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THE BENEFIT OF AFFLICTIONS.

HEBREWS, XII. 10.—*But He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.*

That there is a great deal of affliction in this world, none will deny. No period, no station, no circumstances of life are exempt. Sorrow invades us through a thousand different avenues. We suffer in our property, in our character, in our friends. *Riches often take to themselves wings and flee away.* Even the earnings of honest industry, the savings of temperance and economy, may be torn from us by the hand of adversity, and we be left in that state from which the wise man earnestly prayed to be preserved. Our character, our *good name which is better than precious ointment*, the result of integrity and uprightness, may become the sport of the tale-bearer; may be assailed by the tongue of slander. In the sufferings of our friends our sorrows may also be multiplied. Their death pierces our hearts with anguish of a peculiar kind. Our minds, while the body is in health, often feel the most exquisite sensations of pain. *Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.* Unexpected occurrences often blast our most sanguine expectations, and leave us to all the bitterness of disappointment. Our bodies, also, so *fearfully and wonderfully made*, are so much the more liable to disease and suffering. Every limb, every organ, every nerve, may be the seat of disorder and excruciating anguish. At length the principle of animal life is extinct; *this earthly house is dissolved, and man goeth to his long home.*

If such, then, be the fact; if no age, no station, no connexion in this life is exempted from suffering; if to be an inhabitant of this earth, to

be a child of Adam, is to be an heir of misery; surely the art of turning these afflictions to a good purpose—of deriving great and lasting benefit from them, must be more important to us, than the art of changing other substances into gold. For did we possess millions of wealth, this would not shield us from suffering and from death; but if these afflictions *work together for our good*, then the immortal spirit may rejoice in tribulation, and triumph in hope, while the body suffers and dissolves, and *returns to the earth as it was*.

This lesson is frequently and clearly taught in the Bible: and, if we mistake not, in the text. Let us then contemplate,

I. THE LIGHT IN WHICH AFFLICTIONS OUGHT TO BE VIEWED, AND THE DISPOSITION WITH WHICH THEY OUGHT TO BE RECEIVED.

II. THEIR TENDENCY WHEN THUS VIEWED AND RECEIVED, TO PROMOTE OUR SPIRITUAL INTEREST.

1. You are to view and receive afflictions *as coming from the hand of God*;—as sent by Him whose *kingdom ruleth over all*. You have only to open your Bible, and this truth will meet your eye in almost every page. All those diseases to which you are liable, are most explicitly ascribed to divine agency. When nations, or individuals were to be chastised, the pestilence is called for, and its course is directed, until His purpose, who administers the correction, is fully accomplished. It is stated in Scripture, that *all the diseases of Egypt, also every sickness and every plague*, though not mentioned in the book of the law, are sent and controlled by the hand of God. If, in subsequent ages, intemperance and licentious habits of living, or any other causes, have generated diseases unknown to former times, still they do not move without His direction. And even death itself, the termination of all earthly enjoyment, is as clearly ascribed to God, as the creation of the world. *I know*, says the pious and afflicted Job, *that thou wilt bring me to death. He killeth and he maketh alive*. All other calamities with which you can possibly be afflicted are also his messengers. If the devouring flame consumes your property; if the tempest or hurricane visits you with desolation; this *fire* and this *stormy wind* are but his servants, *fulfilling his pleasure*.

It is true that these afflictions take place through the instrumentality of second causes; that is, they are sent in the dispensations of Providence, and not by miraculous power. Yet these second causes, many of them at least, have no intelligence, and of course, can form no design to visit you with affliction. Your diseases are often contracted from the air impregnated with noxious qualities. But this air, this vapour,

holds no consultation, forms no design to produce this effect; and yet it does not take place without design. A second cause, indeed, necessarily implies the existence and agency of a First, controlling and directing the second. When, therefore, it is your Father's intention to afflict you with disease, *he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth*, gives them their necessary qualities, directs their course, and limits their effect, and His purpose is accomplished. This is true respecting all the calamities with which you may be visited; whatever means may be employed, the hand which guides them is the hand of God. Your own agency may be thus employed; your safety may be secured through your own prudence and care; or your health may be restored, your sorrows lightened by means of human skill. In either case, however, the wisdom and the power of God are to be acknowledged. His wisdom forms the design; his hand guides the progress and limits the effect of all these means. Also, when you are chastised, whatever the rod may be, it is your Father's hand, which administers the chastisement. *Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground.* They must be traced back to the Great First Cause, with whom there is neither chance nor accident; but who works according to a definite plan, formed *after the council of his own wisdom.*

2. You are to view and receive your afflictions *as deserved*. You are not for a moment to suppose, that they are arbitrary in their design, or sent without such reasons as are amply sufficient to justify them, in the view of infinite justice and wisdom. *The Lord doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.* There is a cause for every kind and degree of sorrow which you taste: and this cause is found in yourselves; in your own *sinfulness*.

Why has this world, in every age, exhibited such scenes of protracted and complicated misery? Why is every child of Adam born heir to a large inheritance of suffering? From what inexhaustible source have these streams of bitterness continued to flow and overspread the earth? This world, with all its changes, from the greatest to the very least, is under the government of a being, infinite in wisdom, power and goodness. His power could prevent these sufferings, if the designs of his wisdom required it; his goodness *would* prevent them, if there were not cause for a different treatment of us. When this world came from the hand of its Creator, it bore no marks of his displeasure. Every thing proclaimed his benignity. But now, this earth is filled with miseries; the unequivocal marks of the divine displeasure; and the man's transition from time to eternity is often attended by circumstances most appalling to human feelings.

The Bible gives us the only satisfactory information on this subject, so solemnly interesting to us. Death, indeed, with all his ministers, with all his precursors, has reigned, and is reigning over the human race. Sin, however, had first entered; and misery and death are its legitimate consequences. *By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.* The first man wilfully transgressed the positive command of God, and thereby drew down upon himself the divine displeasure, and subjected his posterity, in every age, to misery and death. Sin, therefore, is the procuring cause of all the sufferings of men; and, as all have sinned, so all inherit this legacy of woe. This accounts for all your calamities, and shows their perfect consistency with that Goodness which governs the world.

The sufferings of men, it is true, are great; but their guilt is still greater. Take a single individual, for the sake of experiment; observe him through every stage of life; form an estimate of all his sufferings of mind and of body; finish the account with his dying agonies; and then multiply this amount by all the woes of all the millions of mankind who have lived and suffered since the creation: and how amazing will be the result! If any difficulty should arise in attempting to reconcile this inconceivable amount of misery with the goodness of God; make another estimate. Take the same, or some other individual; consider him as a moral agent, accountable to God for what he is, and for what he does; consider his sins of childhood, of youth, of manhood, of old age, in thought, in word, and in deed; consider the aggravation of these sins from a variety of causes,—from the preserving care, and the forbearance of God, and above all from the abuse of infinite mercy, offered through a crucified Saviour; multiply this amount of guilt,—we know not by what numbers,—by such, however, as will correspond with the millions of men who have lived and sinned from the first to the present moment. There is no necessity to exceed the truth. The guilt of *one* individual exceeds the comprehension of men or angels; the guilt of *a world* can be comprehended only by the Infinite Mind. Your amazement must now be,—not that there is so much,—but so *little* suffering in the world; not that such a vast and irresistible tide of misery has deluged and swept the earth of its inhabitants,—but that a single trace of divine benignity is to be found; that a single blessing is enjoyed, in a world filled with such bold and wilful rebellion. There is no feature of the divine government calculated to strike the mind with more profound and holy admiration, than the forbearance of our of-

fended Sovereign,—in that this earth, deluged with crimes, is not made the theatre of immediate and inexorable vengeance on the workers of iniquity. Truly judgment is *His strange work; goodness and mercy are his delight.*

Here, then, you see the true cause of all the sufferings of mankind, and of your own individually. It is sin. Let then the association of sin as the cause, and misery as the consequence, be so clear, and so habitual in your mind, that whenever you witness or suffer the chastisements of God, sin may present itself as that which *deserves* this suffering. Deal honestly and faithfully with yourself. Lose not yourself in the crowd, by simply admitting that you belong to a sinful race, and are thus liable to your part of the sufferings which that race deserves. Content not yourself with viewing sin in the aggregate, a part of which belongs to you. This will never produce that impression with which you ought to receive afflictions. Men of wealth are not willing, in this manner, to dispose of their property; to throw it into a common stock from which they will receive but an equal share with others, or only so much as their real wants may demand. Here they contend for individual right. With the same care ought you to keep the account of your own sins. Others may be more or less guilty than yourself. You may witness and lament their sins; but you ought to *feel and confess your own.* Then will you be deeply convinced that you *deserve* all the sufferings with which God is pleased to visit you.

3. You ought to view and receive your afflictions *as intended to promote your improvement in holiness*;—as means to correct the evil dispositions of your heart, and the sinful habits and practices of your life. Your afflictions, of every kind and degree, are sent with design; and this design is always good and wise. Such is the testimony of the Bible; and especially of that passage from which our text is taken. God is represented as administering his chastisements—not as a stranger, much less as an enemy,—but as a kind and affectionate Father. Earthly parents may love their children; yet they are imperfect; some degree of unhallowed feeling may mingle with their love; the correction which they give, may be, in part, to gratify this feeling. Yet because the correction is deserved, and right in itself, the good child will submit, and reverence the hand which corrects. Your Heavenly Father can have no such desire to gratify in your affliction; your suffering, considered in itself, gives him no pleasure. He corrects with no other intention than to render you more humble, more patient, more watchful, more devoted

to his service. 'These distresses, these siftings, are for the trial of your faith, that it may be strengthened, and thus *be found unto praise and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

A child would consider the stripes inflicted by an enemy, as given to gratify hatred or malice; of course, irritation and resentment would be the result: or, perhaps, a slavish fear and dread. But if corrected by a benevolent parent, who is *believed to have the kindest intention*, the result will be reformation, dutiful submission, and increased affection for the parent. Let this child be the pattern for your imitation. Though you know that your afflictions come from the hand of God; and that you deserve them; yet, unless you receive them as given in love, they will not produce the desired effect. When, therefore, the rod of correction is felt, do not consider Him who holds it, as a Judge, inflicting the punishment which justice demands; but as a Father, watching over you with loving kindness; yearning over you with the most tender commiseration while you suffer; calling you back from your wanderings to cheerful obedience, to greater confidence in His grace, and to more intimate communion with Himself. Thus viewed, your afflictions may *work for good*;—may fit you for that *rest which remaineth for the people of God.*

4. Receive your afflictions *with humble and earnest prayer to God, that they may exert a sanctifying influence*;—that your ignorance of their design, your unbelief, your impenitence may not render them ineffectual. You as much need the influences of the Divine Spirit, in making a right improvement of your afflictions, as in exercising faith and repentance. The Gospel, in itself, is calculated to produce a powerful and happy effect on the human mind; yet, unless the quickening Spirit accompanies this Gospel, it will be resisted, and fail of producing this effect. So your afflictions, though in themselves calculated to correct your errors and promote your spiritual interests, will not produce these effects, unless God, the Spirit, *of his good pleasure worketh in you, both to will and to do.* Is it criminal and dangerous to neglect the Gospel and its *great salvation*? So is it to neglect the Fatherly chastisements appointed for you. That same infinite wisdom, which designed the wondrous plan of redemption, designed these chastisements as means, in part, of preparing you for *the inheritance of the saints in light.* Are the sufferings and death of the Divine Saviour evidence of the love of God? So are the sorrows, which you are called to endure in this life. You are as certainly accountable to God for the improvement or neglect of your afflictions, as of the Gospel, or of the Saviour himself.

Ask, then, with humble importunity, and God will cause your afflictions to produce in you *the peaceable fruits of righteousness*.

If you should, with kindness and discretion, administer correction to your child, and it should manifest an indifference to the effect of that correction, your displeasure would be increased; because your intention and your hopes would be disappointed. If it should manifest opposition to your intention, you would be still more displeased; because this would be still further from your hopes than mere indifference. In like manner your Heavenly Father must be displeased, if you feel indifferent respecting the effect which your afflictions may produce; and still more so, if you feel opposed to the design with which they are sent. The only way, therefore, to avoid this displeasure, is to cherish an earnest desire that they may make you wise unto salvation; that by them you may be purified, like gold tried with fire: *that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

And now, brethren, in review of what has been suggested, let the honest inquiry be made by each of you—With what spirit are you accustomed to regard the afflictive visitations of Providence? Do you view and receive them, *as coming from the hand of God*? In the day of adversity, do you hear Him speaking to you, in language plainer and more impressive than an audible voice from heaven? Or are you utterly regardless of the Source, whence afflictions come, and of the lessons they inculcate?

Do you view and receive them, *as deserved by your transgressions*? and, indeed, as infinitely less grievous than your sins deserve? Or are you accustomed to consider your case as *hard*? and your afflictions as coming upon you without *just cause*? Do you thus charge God with *severity*? or do you say, in meek submission, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and upright are thy judgments*?

Do you view and receive afflictions, *as intended to promote your spiritual improvement*? and do they have this effect on your heart? Do they make you more humble, more patient, more heavenly-minded, more kind to your neighbour, and more devoted to God? Or do they have the awful effect of *hardening* your heart, and alienating your affections from God and your fellow-men? Can you say, with the pious psalmist, *Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word*? Or have you rather *dealt proudly—despised reproof—sinned against judgments*—and thus been *treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath*?

Have you received afflictions *with humble and earnest prayer, that*

they might be sanctified to you?—that by them you might be made wiser and better? Or have you rather yielded to them as a matter of necessity—without one earnest petition, that the chastisements of God might make you *wise unto salvation*?

God, in his holy providence, is thus putting each of you on trial;—is giving you the opportunity of sitting in judgment on your own soul, before you come to the tremendous trial of the Great Day. O, be faithful to yourself now, that you may not be ashamed and confounded in that Day. And do thou still *search us, Great God, and try us*, if need be, *in the midst of the furnace*,—that we may not fall under the *power of thine anger*, when there is *none to deliver*!

SERMON XII.

HEBREWS, XII. 10.—*But He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.*

Having, in the preceding discourse, contemplated the light in which afflictions ought to be viewed, and the disposition with which they ought to be received; we are now,

II. TO CONSIDER THEIR TENDENCY WHEN TRUS VIEWED AND RECEIVED TO PROMOTE OUR SPIRITUAL INTEREST.

That we might be partakers of his holiness :—that is, of the holiness which he requires. Holiness consists in conformity to the will of God. Its great and operative principle is faith in Christ; or the knowledge and cordial belief of the Bible. This word, which is *quick and powerful*, vital and energetic, like seed sown in good ground, has its fruit unto holiness, *the end of which is eternal life*. Afflictions have a tendency to promote the great work.

1. *They teach you the evil nature of sin*, on account of which they are sent, and point you to the Saviour. Practical lessons are the best of all lessons. In the Scriptures you are taught, that sin is an evil,—a great and destructive evil; in the calamities of life you taste, in some degree, the bitterness of this evil. The Lord is graciously pleased to vouchsafe to his beloved children an earnest, a foretaste of the joys which are at his right hand; and thus to encourage, animate, and lead them on towards the heavenly Zion. So does he, in the numerous and various

afflictions of life, give a foretaste of the inseparable consequences of sin. Thus you experience the truth of the Bible. This experience of the bitterness of sin, will awaken that fear, which is natural to man under the apprehension of danger, and which becomes a powerful motive urging you to seek a refuge from that wrath, of which you have now but a foretaste. No refuge can be found, that will answer this purpose, but in the crucified Saviour. Whatever, therefore, will bring you to this Saviour, partakes of the nature of holiness; for it is according to the will of God. *For this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.* That Divine Redeemer, by whom you are saved from wrath, will thus become exceedingly precious, and you will cleave to him with full purpose of heart. *More to be desired,* will His word become, in your estimation, *than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter, also, than honey and the honey-comb.* Gratitude will thus habitually spring up in your bosom: the devout language of which will be, *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable Gift.* Here you find a safe refuge from the impending vengeance. The love and power of sin will thus be destroyed; and faith in Jesus Christ, and love to God will reign in your heart.

In this world where sin prevails, there is no possible escape from sorrow and distress. This circumstance will endear so much the more to your heart, that heaven, where there is no sin, and of course, no sorrow; where *God shall wipe away tears from off all faces.* As the hireling longs for the setting sun, when his labour will end; as the mariner, clinging to a single fragment of his broken ship, thinks of the safety enjoyed on shore; so, by the sorrows and conflicts of this troublous region, will you be reminded of that blissful state, where *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.* These conflicts will cause the soul to stretch all her powers, with more intense desire, towards that better country, where alone there is exemption from calamity and pain. These desires not only support you under your afflictions, but they prepare you for the *joy of your Lord.* Thus death, the last enemy, will be disarmed of his sting; and heaven will be endeared to your hearts. Blessed effects, precious fruits of affliction!

2. Afflictions teach you another practical, and therefore useful lesson;—*The utter insufficiency of this world, as a portion for the soul.* In days of prosperity you may not be thoroughly convinced of this. The enjoyments of life have their place and their value, and demand your gratitude to God; the sympathies and endearments of friendship are im-

portant sources of human happiness. But none of these, nor all of these together, can satisfy the heart oppressed with heavy affliction. No sooner do the waves of adversity strike and break around you, than you feel your need of consolation from a higher Source. To the man, whose heart is bleeding under the anguish of the last adieu of some dear friend, the splendours of wealth have lost their power to give comfort. God alone can be his Comforter. If he has taken the world as his portion, he now finds it utterly insufficient to drive away his sorrow, or to support him under it. To the man whose spirit is departing to another state, the pleasures, the honours, the riches of this world are unavailing. To him an humble hope in the mercy of God is of more value than the wealth and sceptre of empires. Plainly and frequently as this truth is taught in the Bible, yet how slow are men to learn; how slight is the conviction which it leaves on the mind! To quicken your perception, to render this conviction more deep and influential, your heavenly Father, with great kindness and wisdom, uses his chastising rod; and thus gives you a practical sense of his own truth. You are thus brought to see, that in the hour of affliction, or on the bed of death, your choice is not between different sources of earthly comfort; for these all fail; but between absolute despair and the Lord Jehovah, as the *joy of your heart*.

This will explain a case which you have sometimes witnessed, and perhaps experienced. A slight affliction may overcome and disquiet the mind with suspicions and complaints, with rebellious murmurings and repinings, and occasion a degree of distress quite disproportioned to the cause by which it is produced; while a much heavier stroke is perhaps borne with meek submission, with heavenly fortitude. The slight affliction touches but one rivulet of earthly pleasure, and you have recourse to those which are still left; but the heavier stroke dries up the very source of all earthly comfort, and leaves you to sink, or depend on God alone. The slight affliction you attempt to bear in your own strength, which is perfect weakness; the heavier stroke is no sooner felt, than you are convinced, that if the same God who inflicts the wound, does not heal, you must be overwhelmed; and your language now is, *Lord save, or I perish*.

Sometimes what you call afflictions are sent to remove those objects which occupy more of your thoughts and affections than is consistent with sincere and entire devotedness to God. That wealth which is imperceptibly, it may be, but really, withdrawing your heart from God, is lost through the fraud or negligence of others; or it is borne away on the wings of devouring flame; or it is engulfed in the ocean. That

fame which was producing similar effects, is assailed by the tongue of slander. That friend, that dear child, whose increasing loveliness, whose unfolding beauties, were entwining themselves more closely with every fibre of your heart, is cut down like a flower, in the morning of life. These endearing objects are removed, that you may be delivered from the snare which they bring, and that your heart may be given supremely to God.

Sometimes one affliction is intended to prevent another that would be more grievous. Had Absalom died in infancy the grief of his father would have been much less than it was from the subsequent life and death of that ungrateful son. When Joseph's coat was presented to his father, the venerable patriarch was deeply afflicted, and refused to be comforted. Yet this affliction had a connection, mysterious, indeed, at the moment, with the preservation of his own life, and the life of his whole family. The righteous are sometimes *taken away from the evil to come*. Welcome, therefore, should be those calamities, which are kindly intended, and which often produce the happiest effects. They should engrave on your heart this truth; *O Lord God of hosts, blessed is the man who trusteth in Thee.*

3. Afflictions *excite and increase some of the most amiable and pious dispositions of the human heart*; and thus greatly promote your spiritual interest. Unless some disappointment is experienced, unless the loss of some valued object is sustained, there is no place for *submission* to the will of God; there is nothing to call this disposition into exercise. No man knows what his character really is, until he is tried; nor until these trials are so varied, as to reach every principle of action, and source of feeling. If all your schemes were successfully accomplished; if all that you esteem valuable remained safe in your possession, you would not know, whether or not, in a change of circumstances, you could exercise that calm resignation—that meek submission—which becomes the Christian character. That you may have this proof of your love to God—that you may *perfect holiness in the fear of God*—he sends you these trials, varied and repeated, according to his wisdom, until the object is answered; until, in the spirit of holy acquiescence, you are enabled to say, under the severest disappointments and losses; *The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord: Not my will, but thine be done.*

Patience is another Christian virtue, for the exercise of which exemption from suffering would leave no room. Unless some degree of pain is actually felt, you can no more exercise patience than you can

forgive when no injury has been received. Without this feature, your character would be imperfect, as the human countenance would be with the loss of one of its features. It is, therefore, the design and the tendency of affliction to supply this deficiency; for *tribulation worketh patience*. Therefore, *my brethren, count it all joy, when ye fall into divers temptations: knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience*. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

You have not only trials sent for the exercise of this virtue, but you have examples set before you for imitation. You have the *prophets, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience*; you have Job, not less distinguished for his calamities than for the patience with which he endured them. You have all those, *who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises*; and you have above all, the example of Jesus, the Saviour, who *patiently endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*. Despise not, therefore, these *chastenings of the Lord*; for they have an important influence in preparing you for the joys and glories of heaven. Through them *the love of God is shed abroad in your heart, by the Holy Spirit*.

4. This reminds us of another important advantage resulting from afflictions: When viewed in their true light, and received with a proper spirit, *they are most satisfactory proofs of the love of God*. This point is illustrated by a reference to earthly parents. You love your own child. This love is manifested not only by a prompt and kind attention to all its real wants, but also by correction, when deemed necessary. Should you neglect to give this correction, it would be a proof that your affection for the child is not genuine. It is not love, but hatred, according to the language of inspiration, from which such neglect proceeds. *He that spareth his rod, hateth his son; but he that loveth him, chastiseth him betimes*. (Prov. xiii. 24.) The child desires nothing but present indulgence, perfectly ignorant, and, of course, regardless, what influence this indulgence will have on its future life. But you are not ignorant of this influence; observation and experience have convinced you, that many of the habits formed, and the passions and appetites nourished by such indulgence, would be destructive of its future usefulness, respectability and peace. It is therefore the dictate of reason and humanity, as well as of inspiration, that if milder measures fail to answer the purpose, correction must be administered; and the most sincere and tender love that ever warmed the parental bosom, will lead to such correction; not once or

twice only, but as often as it shall be needed ; until the child is taught to follow, as its guide, your will, not its own. If you neglect this correction, you will be accountable for the future misery and disgrace of this child ; and in the day of final reckoning, its ruin may be found charged to your want of proper affection. At the same time, if your kindness has been what it ought to be, the child will feel the assurance of your love. My father, it will say, or my mother, has always been kind to me ; has provided for my wants ; has relieved my distresses ; in her own bosom has soothed my sorrows ; with great watchfulness has guarded me from danger ; I know, I feel, that she loves me. But the very hand, which has so often wiped away my tears, now corrects me, now gives me pain. Although she loves me, she is displeased with my conduct, because it is wrong, and will lead to some future evil, from which she wishes and intends to preserve me by this correction ; I will, therefore, submit, and love her the more for this kindness.

All this is plain, and of easy application to your case. You are ignorant of the changes which await you in future ; you cannot tell *what a day or an hour may bring forth* ; nor can you tell what influence present events may have on these changes, or what will best prepare you for them. Still less do you know the influence which temporal occurrences may have on your eternal existence ; to raise you higher, or sink you lower in the mansions of bliss. But all this is known to your Father in heaven. He sees what influence present events will have on those which are future ; and what the effect of all these events will be on your condition in eternity. His plan of discipline is so wisely arranged that one event shall prepare you for the next in order ; this, again, for the next ; and that the whole series, terminating only with death, shall have a happy bearing on your everlasting state. If he sees that afflictions will produce effects on your character which other means have failed to produce ; effects which are essential to your future advancement in holiness, and to your final exaltation in glory ; he may, in kindness, subject you to losses of property, of reputation, of health, of friends. He may thus detach your affections from an unsatisfying world, and promote in you that *spiritual-mindedness, which is life and peace*. By these *light afflictions, which endure but for a moment, he may work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*.

There is another view of this subject which leads to the same conclusion. Your chastisements are, indeed, on account of your sins ; but they bear no proportion to the guilt of those sins. *He hath not dealt with you*

after your sins ; nor rewarded you after your iniquities. They are, therefore, corrective, and not penal ; sent *for your profit*, not for your destruction. They are manifestations of that love which will save you ; not of that wrath which will consume you. You have judgment, it is true, but not *without mercy* ; your cup is bitter, indeed, but not without consolation ; he afflicts you, but he does not forsake you ; he sustains you under all your trials. *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.* You may, therefore, view tribulation, as Paul did, as *pouring forth* the love of God into your heart, that is, furnishing clear and satisfactory proof of His love to you.

This conviction, founded as it is on scriptural evidence, is calculated to exert a transforming influence on the heart and life. It will warm the coldest bosom with love to God ; for *we love him, because he first loved us.* This love in the heart will be a motive to cheerful obedience : for *this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.* It will suppress every rebellious feeling, silence every impatient murmur under the trials of life, and sustain and comfort you in *the valley of the shadow of death* ; and finally raise you to that world, where *there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.*

REMARKS.

1. In the light of this subject, we see the reason, why so many instances of affliction fail to produce any good and lasting effect. They are not viewed in a proper light, nor received with a right spirit. By multitudes the agency of God is not acknowledged in them. They are traced back to the operation of natural causes, or of human agency, and no further ; no divine hand is seen controlling these subordinate agencies. You might as soon expect the child to be benefited by correction, when its views extend no further than the rod, with which that correction is given, as that those can be benefited by afflictions, who do not acknowledge in them the hand of God. Such men, as it regards their afflictions, are **ATHEISTS**, *without God in the world.* Those who are determined to persevere in transgression, have no correct views of sin. In their own opinion, their guilt is too small to deserve any severe reprehension. In the hour of distress their spirits are disquieted, and break forth in impatient exclamations, which, like the groans and cries of irrational animals, are strong indications of pain and suffering, but have no other meaning. Afflictions do not answer the purpose of a mirror, reflecting on their view their own guilt. Such hearts resist the tendency of afflictions to do good. As

the hand of God is not acknowledged in them, they are considered as coming without design, either good or bad; and especially without any design to lead them to repentance. Nor is there, in such men, the slightest desire that their sufferings should issue in reformation. The spirit of prayer is an alien from all the impenitent. They may use the name of God, indeed; but it is only as a mere exclamation, savouring more of profaneness than of prayer. If they direct their desires for relief to God, it is not with the purpose of spending future life in his service, but of returning to their sinful pleasures. Let all such hear the warning voice of God:—*He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.* Which leads me to remark,

2. This subject furnishes solemn reproof and warning to such as have experienced affliction, and yet have not repented. Have you not found that the cup is bitter? This bitterness is the genuine extract of your own sins, prepared and given, that by this foretaste you might be admonished and repent. With the admonition came this timely and affectionate warning; *Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.* Those who perish, will find—not a single cup of bitterness—but *an horrible tempest*—a deluge of divine, unmingled wrath. Is it no encouragement, that, instead of being doomed to destruction, you have been spared and preserved? preserved, too, that you might have *space for repentance*. Surely this kindness is encouraging. Instead of destruction, God has sent you afflictions; light, when compared with your guilt; short, when compared with eternity. Do you still wait for invitation? God the Father, who afflicts you, and who afflicted his beloved Son for your sake, invites you; Jesus Christ, who died for sinners, invites you; *the Spirit*, the Comforter, *says, Come*; and this would be the language, could you hear their voice, of *the spirits of just men made perfect*, as well as of the whole Church on earth. How deeply interesting is your situation! The *next* affliction may decide your eternal destiny. Harken then to the voice of God; *Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto you; I will make known my words unto you. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those that put their trust in Him.*

Lastly. This subject affords instruction and peculiar encouragement to Christians. You must not expect to escape the chastisements of your Father; he will give you this proof of your adoption into his family. During your successive trials, you may discover the latent evils of your heart,

the weakness of your religious principles and affections, the defects of your character. These discoveries might not be made in prosperity; and yet they are important to your progress in the divine life. They teach you to be more watchful, more humble, more earnest in prayer for divine aid; they render more precious to your heart Jesus, and his atoning blood, *which cleanseth from all sin*. Then bear every loss, endure every suffering, with filial resignation. It is your Father who afflicts. Cherish the spirit, and you may then use the language of the Saviour: *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

Those who wear the white robes in heaven, *came out of great tribulation*. *Faint not, when you are rebuked of your Father*; these are the rebukes of infinite wisdom and kindness, intended to invigorate the pulse of devout affection in the heart. *Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down*. Adore the Wisdom, which has so arranged the events of life, that *all things shall work together for good to them that love God*. Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*. And brethren, if it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the CAPTAIN of their salvation perfect through SUFFERINGS,—let us never wonder, if WE, bearing about in our body, the dying of the Lord Jesus—must through MUCH TRIBULATION enter into the kingdom of God.

Let us rather, with the apostle, *glory in tribulations*. For tribulation *worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed*: For in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God; that he may exalt you in due time*. Fear not trials by the way: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Fear not death: for if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, he that raised Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit, that dwelleth in you. And when, from the Judgment scene, they, who have despised reproof and received all their good things in this life, shall descend to make their everlasting bed in hell,—you, who have chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, shall ascend triumphant, to dwell with Abraham, and with Abraham's God and the Lamb, for ever and ever.