21). Their hearts were secretly scheming their lusts, even while they were yet smarting under the rod; and in the howling wilderness they are forecasting how to satisfy sense and serve their carnal interests when they would come into the land that flowed with milk and honey. Possibly, these were not down-right resolves; but says the Lord, “I know their imaginations.”

O my brethren, we should hearken to the whisperings of lust in our own bosoms, and labor to suppress them; for if there are now such floatings of sin in the imagination—what will there be when enlargement shall present both temptations and opportunities? And therefore “keep your hearts with all diligence, for out of them come the issues of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

[2.] Renew often the remembrance of the sharpness and bitterness of the affliction—it will be a good corrective to sensuality, and give check to sinful excesses. The flesh will quickly grow wanton when it finds ease. Jeshurun, when the neck was removed from under the yoke, quickly “waxed fat and kicked” (Deuteronomy 32:15). They soon forgot God’s works—they quickly forgot a barren wilderness, in a land that flowed with milk and honey. They did not wait for his counsel; they grew weary of it when once free from correction, and chose rather to walk by the dictate of their own lusts, than of God’s laws, until at length God grew as weary (if I may so say) of counseling, as they were of being counseled. Then he “gave them up to their own hearts’ lusts, to walk in their own counsels” (Psalm 81:12).

Those who would not live by God’s counsels, should perish by their own. And therefore, you who have come out of the house of bondage, remember the sorrows of a suffering condition. Set your heart not so much upon the pleasure of your present enlargement, as upon the bitterness of your former captivity. The Church found great advantage in it, when returned from Babylon, “Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall; my soul has them continually in remembrance” (Lamentations 3:19-20). And what was the fruit of it? It follows, “and my soul is humbled in me” (verse 20b). And that is not all, as remembrance of affliction preserved humility, so humility strengthened faith: “This I recall to mind, therefore have I hope. Tribulation wrought patience, and patience experience, and experience hope,” and so forth (Lamentations 3:21).

[3.] Call often to mind the sad discourses and reasonings, the fears and tremblings, which you have had in your bosoms in the times of trouble and distress. Thus says the Church, “I forgot prosperity” (Lamentations 3:17)—she had been so long in a suffering condition, that now she can scarcely remember that ever she saw a good day in all her life; and at length she sits down, and gives herself up to despair, “And I said, my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord” (verse 18). She remembered what unbelieving conclusions she made in her affliction—and so the prophet Jeremiah says, “Waters flowed over my head; then I said, I am cut off” (Lamentations 3:54); when he began to sink in the mire, he remembered how his heart began to sink with fear; he called to mind what faithless language his heart spoke, “I said, I am cut off.”

Hezekiah makes a large narrative of what discourses he had in his own soul when he had received the sentence of death, and left it in writing to all posterity: “The writing of Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he had been sick: I said in the cutting off of my days,” what did he say? “I shall go to the gates of the grave; I am deprived of the residue of my years; my age is departed” (Isaiah 38:9-10), and a great deal more to that purpose; the sum whereof is this, ‘I shall die, I shall die. I must take my leave of this world, and worms must eat my flesh in the grave,’ and so forth. Such uncomely words he uttered—but he remembered them afterward, and is contented to shame himself for them to all the world. He puts his complaints in print—that he may humble himself, and caution, yes and comfort, others.

Thus, Christians, should we do, we should call to mind our sins—we should sit down and recount the impatience, murmurs, and unbelief; the love of a present world, the fear of death, the hard thoughts of God; all the irregularities and distempers of our own spirits in the time of tribulation. Doubtless it would be of singular use, as to humble our souls and check corruption—and so to endear and preserve the teachings of God upon your souls.

While you might tune David’s thanksgiving (conceived upon some such like occasion), “Good and upright is the Lord, therefore will he teach sinners in the way” (Psalm 25:8); as much as to say, ‘I sinned against the Lord in my affliction by my impatience, unbelief, unhumbleness, and so forth—yet he was pleased, not altogether to leave me without the teachings of his Spirit—not because I was good—but because he was good; not because I pleased him—but because

mercy pleased him; not because I was upright before him—but because he was upright. True and faithful to his own promise, has he done it, good and upright is the Lord—and therefore he has taught me in the way.’

[4.] Remember your vows. When God by affliction showed you your folly, and revealed to you the hidden corruption of your hearts, and brought your ways and doings to remembrance, which were not good—you were ashamed, yes, even confounded; and said, as it is in Job, “Lord, wherein I have done wickedly, I will do so no more” (Job 34:32). But take heed it be not with you as it was with backsliding Israel, of whom God thus complained: “Of old time I have broken your yoke, and burst your bands, and you said, ‘I will not transgress’” (Jeremiah 2:20).

I brought you (as if he had said) hundreds of years ago, out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and then you made me fair promises. “I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your espousals” (Jeremiah 2:2); you said, “I will do so no more” (Job 34:32); Lord, I will be covetous no more, idolatrous no more, adulterous no more. I will murmur no more; I will no more depart from you, “You are the guide of my youth” (Jeremiah 3:4). Good *words*—had she been as good as her word! But O read what follows, and tremble! “When upon every high hill, and under every green tree, you wander, playing the harlot” (Jeremiah 2:20). No sooner had her old *heart* and her old *temptations* met, but presently they fell into mutual embraces!

This is also the temper of our hearts, we are very good while we are in affliction, and promise fair. But no sooner is the trial over, but we forget God’s teachings and our own vows, and return into the same sinful course and conduct as before.

Now therefore, if you would preserve the teachings of God upon your spirits—sit down and remember your vows; and spreading them before the Lord, say with David, “I will pay you my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth has spoken, when I was in trouble” (Psalm 66:13-14).

[5.] If you would preserve the teachings of God upon your heart, attend constantly and conscientiously upon the ministry of the Word. The truth is, *the Word and the rod teach the same lessons*. The rod many times is but the Word’s remembrancer—and therefore as the rod quickens the Word. In the same way, the Word will revive and sanctify the teachings of the rod. They mutually help to set on one another with deeper impressions. And therefore “Hear Wisdom, watching daily at her gates, waiting at the posts of her doors” (Proverbs 8:33-34), if you will be blessed. It will be of a twofold advantage—

FIRST. It will help your memories. As the rod repeats the Word—so the Word will repeat the instructions of the rod. The Word will bring to remembrance what you have learned in the school of affliction.

SECOND. It will quicken affection. To hear that repeated by the still small voice of the Word, which before God taught you in the voice of thunder in affliction—this cannot but affect your hearts! As once the Israelites said unto Moses, “Speak unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto you, and we will hear it and do it; but let us not hear the voice of God any more”—that terrible voice of judgment—“lest we die” (Deuteronomy 5:27; Exodus 20:18-19). And certainly God will take it as well at your hands as he did at Israel’s, and will answer in some such language, “I have heard the voice of this people, they have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep my commandments, that it might be well with them” (Deuteronomy 5:28-29)—and that I might not bring upon them such evils as I have done, anymore!

[6.] Be often feeding that frame of heart which God has taught you into. Do by it as you daily beg God would do by you—give it day by day its daily bread (Matthew 6:11). Maintain MEDITATIONS suitable to the nature of that grace which you would maintain—threatenings, promises, truths, and Scripture considerations agreeable to the lesson. Take heed of feeding your heart’s corruption, with thoughts of the sweetness which is in sin. Take heed also, of starving grace by withdrawing from it suitable nourishment.

Meditate much upon the sinfulness of sin, the vanity of the creature, the fullness of Christ, the exquisiteness of His sufferings, the finality of the judgment, the torments of Hell, the joys of Heaven, the infinite perfections of the divine nature, and the solemnity of eternity!

Rich in meditation—rich in grace!

[7.] And lastly, be much in PRAYER. As it was not enough for God to make the first creation, but he must “uphold it by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3), or else it would quickly have returned into its first nothing—so it is with the second creation. Christ is the finisher as well as the author of grace (Hebrews 12:2); he who has begun a good work in you, must perfect it (Philippians 1:6). Stability only comes from the unchangeable God—therefore pray that God would put his unchangeableness upon you.

Pray as *Luther* was in the habit of praying, “Confirm, O Lord, in us what you have wrought, and perfect the work you have begun in us, to your glory, Amen.” He seems to have taken this out of Psalm 68:28, “Strengthen, O God, that which you have wrought in us.”

Pray that prayer which *David* prayed over that liberal frame of heart which God had formed in his people, for the service of the temple: “O Lord God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, our fathers—keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of your people, and establish their heart unto you” (1 Chronicles 29:18).

Oh be earnest with God for stability of heart, that your goodness may not be as a morning cloud, and as the early dew; but that it may, in some proportion, resemble the Author of it, and be the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

In SUMMARY, by all these means and helps, and what other God has sanctified for this gracious end—labor, Christians, to be such after God has delivered out of your afflictions, as you promised God and yourselves to be when you were in them—so that the fruit of chastening may be repentance never to be repented of. Having in your troubles repented of your sins—take heed when you are delivered, that you repent not of your repentance.

c.) I come now to the third duty of those who have come out of afflictions: pray for the afflicted. And when you pray, say, ‘Lord *teach* them, as well as *correct* them—that they may be blessed.’ O pray thus for England; she has been a long time sorely chastised of the Lord—and yet has been all this while “like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jeremiah 31:18). O pray, “Turn us, Lord, and we shall be turned—you are the Lord our God” (Lamentations 5:21). Pray that God would teach England in this day of her visitation, the things of her peace, before they are hidden from her eyes. O pray that we may be instructed, lest God depart from us. If correction is not accompanied with instruction—if England is not at length reformed by all the judgments of God upon her—then she has already seen her best days, and may expect to be “made desolate, a land not inhabited” (Jeremiah 6:8). Then there is no balm for our pain, nor any physician who can heal our malady.

Pray thus for all your friends who are or have been in the furnace of affliction. Pray that they may come forth as gold purified seven times in the fire. Pray that they may lose nothing there, but their rust and dross.

One great use which Christians should make of reading the Scriptures, is to learn the language of prayer. O that the professors of this age would in this particular, learn what to pray, and how to pray for their brethren in tribulation. O that they would *censure* less—and *pray* more; and instead of speaking one *of* another, speak more one *to* another, and one for another. That was the good old way, “Then those who feared the Lord spoke often one to another” (Malachi 3:16).

But now the tender, praying, healing, restoring Spirit is departed; and if Christians stir not up themselves to call Him back again, it is a sad presage that God is departing too. And woe unto us when God departs from us.

We *judge* before we inquire, and *reject* before we admonish—our brethren in afflictions. And this we think befits us—and we take a kind of pride and contentment in it. But O to inform, to convince, to exhort, to pray, to put the bone that is out in joint again—this is to act like the disciples of Christ; this is to show ourselves Christians indeed, professors not of the letter, but of the Spirit, and would *gain* our brethren instead of *blasting* them.

Finally, I would also address such as cannot evidence to their own souls that chastening has been accompanied with divine teaching in any gospel proportion, or at least are not deeply sensible of the lack of it. Here is a word of exhortation for them, receive it, I beseech you. Roll yourselves in the dust before the Lord; smite upon your thigh; sigh and cry out with Ephraim, “You have chastised me and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke” (Jeremiah 31:18). I have felt the blows of God, but that is all. I have received no more instruction by all my correction than a brute beast—or if I had, I have quickly lost it; it is fled away like a bird.

Truly you have cause to sit down, and even wish for your affliction again. God had put himself into your hands as it were—and you have let him go without the blessing, the blessing of saving instruction. How may you even wish, ‘O that I were in prison again, in my sick bed again, in banishment again.’ However, humble yourself greatly before the Lord, and wrestle mightily for the *after teachings* of God upon your heart. Pray, “Turn me O Lord, and I shall be turned, for you are the Lord my God” (Lamentations 5:21)—what affliction has not done, Lord do—“turn me, and I shall be turned”—so that your soul may yet speak to the praise of free grace: “After that I returned I repented, and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed, yes even confounded, because I bore the reproach of my youth” (Jeremiah 31:19).

Urge the Lord, as Sampson did after his victory, “You have given this great deliverance into the hand of your servant, and shall I now die for thirst, and fall into the hand of the uncircumcised?” (Judges 15:18). Say unto him, ‘Lord, you have given your servant this great deliverance from danger and death—and shall I now perish for lack of teaching, and go down to Hell among the uncircumcised?’ “Teach me your way, O Lord—and I will walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name” (Psalm 86:11). In a word, desire the Lord that he would do all the work—and then take all the glory. Say, ‘Lord *teach* me as well as *deliver* me—and I shall be blessed.’

4. The fourth and last branch of exhortation, is to parents—to exhort them in the education of their children to imitate God, and that in three things:

a.) Afford your children due CORRECTION. It is the counsel of the Holy Spirit, “Chasten your son while there is hope, and let not your soul spare for his crying” (Proverbs 19:18). Behold, God counsels you who are parents to do with your children as he does with his—wisely to use the discipline of the rod, before vicious dispositions grow into habits, and folly is so deeply rooted that the rod of correction will not drive it out.

“Error and folly,” says one very well, “are the knots of Satan with which he ties sinners to the stake to be burnt in Hell!” These knots are easiest cut early. Or if you would make the child bleed in cutting of them, let it not cause you to withdraw your hand; for so it follows, “Chasten your son, and let not your soul spare for his crying.” It is not only foolish, but cruel pity to forbear correction for a few childish tears; to allow the child to wail in Hell for sin, rather than to shed a few tears for the preventing of it. Foolish fathers and mothers call this love, but the Father of Spirits calls it hatred: “He who spares the rod, *hates* his son!” (Proverbs 13:24). Surely there is nothing so ill-spared, as that whereby the child is bettered. Such sparing is hatred; and because you hate your children in not correcting them—they may come afterwards to hate you for not correcting them.

But this is not all. The parent’s leniency in disciplining, makes way for God’s severity. Pity to the child’s flesh—is cruelty to the child’s soul. So the Hebrew may be rendered, “Spare not to his destruction, or to cause him to die”—that is, to occasion his destruction. The foolish indulgence of the parent may be, and often is, the death of the child—eternal death. Parents spare their children in their folly—to the destruction both of body and soul!

And this may help us to expound that other parallel text, “Withhold not correction from the child, for if you beat him with the rod he shall not die.” (Proverbs 23:13). The meaning may be either that correction will not kill him—the rod will break no bones. This reproves the silly and sinful soft-heartedness of parents, who think if they would correct their children, they would presently die of it. They are as afraid to use the rod, as if it were a sword. Nay, but says the Holy Spirit, fear not correction, for behold, the strokes of the rod are not the strokes of death. It is but a rod—it is not a serpent. It may hurt—but it will not give a poisonous sting. To obviate the fear of parents in this case, God himself gives his word for it, “He shall not die.”

This may be the meaning, which I rather conceive—the words may be a motive drawn from the *fruit* of correction, “Withhold not correction from the child.” Why? “He shall not die”—in other words discipline may be, and (through divine blessing accompanying it) is often a means to prevent death. It may prevent the first and second death, to which the child is exposed by the sinful indulgence of the parent.

The word used in this place, says one, seems to note an immortality; so that “He shall not die”—is all one as if the Holy Spirit had said, ‘He shall live forever,’ the rod on the flesh shall be a means to save the soul in the day of the Lord Jesus. “We are chastened that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32). “Such smittings,” as David says in another case, “shall be a kindness” (Psalm 141:5). And such rebukes are so far from breaking the head, that they shall be an excellent oil which shall cure, and give life. Even the philosopher could say, “Correction is a kind of medicine for children.”

Alas, our children are sick, and cruel is that mercy which will allow them to die—yes eternally—rather than heal their palates with a little bitter medicine! They are monsters in the form of fathers and mothers—who thus hug their little ones to death! They are infanticides rather than parents; of whom we may say, as once the Roman emperor said of Herod, when he heard that he had murdered his own son among the rest of the infants in Bethlehem, so that he might be sure to destroy the King of the Jews, “Surely it is better to be such people’s swine, than their sons!”

O hateful indulgence and merciless pity—to damn a child for lack of correction! Such parents throw both the rod and the child into the fire at once! They throw the rod into the fire of the chimney—and the child into the fire of Hell.

This is not done like God, for “whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives” (Hebrews 12:6)—and so does every wise loving parent! “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him chastens him early” (Proverbs 13:24).

As moths are beaten out of a garment with a rod—so must vices be beaten out of children’s hearts. For lack of this disciplinary love—how have some children accused their parents on their death-bed, yes at the gallows! And how many do and will curse their parents in Hell—as Cyprian supposes some to do: “The wicked fondness of our parents has brought us into these torments! Our fathers and mothers have been our murderers! Those who gave us our natural life, have deprived us of eternal life! Those who would not correct us with the rod, have occasioned us now to be tormented with scorpions.”

Yes, even in this life, how do many godly parents smart for their indulgent fondness, because they will not make their children smart for their folly. Eli and David would not so much as rebuke their sons—and God gave them rebukes in their sons. It is said of Eli, “His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not” (1 Samuel 3:13). The Hebrew has it, “He did not frown upon them.” How sad—for lack of a frown, to destroy a soul!

I am much afraid, this unchristian, yes wicked indulgence of parents, is the fountain of all that confusion under which England at this time reels and staggers like a drunken man. And for this very sin (at least for this among others, yes, and for this above others) God is visiting all the families of the land, from the throne to the poorest cottage. Parents have laid

the foundation of their own sorrows, their children's ruin, and the desolation of the nation—in the looseness of their correction—and yet are not sensible of it to this day.

Therefore God crosses us in our righteous desires; we have walked, even in this point, exceedingly contrary to God and to his discipline; and therefore God is walking contrary to us, and is punishing us seven times more for this iniquity. And therefore O that parents would at length awaken themselves, to follow both the pattern and precept of their heavenly Father, who, as “he corrects those whom he loves,” so he commands them to lovingly correct their children. “Withhold not correction from the child; for if you correct him with the rod he shall not die” (Proverbs 23:13).

And it is further worth observation, that the same word in the original, which is translated “withhold”, signifies also “to forbid;” meeting with another distemper in parents, who as they will not correct their children themselves, so also they forbid others to correct them, under whose tuition they put them. It is as if they were afraid their children would not have sin enough here, nor Hell enough hereafter—they lay in caveats against the means which God has sanctified for their reclaiming. Parents, take heed that when you commit your children to others' hands, you do not in the meanwhile hold their hands.

If you judge them unwise, why do you choose them? If you choose them, why do you not trust them? Well then, if the rod is in your own hand, withhold it not; if in your friend's hand, forbid it not.

Certainly there is great need of this duty, which the Spirit of God frequently inculcates all through the Proverbs.

b.) And secondly, if you would have your children blessed, add INSTRUCTION to correction. Imitate God in this part of paternal discipline also. Let *chastisement* and *instruction* go together—it is what the Holy Spirit urges upon you, “Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

There are two words relating to both of these parental duties; in the “nurture” or correction; and it is added, “of the Lord”. That is, the *chastisement* which the Lord commands earthly parents to exercise towards their children—this is the first duty, of which we have already addressed. And then there is another word, which holds forth the end and design of parental correction—that is the “admonition” or *instruction* of the Lord—counsels and instructions taken out of the Word of God, or such as are approved of by God. The sum is this, that while we *chasten the flesh*—we should labor to *inform and form the mind and spirit*, by infusing right principles, pressing and urging upon their tender hearts counsel, reproof, and instruction as the matter requires.

This is the duty of parents, to imitate God, to *let instruction expound correction*; and with a *rod* in the hand, and a word in the mouth—to train up their children to life eternal.

A silent rod is but a brutish discipline, and will certainly leave them more brutish than it found them. Chastisement without teaching—may sooner break the bones than the heart. Chastisement alone may mortify the flesh, but not corruption. Chastisement alone may control nature, but never beget grace. But the rod *and* reproof give wisdom. As instruction added to correction makes excellent Christians—so also it makes good children.

There are parents who are severe and crusty enough to their children—they spare for no blows. Instead of breaking them of their wills by a wise and moderate correction—they are ready to break their bones, and their necks too sometimes, in their angry passions! But they never mind the other branch of paternal discipline—instruction and admonition.

Of such parents I suppose the apostle speaks, “We have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected and chastened us after their own pleasure” (Hebrews 12:9-10). He is not speaking of all parents, but his meaning is, there are such men and women in the world who are most unlike to God, and in smiting their children rather please themselves, than profit their children. God disciplines for our profit—but they discipline to give vent to their passion, and satisfy their vindictive rage and fury. And when is that?

Truly when the rod and reproof do not go together, it is an argument that there is more passion than wisdom, and more cruelty than love, in such chastisements. Such parents do rather betray their own folly, than take a course to make their children wise.

The rod *and* reproof give wisdom—neither alone will do it. The rod without reproof, will harden the heart and teach children sooner to hate their parents than to hate sin. While reproof without the rod, will oftentimes leave no impression. It is divine truth alone, which must be the instrument which works saving grace in the heart, “Sanctify them with your truth—your word is truth” (John 17:17). It is the commendation of Timothy's mother, that from his very infancy, she instructed him in the Scriptures, “which were able to make him wise to salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15). When the instruction of the Word in the mouth of the rod—it brings wisdom and life with it.

And therefore, O that parents would imitate the Father of Spirits in this blessed art of paternal discipline, join the word of instruction to the rod of correction—and teach as well as chastise “Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). O that every child might have cause to give their parents that commendation which once Augustine gave his mother, “My mother labored with my everlasting salvation with more tenderness and sorrow, than ever she did with my first birth.”

O that natural parents could speak of the fruit of their loins, as Paul speaks of his Galatians, “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Galatians 4:19); so that they might rejoice in the second, more than they ever did in the first birth.

Beloved, this is done by the Word and the rod. “Correct your son and he shall give you rest, yes he shall give delight unto your soul” (Proverbs 29:17). What greater delight than to see your children walking in truth, and to think thus with yourselves: that so many children God has given you, so many children you have brought up for God, and so many heirs for the kingdom of Heaven! Well, chastise and teach them out of the Word of God, and your children shall be blessed.

Take one short caution more, and that is:

c.) Add PRAYER to instruction. As teaching should accompany chastisement—so prayer should accompany teaching. Paul may plant, and Apollos may water—but God must give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). In the same way with us, the father may correct, the mother may instruct, both may do both—but God must give the blessing.

So therefore Christian parents, while they add *instruction* to *correction*—should add *prayer* to instruction. The *means* are ours—the *success* is God’s. Therefore let us put the rod into the hand of instruction—and instruction into the hand of prayer—and all into the hand of God.

Pray and teach your children to pray—that God would so bless correction and instruction, that both may make you and your children blessed. Amen.