



COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

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Revised: February 14, 2005





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Introduction

The work unto which the servant of Christ is called is many-sided. Not only is he to preach the Gospel to the unsaved, to feed God's people with knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15), and to take up the stumbling stone out of their way (Isa. 57:14), but he is also charged to "cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression" (Isa. 58:1 and cf. 1 Tim. 4:2). While another important part of his commission is stated in, "Comfort ye, My people, said your God" (Isa. 40:1).

What an honorable title, "My people!" What an assuring relationship: "your God!" What a pleasant task: "comfort ye My people!" A threefold reason may be suggested for the duplicating of the charge. First, because sometimes the souls of believers refuse to be comforted (Ps. 77:2), and the consolation needs to be repeated. Second, to press this duty the more emphatically upon the preacher's heart, that he need not be sparing in administering cheer. Third, to assure us how heartily desirous God himself is that His people should be of good cheer (Phil. 4:4).

God has a "people," the objects of His special favour: a company whom He has taken into such intimate relationship unto Himself that He calls them "My people." Often they are disconsolate: because of their natural corruption's, the temptations of Satan, the cruel treatment of the world, the low state of Christ's cause upon earth. The "God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3) is very tender of them, and it is His revealed will that His servants should bind up the broken-hearted and pour the balm of Gilead into their wounds. What cause have we to exclaim "Who is a God like unto Thee!" (Micah 7:18), who has provided for the comfort of those who were rebels against His government and transgressors of His Law.

May it please Him to use His Word as expounded in this book to speak peace to afflicted souls today, and the glory shall be His alone.

—A. W. Pink, 1952





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 1

No Condemnation

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus"

Romans 8:1

"There is therefore now no condemnation." The eighth chapter of the epistle to the Romans concludes the first section of that wonderful epistle. Its opening word "Therefore" ("There is" is in italics, because supplied by the translators) may be viewed in a twofold way. First, it connects with all that has been said from 3:21. An inference is now deduced from the whole of the preceding discussion, an inference which was, in fact, the grand conclusion toward which the apostle had been aiming throughout the entire argument. Because Christ has been set forth "a propitiation through faith in His blood" (3:25); because He was "delivered for our offences and raised again for our justification" (4:25); because by the obedience of the One the many (believers of all ages) are "made righteous," constituted so, legally, (5:19); because believers have "died (judicially) to sin" (6:2); because they have "died" to the condemning power of the law (7:4), there is "therefore now NO CONDEMNATION."

But not only is the "therefore" to be viewed as a conclusion drawn from the whole of the previous discussion, it is also to be considered as having a close relation to what *immediately* precedes. In the second half of Romans 7 the apostle had described the painful and ceaseless conflict which is waged between the antagonistic natures in the one who has been born again, illustrating this by a reference to his own personal experiences as a Christian. Having portrayed with a master pen (himself sitting for the picture) the spiritual struggles of the child of God, the apostle now proceeds to direct attention to the Divine consolation for a condition so distressing and humiliating. The transition from the despondent tone of the seventh chapter to the triumphant language of the eighth appears startling and abrupt, yet is quite logical and natural. If it is true that to the saints of God belongs the conflict of sin and death, under whose effect they mourn, equally true is it that their deliverance from the curse and the corresponding condemnation is a victory in which they rejoice. A very striking contrast is thus pointed. In the second half of Romans 7 the apostle treats the power of sin, which operates in believers as long as they are in the world; in the opening verses of chapter eight, he speaks of the guilt of sin from which they are completely delivered the moment they are united to the Saviour by faith. Hence in 7:24 the apostle asks "Who shall deliver me" from the power of sin, but in 8:2 he says, "hath made me free," i.e. hath delivered me, from the guilt of sin.

"There is therefore now no condemnation." It is not here a question of our heart condemning us (as in

1 John 3:21), nor of us finding nothing within which is worthy of condemnation; instead, it is the far more blessed fact that God condemns not the one who has trusted in Christ to the saving of his soul. We need to distinguish sharply between subjective and objective truth; between that which is judicial and that which is experimental; otherwise, we shall fail to draw from such Scriptures as the one now before us the comfort and peace they are designed to convey. There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. "In Christ" is the believer's position before God, not his condition in the flesh. "In Adam" I was condemned (Rom. 5:12); but "in Christ" is to be forever freed from all condemnation.

"There is therefore now no condemnation." The qualifying "now" implies there was a time when Christians, before they believed, were under condemnation. This was before they died with Christ, died judicially (Gal. 2:20) to the penalty of God's righteous law. This "now," then, distinguishes between two states or conditions. By nature we were "under the (sentence of) law," but now believers are "under grace" (Rom. 6:14). By nature we were "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:2), but now we are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). Under the first covenant we were "in Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22), but now we are "in Christ" (Rom. 8:1). As believers in Christ we have everlasting life, and because of this we "shall not come into condemnation."

Condemnation is a word of tremendous import, and the better we understand it the more shall we appreciate the wondrous grace that has delivered us from its power. In the halls of a human court this is a term which falls with fearful knell upon the ear of the convicted criminal and fills the spectators with sadness and horror. But in the court of Divine Justice it is vested with a meaning and content infinitely more solemn and awe-inspiring. To that Court every member of Adam's fallen race is cited. "Conceived in sin, shapen in iniquity" each one enters this world under arrest – an indicted criminal, a rebel manacled. How, then, is it possible for such a one to escape the execution of the dread sentence? There was only one way, and that was by the removal from us of that which called forth the sentence, namely sin. Let guilt be removed and there can be "no condemnation."

Has guilt been removed, removed, we mean, from the sinner who believes? Let the Scriptures answer: "As far as the east is from the west so far hath he removed our transgressions from us" (Ps. 103:12). "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions" (Isa. 43:25). "Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back" (Isa. 38:17). "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10:17).

But how could guilt be removed? Only by it being transferred. Divine holiness could not ignore it; but Divine grace could and did transfer it. The sins of believers were transferred to Christ: "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6). "For he hath made him to be sin for us" (2 Cor. 5:21).

"There is therefore no condemnation." The "no" is emphatic. It signifies there is no condemnation whatsoever. No condemnation from the law, or on account of inward corruption, or because Satan can substantiate a charge against me; there is none from any source or for any cause at all. "No condemnation" means that none at all is possible; that none ever will be. There is no condemnation because there is no accusation (see 8:33), and there can be no accusation because there is no imputation of sin (see 4:8).

"There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." When treating of the conflict between the two natures in the believer the apostle had, in the previous chapter, spoken of himself in his own person, in order to show that the highest attainments in grace do no exempt from the internal warfare which he there describes. But here in 8:1 the apostle changes the number. He does not say, There is no condemnation to me, but "to them which are in Christ Jesus." This was most gracious of the Holy Spirit. Had the apostle spoken here in the singular number, we should have reasoned that such a blessed exemption was well suited to this honored servant of God who enjoyed such wondrous privileges; but could not apply to *us*. The Spirit of God, therefore, moved the apostle to employ the plural number here, to show that "no condemnation" is true of *all* in Christ Jesus.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." To be in Christ Jesus is to be perfectly identified with Him in the judicial reckoning and dealings of God: and it is also to be

one with Him as vitally united by faith. Immunity from condemnation does not depend in any-wise upon our "walk," but solely on our being "in Christ." "The believer is in Christ as Noah was enclosed within the ark, with the heavens darkening above him, and the waters heaving beneath him, yet not a drop of the flood penetrating his vessel, not a blast of the storm disturbing the serenity of his spirit. The believer is in Christ as Jacob was in the garment of the elder brother when Isaac kissed and blessed him. He is in Christ as the poor homicide was within the city of refuge when pursued by the avenger of blood, but who could not overtake and slay him" (Dr. Winslow, 1857). And because he is "in Christ" there is, therefore, no condemnation for him. Hallelujah!





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 2

The Christian's Assurance

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:28

How many of God's children have, through the centuries, drawn strength and comfort from this blessed verse. In the midst of trials, perplexities, and persecutions, this has been a rock beneath their feet. Though to outward sight things seemed to work against their good, though to carnal reason things appeared to be working for their ill, nevertheless, faith knew it was for otherwise. And how great the loss to those who failed to rest upon this inspired declaration: what unnecessary fears and doubtings were the consequence.

"All things work together." The first thought occurring to us is this: What a glorious Being our God be, who is able to make all things so work! What a frightful amount of evil there is in constant activity. What an almost infinite number of creatures there are in the world. What an incalculable quantity of opposing self-interests at work. What a vast army of rebels fighting against God. What hosts of super-human creatures over opposing the Lord. And yet, high above all, is GOD, in undisturbed calm, complete master of the situation. There, from the throne of His exalted majesty, He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). Stand in awe, then, before this One in whose sight "all nations are as nothing; and they are counted as less than nothing, and vanity" (Isa. 40:17). Bow in adoration before this "high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity" (Isa. 57:15). Lift high your praise unto Him who from the direct evil can educe the greatest good.

"All things work." In nature there is no such thing as a vacuum, neither is there a creature of God that fails to serve its designed purpose. Nothing is idle. Everything is energized by God so as to fulfill its intended mission. All things are laboring toward the grand end of their Creator's pleasure: all are moved at His imperative bidding.

"All things work together." They not only operate, they co-operate; they all act in perfect concert, though none but the anointed ear can catch the strains of their harmony. All things work together, not simply but conjointly, as adjunct causes and mutual helps. That is why afflictions seldom come solitary and alone. Cloud rises upon cloud: storm upon storm. As with Job, one messenger of woe was quickly succeeded by another, burdened with tidings of yet heavier sorrow. Nevertheless, even here faith may trace both the wisdom and love of God. It is the compounding of the ingredients in the recipe that constitutes its beneficent value. So with God: His dispensations not only "work," but they

"work together." So recognized the sweet singer of Israel—"He drew me out of many waters" (Psa. 18:16).

"All things work together for good to," etc. These words teach believers that no matter what may be the number nor how overwhelming the character of adverse circumstances, they are all contributing to conduct them into the possession of the inheritance provided for them in heaven. How wonderful is the providence of God in over-ruling things most disorderly, and in turning to our good things which in themselves are most pernicious! We marvel at His mighty power which holds the heavenly bodies in their orbits; we wonder at the continually recurring seasons and the renewal of the earth; but this is not nearly so marvelous as His bringing good out of evil in all the complicated occurrences of human life, and making even the power and malice of Satan, with the naturally destructive tendency of his works, to minister good for His children.

"All things work together for good." This must be so for three reasons. First, because all things are under the absolute control of the Governor of the universe. Second, because God desires our good, and nothing but our good. Third, because even Satan himself cannot touch a hair of our heads without God's permission, and then only for our further good. Not all things are good in themselves, nor in their tendencies; but God makes all things work for our good. Nothing enters our life by blind chance: nor are they any accidents. Everything is being moved by God, with this end in view, our good. Everything being subservient to God's eternal purpose, works blessing to those marked out for conformity to the image of the Firstborn. All suffering, sorrow, loss, are used by our Father to minister to the benefit of the His elect.

"To them that love God." This is the grand distinguishing feature of every true Christian. The reverse marks all the unregenerate. But the saints are those who love God. Their creeds may differ in minor details; their ecclesiastical relations may vary in outward form; their gifts and graces may be very unequal; yet, in this particular there is an essential unity. They all believe in Christ, they all love God. They love Him for the gift of the Saviour: they love Him as a Father in whom they may confide: they love Him for His personal excellencies – His holiness, wisdom, faithfulness. They love Him for His conduct: for what He withholds and for what He grants: for what He rebukes and for what He approves. They love Him even for the rod that disciplines, knowing that He doth all things well. There is nothing in God, and there is nothing from God, for which the saints do not love Him. And of this they are all assured, "We love Him because He first loved us."

"To them that love God." But, alas, how little I love God! I so frequently mourn my lack of love, and chide myself for the coldness of my heart. Yes, there is so much love of self and love of the world, that sometimes I seriously question if I have any real love for God at all. but is not my very desire to love God a good symptom? Is not my very grief that I love Him so little a sure evidence that I do not hate Him? The presence of a hard and ungrateful heart has been mourned over by the saints of all ages. "Love to God is a heavenly aspiration, that is ever kept in check by the drag and restraint of an earthly nature; and from which we shall not be unbound till the soul has made its escape from the vile body, and cleared its unfettered way to the realm of light and liberty" (Dr. Chalmers).

"Who are called." The word "called" is never, in the New Testament Epistles, applied to those who are the recipients of a mere external invitation of the Gospel. The term always signifies an inward and effectual call. It was a call over which we had no control, either in originating or frustrating it. So in Romans 1:6,7 and many other passages: "Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ: to all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called saints." Has this call reached *you*, my reader? Ministers have called you: the Gospel has called you, conscience has called you: but has the Holy Spirit called you with an inward and irresistible call? Have you been spiritually called from darkness to light, from death to life, from the world to Christ, from self to God? It is a matter of the greatest moment that you should know whether you have been truly called of God. Has, then, the thrilling, life-giving music of that call sounded and reverberated through all the chambers of your soul? But how may I be sure that I have received such a call? There is one thing right here in our text which should enable you to ascertain. They who have been efficaciously called, love God. Instead of hating Him, they now

esteem Him; instead of fleeing from Him in terror, they now seek Him; instead of caring not whether their conduct honored Him; their deepest desire now is to please and glorify Him.

"According to His purpose." The call is not according to the merits of men, but according to the Divine purpose: "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to this own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). The design of the Holy Spirit in bringing in this last clause is to show that the reason some men love God and others do not is to be attributed solely to the mere sovereignty of God: it is not for anything in themselves, but due alone to His distinguishing grace.

There is also a practical value in this last clause. The doctrines of grace are intended for a further purpose than that of making up a creed. One main design of them is to move the affections; and more especially to reawaken that affection to which the heart oppressed with fears, or weighed down with cares, is wholly insufficient—even the love of God. That this love may flow perennially from our hearts, there must be a constant recurring to that which inspired it and which is calculated to increase it; just as to rekindle your admiration of a beautiful scene or picture, you would return again to gaze upon it. It is on this principle that so much stress is laid in Scripture on keeping the truths which we believe in memory: "By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you" (1 Cor. 15:2). "I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance," said the apostle (2 Pet. 3:1). "Do this in remembrance of me" said the Saviour. It is, then, by going back in memory to that hour when, despite our wretchedness and utter unworthiness, God called us, that our affection will be kept fresh. It is by recalling the wondrous grace that then reached out to a hell-deserving sinner and snatched you as a brand from the burning, that your heart will be drawn out in adoring gratitude. And it is by discovering this was due alone to the sovereign and eternal "purpose" of God that you were called when so many others are passed by, that your love for Him will be deepened.

Returning to the opening words of our text, we find the apostle (as voicing the normal experience of the saints) declares, "We know that all things work together for good." It is something more than a speculative belief. That all things work together for good is even more than a fervent desire. It is not that we merely hope that all things will so work, but that we are fully assured all things do so work. The knowledge here spoken of is spiritual, not intellectual. It is a knowledge rooted in our hearts, which produces confidence in the truth of it. It is the knowledge of faith, which receives everything from the benevolent hand of Infinite Wisdom. It is true that we do not derive much comfort from this knowledge when out of fellowship with God. Nor will it sustain us when faith is not in operation. But when we are in communion with the Lord, when in our weakness we do lean hard upon Him, then is this blessed assurance ours: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee" (Isa. 26:3).

A striking exemplification of our text is supplied by the history of Jacob—one whom in several respects each of us closely resembles. Heavy and dark was the cloud which settled upon him. Severe was the test, and fearful the trembling of his faith. His feet were almost gone. Hear his mournful plaint: "And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36). And yet those circumstances, which to the dim eye of his faith wore a hue so somber, were at that very moment developing and perfecting the events which were to shed around the evening of his life the halo of a glorious and cloudless sunset. All things were working together for his good! And so, troubled soul, the "much tribulation" will soon be over, and as you enter the "kingdom of God" you shall then see, no longer "through a glass darkly" but in the unshadowed sunlight of the Divine presence, that "all things" did "work together" for your personal and eternal good.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 3

Sufferings Compensated

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"

Romans 8:18

Ah, says someone, that must have been written by a man who was a stranger to suffering, or by one acquainted with nothing more trying than the milder irritations of life. Not so. These words were penned under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and by one who drank deeply of sorrow's cup, yea, by one who suffered afflictions in their acutest forms. Hear his own testimony: "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. 11:24-27).

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." This, then was the settled conviction not of one of "fortune's favorites," not of one who found life's journey a carpeted pathway, bordered with roses, but, instead, of one who was hated by his kinsmen, who was oft-times beaten black and blue, who knew what it was to be deprived not only of the comforts but the bare necessities of life. How, then shall we account for his cheery optimism? What was the secret of his elevation over his troubles and trials?

The first thing with which the sorely-tried apostle comforted himself was that the sufferings of the Christian are but of brief duration—they are limited to "this present time." This is in sharp and solemn contrast from the sufferings of the Christ-rejector. His sufferings will be eternal: forever tormented in the Lake of Fire. But far different is it for the believer. His sufferings are restricted to this life on earth, which is compared to a flower that cometh forth and is cut down, to a shadow that fleeth and continueth not. A few short years at most, and we shall pass from this vale of tears into that blissful country where groans and sighs are never heard.

Second, the apostle looked forward with the eye of faith to "the glory." To Paul "the glory" was something more than a beautiful dream. It was a practical reality, exerting a powerful influence upon him, consoling him in the warmest and most trying hours of adversity. This is one of the real tests of faith. The Christian has a solid support in the time of affliction, when the unbeliever has not. The child of God knows that in his Father's presence there is "fullness of joy," and that at His right hand

there are "pleasures forever more." And faith lays hold of them, appropriates them, and lives in the comforting cheer of them even now. Just as Israel in the wilderness were encouraged by a sight of what awaited them in the promised land (Num. 13:23,26), so, the one who today walks by faith, and not by sight, contemplates that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, but which God by His Holy Spirit hath revealed unto us (1 Cor. 2:9,10).

Third, the apostle rejoiced in "the glory which should be revealed in us." All that this means we are not yet capable of understanding. But more than a hint has been vouchsafed us. There will be:

1. The "glory" of a perfect body. In that day this corruption shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal, immortality. That which was sown in dishonor shall be raised in glory, and that which was sown in weakness shall be raised in power. As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (1 Cor. 15:49). The content of these expressions is summarized and amplified in Phil. 3:20,21: "For our conservation is in heaven: from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

2. There will be the glory of a transformed mind. "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Cor. 13:12). O what an orb of intellectual light will be each glorified mind! What range of light will it encompass! What capability of understanding will it enjoy! Then will all mysteries be unraveled, all problems solved, all discrepancies reconciled. Then shall each truth of God's revelation, each event of His providence, each decision of His government, stand yet more transparently clear and resplendent than the sun itself. Do you, in your present quest for spiritual knowledge, mourn the darkness of your mind, the weakness of your memory, the limitations of your intellectual faculties? Then rejoice in hope of the glory that is to be revealed in you—when all your intellectual powers shall be renewed, developed, perfected, so that you shall know even as you are known.

3. Best of all, there will be the glory of perfect holiness. God's work of grace in us will then be completed. He has promised to "perfect that which concerneth us" (Psa. 138:8). Then will be the consummation of purity. We have been predestinated to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29), and when we shall see Him, "we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2). Then our minds will be no more defiled by evil imaginations, our consciences no more sullied by a sense of guilt, our affections no more ensnared by unworthy objects.

What a marvelous prospect is this! A "glory" to be revealed in me who now can scarcely reflect a solitary ray of light! In me—so wayward, so unworthy, so sinful; living so little in communion with Him who is the Father of lights! Can it be that in me this glory shall be revealed? So affirms the infallible Word of God. If I am a child of light—through being "in Him" who is the effulgence of the Father's glory—even though now dwelling amid the world's dark shades, one day I shall outshine the brightness of the firmament. And when the Lord Jesus returns to this earth, he shall "be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1:10).

Finally, the apostle here weighed the "sufferings" of this present time over against the "glory" which shall be revealed in us, and as he did so he declared that the one is "not worthy to be compared" with the other. The one is transient, the other eternal. As, then, there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite, so there is no comparison between the sufferings of earth and the glory of heaven.

One second of glory will outweigh a lifetime of suffering. What were the years of toil, of sickness, of battling with poverty, of sorrow in any or every form, when compared with the glory of Immanuel's land! One draught of the river of pleasure at God's right hand, one breath of Paradise, one hour amid the blood-washed around the throne, shall more than compensate for all the tears and groans of earth. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." May the Holy Spirit enable both writer and reader to lay hold of this with appropriating faith and live in the present possession and enjoyment of it to the praise of the

glory of Divine grace.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 4

The Great Giver

"He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

Romans 8:32

The above verse supplies us with an instance of Divine logic. It contains a conclusion drawn from a premise; the premise is that God delivered up Christ for all His people, therefore everything else that is needed by them is sure to be given. There are many examples in Holy Writ of such Divine logic. "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you?" (Matt. 6:30). "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:10). "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. 7:11). So here in our text the reasoning is irresistible and goes straight to the understanding and heart.

Our text tells of the gracious character of our loving God as interpreted by the gift of His Son. And this, not merely for the instruction of our minds, but for the comfort and assurance of our hearts. The gift of His own Son is God's guarantee to His people of all needed blessings. The greater includes the less; His unspeakable spiritual gift is the pledge of all needed temporal mercies. Note in our text four things:

1. The Father's Costly Sacrifice.

This brings before us a side of the truth upon which I fear we rarely meditate. We delight to think of the wondrous love of Christ, whose love was stronger than death, and who deemed no suffering too great for His people. But what must it have meant to the heart of the Father when His Beloved left His Heavenly Home! God is love, and nothing is so sensitive as love. I do not believe that Deity is emotionless, the Stoic as represented by the Schoolmen of the middle ages. I believe the sending forth of the Son was something which the heart of the Father felt, that it was a real sacrifice on His part.

Weigh well then the solemn fact which premises the sure promise that follows: God "spared not His own Son"! Expressive, profound, melting words! Knowing full well, as He only could, all that redemption involved—the Law rigid and unbending, insisting upon perfect obedience and demanding death for its transgressors. Justice, stern and inexorable, requiring full satisfaction, refusing to "clear the guilty." Yet God did not withhold not the only suitable Sacrifice.

God "spared not His own Son," though knowing full well the humiliation and ignominy of Bethlehem's manger, the ingratitude of men, the not having where to lay His head, the hatred and opposition of the ungodly, the enmity and bruising of Satan—yet He did not hesitate. God did not relax ought of the holy requirements of His throne, nor abate one whit of the awful curse. No, He "spared not His own Son." The utmost farthing was exacted; the last dregs in the cup of wrath must be drained. Even when His Beloved cried from the Garden, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," God "spared" Him not. Even when vile hands had nailed Him to the tree, God cried "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd" (Zech. 13:7).

2. The Father's Gracious Design.

"But delivered him up for *us* all." Here we are told why the Father made such a costly sacrifice; He spared not Christ, that He might spare us! It was not want of love to the Saviour, but wondrous, matchless, fathomless love for us! O marvel at the wondrous design of the Most High. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Verily, such love passeth knowledge. Moreover, He made this costly sacrifice not grudgingly or reluctantly, but freely out of love.

Once God had said to rebellious Israel, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hosea 11:8). Infinitely more cause had He to say this of the Holy One, His well-beloved, the One in whom His soul daily delighted. Yet, He "delivered Him up"—to shame and spitting, to hatred and persecution, to suffering and death itself. And He delivered Him up for us—descendants of rebellious Adam, depraved and defiled, corrupt and sinful, vile and worthless! For us who had gone into the "far country" of alienation from Him, and there spent our substance in riotous living. Yes, "for us" who had gone astray like sheep, each one turning to "his own way." For us "who were by nature the children of wrath, even as others," in whom there dwelt no good thing. For us who had rebelled against our Creator, hated His holiness, despised His Word, broken His commandments, resisted His Spirit. For us who richly deserved to be cast into the everlasting burnings and receive those wages which our sins so fully earned.

Yes, for thee fellow Christian, who art sometimes tempted to interpret your afflictions as tokens of God's hardness; who regard your poverty as a mark of His neglect, and your seasons of darkness as evidences of His desertion. O, confess to Him now the wickedness of such dishonoring doubtings, and never again question the love of Him who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

Faithfulness demands that I should point out the qualifying pronoun in our text. It is not God "delivered him up for all," but "for *us* all." "This is definitely defined in the verses which immediately precede. In v. 31 the question is asked, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" In v. 30 this "us" is defined as those whom God did predestinate and has "called" and "justified." The "us" are the high favorites of heaven, the objects of sovereign grace. God's elect. And yet in themselves they are, by nature and practice, deserving of nothing but wrath. But yet, thank God, it is "us all" —the worst as well as the best, the five-hundred-pounds-debtor equally as much as the fifty-pence-debtor.

3. The Spirit's Blessed Inference.

Ponder well the glorious "conclusion" which the Spirit of God here draws from the wondrous fact stated in the first part of our text, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." How conclusive and how comforting is the inspired reasoning of the apostle. Arguing from the greater to the less, He proceeds to assure the believer of God's readiness to also freely bestow all needed blessings. The gift of His own Son, so ungrudgingly and unreservedly bestowed, is the pledge of every other needed mercy.

Here is the unfailing guaranty and talisman of perpetual reassurance to the drooping spirit of the tried believer. If God has done the greater, will He leave the less undone? Infinite love can never change. The love that spared not Christ cannot fail its objects nor begrudge any needed blessings. The sad thing is that our hearts dwell upon what we have not, instead of upon what we do have. Therefore the

Spirit of God would here still our restless thoughts and quiet the ignorant discontent with a soul-satisfying knowledge of the truth; by reminding us not only of the reality of our interest in the love of God, but also of the extent of that blessing that flows from that love.

Weigh well what is involved in the logic of this verse. First, the great Gift was given unasked; will He not bestow others for the asking? None of us supplicated God to send forth His Beloved; yet He sent Him! Now, we may come to the throne of grace and there present our requests in the virtuous and all-efficacious name of Christ.

Second, the one great Gift cost Him much; will He not then bestow the lesser gifts which cost Him nothing save the delight of giving! If a friend were to give me a valuable picture, would he begrudge the necessary paper and string to wrap it in? Or if a loved one made me a present of a precious jewel, would he refuse a little box to carry it in? How much less will He who spared not His own Son, withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly.

Third, the one Gift was bestowed when we were enemies; will not then God be gracious to us now that we have been reconciled and are His friends? If He had designs of mercy for us while we were yet in our sins, how much more will He regard us favorably now that we have been cleansed from all sin by the precious blood of His Son!

4. The Comforting Promise.

Observe the tense that is used here. It is not "how has he not with him also freely given us all things," though this is also true, for even now are we "heirs of God" (Rom. 8:17). But our text goes further than this: "How shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" The second half of this wondrous verse contains something more than a record of the past; it supplies reassuring confidence both for the present and for the future. No time-limits are to be set upon this "shall." Both now in the present and forever and ever in the future God shall manifest Himself as the great Giver. Nothing for His glory and for our good will He withhold. The same God who delivered up Christ for us all is "without variableness or shadow of turning" (Jas. 1:17).

Mark the manner in which God gives: "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" God does not have to be coaxed; there is no reluctance in Him for us to overcome. He is ever more willing to give than we are to receive. Again; He is under no obligations to any; if He were, He would bestow of necessity, instead of giving "freely." Ever remember that He has a perfect right to do with His own as He pleases. He is free to give to whom He wills.

The word "freely" not only signifies that God is under no constraint, but also means that He makes no charge for His gifts, He places no price on His blessings. God is no retailer of mercies or barterer of good things; if He were, justice would require Him to charge exactly what each blessing was worth, and then who among the children of Adam could find the wherewithal? No, blessed be His name, God's gifts are "without money and without price" (Isa. 55:1), unmerited and unearned.

Finally, rejoice over the comprehensiveness of this promise: "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The Holy Spirit would here regale us with the extent of God's wondrous grant. What is it you need, fellow Christian? Is it pardon? Then has He not said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)? Is it grace? Then has He not said, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8)? Is it a "thorn in the flesh"? this too will be given "there was given to me a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12:7). Is it rest? Then heed the Saviour's invitation, "Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28). Is it comfort? Is He not the God of all comfort (2 Cor. 1:3)?

"How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Is it temporal mercies that the reader is in need of? Are your circumstances adverse so that you are filled with dismal forebodings? Does your cruse of oil and barrel of meal look as though they will soon be quite empty? Then spread your need before God, and do it in simple childlike faith. Think you that He will bestow the greater blessings of

grace and deny the lesser ones of Providence? No, "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19). True, He has not promised to give all you ask, for we often ask "amiss." Mark the qualifying clause: "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" We often desire things which would come in between us and Christ if they were granted, therefore does God in His faithfulness withhold them. Here then are four things which should bring comfort to every renewed heart. (1) The Father's costly sacrifice. Our God is a giving God and no good thing does He withhold from them that walk uprightly. (2) The Father's gracious design. It was for us that Christ was delivered up; it was our highest and eternal interests that He had at heart. (3) The Spirit's infallible inference. The greater includes the less; the unspeakable Gift guarantees the bestowment of all other needed favors. (4) The comforting promise. Its sure foundation, its present and future scope, its blessed extent, are for the assuring of our hearts and the peace of our minds. May the Lord add His blessing to this little meditation.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 5

The Divine Rememberer

"Who remembered us in our low estate: for His mercy endureth forever"

Psalm 136:23

"Who remembered us." This is in striking and blessed contrast from our forgettings of Him. Like every other faculty of our beings, the memory has been affected by the Fall and bears on it the marks of depravity. This is seen from its power to retain what is worthless and the difficulty encountered to hold fast that which is good. A foolish nursery-rhyme or song heard in youth, is carried with us to the grave; a helpful sermon is forgotten within twenty-four hours! But most tragic and solemn of all is the ease with which we forget God and His countless mercies. But, blessed be His name, God never forgets us. He is the faithful Rememberer.

We were very much impressed when, on consulting the concordance, we found that the first five times the word "remember" is used in Scripture, in each case it is connected with God. "And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark" (Gen. 8:1). "And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth" (Gen. 9:16). "And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt" (Gen. 19:29), etc. The first time it is used of man we read, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgat him" (Gen. 40:23)!

The historical reference here is to the children of Israel, when they were toiling amid the brick-kilns of Egypt. Truly they were in a "low estate": a nation of slaves, groaning beneath the lash of merciless task-masters, oppressed by a godless and heartless king. But when there was none other eye to pity, Jehovah looked upon them and heard their cries of distress. He "remembered" them in their low estate. And why? Exodus 2:24,25 tells us: "And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto it."

Our text is not to be limited to the literal seed of Abraham: it has reference to the whole "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). The saints of this present Day of salvation also unite in saying, "Who remembered us in our low estate." How "low" was our "estate" by nature! As fallen creatures we lay in our misery and wretchedness, unable to deliver or help ourselves. But, in wondrous grace, God took pity on us. His strong arm reached down and rescued us. He came to where we lay, saw us, and had compassion

on us (Luke 10:33). Therefore can each Christian say, "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings" (Psa. 40:2).

And why did He "remember" us? The very word "remember" tells of previous thoughts of love and mercy towards us. As it was with the children of Israel in Egypt, so it was with us in our ruined condition by nature. He "remembered" His covenant, that covenant into which He had entered with our Surety from everlasting. As we read in Titus 1:2 of eternal life "which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world was. Promised to Christ, that He would give that eternal life to those for whom our covenant Head should transact. Yes, God "remembered" that He had "chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4), therefore did He, in due time, bring us from death unto life.

Yet this blessed word goes beyond our initial experience of God's saving grace. Historically, our text refers not only to God remembering His people while they were in Egypt, but also, as the context shows, while they were in the Wilderness, on their way to the Promised Land. Israel's experiences in the desert but foreshadow the saints' walk through this hostile world. And Jehovah's "remembrance" of them, manifested in the daily supply of their every need, adumbrated the rich provisions of His grace for us while we journey to our Home on High. Our present estate, here on earth, is but a lowly one, for we do not now reign as kings. Yet, is our God ever mindful of us, and hourly does He minister to us.

"Who remembered us in our low estate." Not always are we permitted to dwell upon the mount. As in the natural world, so in our experiences. Bright and sunny days give place to dark and cloudy ones: summer is followed by winter. Disappointments, losses, afflictions, bereavements came our way, and we were brought low. And oftentimes just when we seemed to most need the comfort of friends, they failed us. Those we counted on to help, forgot us. But, even then, there was One "who remembered us" and showed Himself to be "the same yesterday and today and forever," and then did we prove afresh that "His mercy endureth forever" (1 Chron. 16:34)

"Who remembered us in our low estate." There are some who may read these lines that will think of another application of these words: namely, the time when you left your first love, when your heart grew cold, and your life became worldly. When you were in a sadly back-slidden state. Then, indeed, was your estate a low one; yet even then did our faithful God "remember" thee. Yes, each of us has cause to say with the Psalmist "He restoreth my soul; He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" (23:3).

"Who remembered us in our low estate." Still another application of these words may be made, namely, to the last great crisis of the saint, as he passes out of this world. As the vital spark of the body grows dim and nature fails, then too is our "estate" low. But then also the Lord remembereth us, for "His mercy endureth for ever. Man's extremity is but God's opportunity. His strength is made perfect in our weakness. It is then that he "remembers" us by making good His comforting promises, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee, yea, I will help thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness" (Isa. 41:10).

"Who remembered us in our low estate." Surely this text will furnish us with suitable words to express our thanksgiving when we are at Home, present with the Lord. How we shall then praise Him for His covenant faithfulness, His matchless grace, and His loving kindness, for having "remembered us in our low estate! Then shall we know, even as we are known. Our very memories will be renewed, perfected, and we shall remember all the way the Lord our God hath led us" (Deut. 8:2), recalling with gratitude and joy His faithful remembrances, acknowledging with adoration that "His mercy endureth for ever."





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 6

Tried by Fire

"But he knoweth the way that I take; when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold"

Job 23:10

Job here corrects himself. In the beginning of the chapter we find him saying: "Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning" (vv. 1, 2). Poor Job felt that his lot was unbearable. But he recovers himself. He checks his hasty outburst and revises his impetuous decision. How often we all have to correct ourselves! Only One has ever walked this earth who never had occasion to do so.

Job here *comforts himself*. He could not fathom the mysteries of Providence but God knew the way he took. Job had diligently sought the calming presence of God, but, for a time, in vain. Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him" (vv. 8, 9). But he consoled himself with this blessed fact—though I cannot see God, what is a thousand times better, He can see me—"He knoweth." One above is neither unmindful nor indifferent to our lot. If He notices the fall of a sparrow, if He counts the hairs of our heads, of course "He knows" the way that I take.

Job here enunciates *a noble view of life*. How splendidly optimistic he was! He did not allow his afflictions to turn him into a skeptic. He did not permit the sore trials and troubles through which he was passing to overwhelm him. He looked at the bright side of the dark cloud—God's side, hidden from sense and reason. He took a long view of life. He looked beyond the immediate "fiery trials" and said that the outcome would be gold refined. "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold." Three great truths are expressed here: let us briefly consider each separately.

1. *The Divine Knowledge of My Life.*

"He knoweth the way that I take." The omniscience of God is one of the wondrous attributes of Deity. "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings" (Job 34:21). "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good (Prov. 15:3). Spurgeon said, "One of the greatest tests of experimental religion is, What is my relationship to God's omniscience?" What is your relationship to it, dear reader? How does it affect you? Does it distress or comfort you? Do you shrink from the thought of God knowing all about your way? perhaps, a lying, selfish, hypocritical way! To the sinner this is a terrible thought. He denies it, or if not, he seeks to forget it. But to the

Christian, here is real comfort. How cheering to remember that my Father knows all about my trials, my difficulties, my sorrows, my efforts to glorify Him. Precious truth for those in Christ, harrowing thought for all out of Christ, that the way I am taking is fully known to and observed by God.

"He knoweth the way that I take." Men did not know the way that Job took. He was grievously misunderstood, and for one with a sensitive temperament to be misunderstood, is a sore trial. His very friends thought he was a hypocrite. They believed he was a great sinner and being punished by God. Job knew that he was an unworthy saint, but not a hypocrite. He appealed against their censorious verdict. "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold." Here is instruction for us when like circumstanced. Fellow-believer, your fellow-men, yes, and your fellow Christians, may misunderstand you, and misinterpret God's dealings with you: but console yourself with the blessed fact that the omniscient One knows.

"He knoweth the way that I take." In the fullest sense of the word Job himself did not know the way that he took, nor do any of us. Life is profoundly mysterious, and the passing of the years offer no solution. Nor does philosophizing help us. Human volition is a strange enigma. Consciousness bears witness that we are more than automatons. The power of choice is exercised by us in every move we make. And yet it is plain that our freedom is not absolute. There are forces brought to bear upon us, both good and evil, which are beyond our power to resist. Both heredity and environment exercise powerful influences upon us. Our surroundings and circumstances are factors which cannot be ignored. And what of providence which "shapes our destinies"? Ah, how little do we know the way which we "take." Said the prophet, "O Lord I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23). Here we enter the realm of mystery, and it is idle to deny it. Better far to acknowledge with the wise man, "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" (Prov. 20:24).

In the narrower sense of the term Job did know the way which he took. What that "way" was he tells us in the next two verses. "My foot hath held his steps. his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:11, 12). The way Job chose was the best way, the scriptural way, God's way—"His way." What do you think of that way, dear reader? Was it not a grand selection? Ah, not only "patient," but wise Job! Have you made a similar choice? Can you say, "My foot hath held his steps. his way have I kept, and not declined?" (v. 11). If you can, praise Him for His enabling grace. If you cannot, confess with shame your failure to appropriate His all-sufficient grace. Get down on your knees at once, and unbosom yourself to God. Hide and keep back nothing. Remember it is written "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Does not verse 12 explain your failure, my failure, dear reader? Is it not because we have not trembled before God's commandments, and because we have so lightly esteemed His Word, that we have "declined" from His way! Then let us, even now, and daily, seek grace from on high to heed His commandments and hide His Word in our hearts.

"He knoweth the way that I take." Which way are you taking?—the Narrow Way which leadeth unto life, or 'the Broad Road that leadeth to destruction? Make certain on this point, dear friend. Scripture declares, "So every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). But you need not be deceived or uncertain. The Lord declared, "I am The Way" (John 14:6).

2. *Divine Testing*

"When he hath tried me." "The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts" (Prov. 17:3). This was God's way with Israel of old, and it is His way with Christians now. Just before Israel entered Canaan, as Moses reviewed their history since leaving Egypt, he said, "And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what as in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no" (Deut. 8:2). In the same way God tries, tests, proves, humbles us.

"When he hath tried me." If we realized this more, we should bear up better in the hour of affliction

and be more patient under suffering. The daily irritations of life, the things which annoy so much—what is their meaning? why are they permitted? Here is the answer: God is "trying" you! That is the explanation (in part, at least) of that disappointment, that crushing of your earthly hopes, that great loss; God was, is, *testing you*. God is trying your temper, your courage, your faith, your patience, your love, your fidelity.

"When he hath tried me." How frequently God's saints see only Satan as the cause of their troubles. They regard the great enemy as responsible for much of their sufferings. But there is no comfort for the heart in this. We do not deny that the Devil does bring about much that harasses us. But above Satan is the Lord Almighty! The Devil cannot touch a hair of our heads without God's permission, and when he is allowed to disturb and distract us, even then it is only God using him to "try" us. Let us learn then, to look beyond all secondary causes and instruments to that One who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). This is what Job did.

In the opening chapter of the book which bears his name we find Satan obtaining permission to afflict God's servant. He used the Sabeans to destroy Job's herds (v. 15): he sent the Chaldeans to slay his servants (v. 17): he caused a great wind to kill his children (v. 19). And what was Job's response? This: he exclaimed "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (1:21). Job looked beyond the human agents, beyond Satan who employed them, to the Lord who controls all. He realized that it was the Lord trying him. We get the same thing in the New Testament. To the suffering saints at Smyrna John wrote, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried" (Rev. 2:10). Their being cast into prison was simply God trying them.

How much we lose by forgetting this! What a stay for the trouble-tossed heart to know that no matter what form the testing may take, no matter what the agent which annoys, it is God who is "trying" His children. What a perfect example the Saviour sets us. When He was approached in the garden and Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the Saviour said, "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). Men were about to vent their awful rage upon Him, the Serpent would bruise His heel, but He looks above and beyond them. Dear reader, no matter how bitter its contents, (infinitely less than that which the Saviour drained) let us accept the cup as from the Father's hand.

In some moods we are apt to question the wisdom and right of God to try us. So often we murmur at His dispensations. Why should God lay such an intolerable burden upon me? Why should others be spared their loved ones, and mine taken? Why should health and strength, perhaps the gift of sight, be denied me? The first answer to all such questions is, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"! It is wicked insubordination for any creature to call into question the dealings of the great Creator. "Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" (Rom. 9:20). How earnestly each of us need to cry unto God, that His grace may silence our rebellious lips and still the tempest within our desperately wicked hearts!

But to the humble soul which bows in submission before the sovereign dispensations of the all-wise God, Scripture affords some light on the problem. This light may not satisfy reason, but it will bring comfort and strength when received in child-like faith and simplicity. In I Pet. 1:6 we read; "Wherein (God's salvation) ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (or trials): That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Note three things here. First, there is a needs-be for the trial of faith. Since God says it, let us accept it. Second, this trying of faith is precious, far more so than of gold. It is precious to God (cf. Ps. 116:15) and will yet be so to us. Third, the present trial has in view the future. Where the trial has been meekly endured and bravely borne, there will be a grand reward at the appearing of our Redeemer.

Again, in 1 Peter 4:12, 13 we are told: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are

partakers of Christ's sufferings: that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." The same thoughts are expressed here as in the previous passage. There is a needs-be for our "trials" and therefore we are to think them not strange—we should expect them. And, too, there is again the blessed outlook of being richly recompensed at Christ's return. Then there is the added word that not only should we meet these trials with faith's fortitude, but we should rejoice in them, inasmuch as we are permitted to have fellowship in "the sufferings of Christ." He, too, suffered: sufficient then, for the disciple to be as his Master.

"When he hath tried me." Dear Christian reader, there are no exceptions. God had only one Son without sin, but never one without sorrow. Sooner or later, in one form or another, trial-sore and heavy—will be our lot. "And sent Timotheus our brother . . . to establish you, and comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto" (I Thess. 3:2, 3). And again it is written, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). It has been so in every age. Abram was "tried," tried severely. So, too, were Joseph, Jacob. Moses, David, Daniel, the Apostles, etc.

3. *The Ultimate Issue*

"I shall come forth as gold." Observe the tense here. Job did not imagine that he was pure gold already. "I shall come forth as gold," he declared. He knew full well that there was yet much dross in him. He did not boast that he was already perfect. Far from it. In the final chapter of his book we find him saying, "I abhor myself" (42:6). And well he might: and well may we. As we discover that in our flesh there dwelleth "no good thing," as we examine ourselves and our ways in the light of God's Word and behold our innumerable failures, as we think of our countless sins, both of omission and commission, good reason have we for abhorring ourselves. Ah, Christian reader, there is much dross about us. But it will not ever be thus.

"I shall come forth as gold." Job did not say, "When he hath tried me I may come forth as gold," or "I hope to come forth as gold," but with full confidence and positive assurance he declared, "I shall come forth as gold." But how did he know this? How can we be sure of the happy issue? Because the Divine purpose cannot fail. He which hath begun a good work in us "will finish it" (Phil. 1:6). How can we be sure of the happy issue? Because the Divine promise is sure: "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me" (Ps. 138:8). Then be of good cheer, tried and troubled one. The process may be unpleasant and painful, but the issue is charming and sure.

"I shall come forth as gold." This was said by one who knew affliction and sorrow as few among the sons of men have known them. Yet despite his fiery trials he was optimistic. Let then this triumphant language be ours. "I shall come forth as gold" is not the language of carnal boasting, but the confidence of one whose mind was stayed upon God. There will be no credit to our account—the glory will all belong to the Divine Refiner (Jas. 1:12).

For the present there remain two things: first, Love is the Divine thermometer while we are in the crucible of testing—"And he shall sit (the patience of Divine grace) as a Refiner and Purifier of silver," etc. (Mal. 3:3). Second, the Lord Himself is with us in the fiery furnace, as He was with the three young Hebrews (Dan. 3:25). For the future this is sure: the most wonderful thing in heaven will not be the golden street or the golden harps, but golden souls on which is stamped the image of God—"predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son!" Praise God for such a glorious prospect, such a victorious issue, such a marvelous goal.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 7

Divine Chastisement

"Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou are rebuked of him"

Hebrews 12:5

It is of first importance that we learn to draw a sharp distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement: important for maintaining the honour and glory of God, and for the peace of mind of the Christian. The distinction is very simple, yet is it often lost sight of. God's people can never by any possibility be *punished* for their sins, for God has already punished them at the Cross. The Lord Jesus, our Blessed Substitute, suffered the full penalty of all our guilt, hence it is written "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Neither the justice nor the love of God will permit Him to again exact payment of what Christ discharged to the full. The difference between *punishment* and *chastisement* lies not in the nature of the sufferings of the afflicted: it is most important to bear this in mind. There is a threefold distinction between the two. First, the *character* in which God acts. In the former God acts as Judge, in the latter as Father. Sentence of punishment is the act of a judge, a penal sentence passed on those charged with guilt. Punishment can never fall upon the child of God in this judicial sense because his guilt was all transferred to Christ: "Who his own self bear our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24)

But while the believer's sins cannot be punished, while the Christian cannot be condemned (Rom. 8:3), yet he may be *chastised*. The Christian occupies an entirely different position from the non-Christian: he is a member of the Family of God. The relationship which now exists between him and God is that of parent and child; and as a son he must be disciplined for wrongdoing. Folly is bound up in the hearts of all God's children, and the rod is necessary to rebuke, to subdue, to humble.

The second distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement lies in the *recipients* of each. The objects of the former are His enemies. The subjects of the latter are His children. As the Judge of all the earth, God will yet take vengeance on all His foes. As the Father of His family, God maintains discipline over all His children. The one is judicial, the other parental.

A third distinction is seen in The *design* of each: the one is retributive, the other remedial. The one flows from His anger, the other from His love. Divine punishment is never sent for the good of sinners, but for the honoring of God's law and the vindicating of His government. But Divine chastisement is sent for the well-being of His children: "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our

profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:9-10).

The above distinction should at once rebuke the thoughts which are so generally entertained among Christians. When the believer is smarting under the rod let him not say, God is now punishing me for my sins. That can never be. That is most dishonoring to the blood of Christ. God is correcting thee in love, not smiting in wrath. Nor should the Christian regard the chastening of the Lord as a sort of necessary evil to which he must bow as submissively as possible. No, it proceeds from God's goodness and faithfulness, and is one of the greatest blessings for which we have to thank Him. Chastisement evidences our Divine son-ship: the father of a family does not concern himself with those on the outside: but those within he guides and disciplines to make them conform to his will. Chastisement is designed for our good, to promote our highest interests. Look beyond the rod to the All-wise hand that wields it!

The Hebrew Christians to whom this Epistle was first addressed were passing through a great fight of afflictions, and miserably were they conducting themselves. They were the little remnant out of the Jewish nation who had believed on their Messiah during the days of His public ministry, plus those Jews who had been converted under the preaching of the apostles. It is highly probable that they had expected the Messianic Kingdom would at once be set up on earth and that they would be allotted the chief places of honour in it. But the Millennium had not begun, and their own lot became increasingly bitter. They were not only hated by the Gentiles, but ostracized by their unbelieving brethren, and it became a hard matter for them to make even a bare living. Providence held a frowning face. Many who had made a profession of Christianity had gone back to Judaism and were prospering temporally. As the afflictions of the believing Jews increased, they too were sorely tempted to turn their back upon the new Faith. Had they been wrong in embracing Christianity? Was high Heaven displeased because they had identified themselves with Jesus of Nazareth? Did not their suffering go to show that God no longer regarded them with favour?

Now it is most instructive and blessed to see how the Apostle met the unbelieving reasoning of their hearts. He appealed to their own Scriptures! He reminded them of an exhortation Found in Proverbs 3:11-12, and applied it to their case. Notice, first, the words we place in italics: "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh *unto you*." This shows that the exhortations of the Old Testament were not restricted to those who lived under the old covenant: they apply with equal force and directness to those of us living under the new covenant. Let us not forget that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16) The Old Testament equally as much as the New Testament was written for our learning and admonition. Second, mark the tense of the verb in our opening text: "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh." The Apostle quoted a sentence of the Word written one thousand years previously, yet he does not say "which hath spoken," but "which speaketh." The same principle is illustrated in that sevenfold "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith (not "said") unto the churches" of Rev. 2 and 3. The Holy Scriptures are a living Word in which God is speaking today!

Consider now the words "Ye have forgotten." It was not that these Hebrew Christians were unacquainted with Proverbs 3:11 and 12, but they had let them slip. They had forgotten the Fatherhood of God and their relation of Him as His dear children. In consequence they misinterpreted both the manner and design of God's present dealings with them, they viewed His dispensation not in the light of His Love, but regarded them as signs of His displeasure or as proofs of His forgetfulness. Consequently, instead of cheerful submission, there was despondency and despair. Here is a most important lesson for us: we must interpret the mysterious providences of God not by reason or observation, but by the Word. How often we "forget" the exhortation which speaketh unto us as unto children: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."

"Unhappily there is no word in the English language which is capable of doing justice to the Greek term here. "Paideia" which is rendered "chastening" is only another form of "paidion" which signifies "young children," being the tender word that was employed by the Saviour in John 21:5 and Hebrews

2:13. One can see at a glance the direct connection which exists between the words "disciple" and "discipline": equally close in the Greek is the relation between "children" and "chastening." Son-training would be better. It has reference to God's education, nurture and discipline of His children. It is the Father's wise and loving correction.

Much chastisement comes by the rod in the hand of the Father correcting His erring child. But it is a serious mistake to confine our thoughts to this one aspect of the subject. Chastisement is by no means always the scourging of His refractive sons. Some of the saintliest of God's people, some of the most obedient of His children, have been and are the greatest sufferers. Oftentimes God's chastenings instead of being retributive are corrective. They are sent to empty us of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness: they are given to discover to us hidden transgressions, and to teach us the plague of our own hearts. Or again, chastisements are sent to strengthen our faith, to raise us to higher levels of experience, to bring us into a condition of usefulness. Still again, Divine chastisement is sent as a preventative, to keep under pride, to save us from being unduly elated over success in God's service. Let us consider, briefly, four entirely different examples.

David. In his case the rod was laid upon him for grievous sins, for open wickedness. His fall was occasioned by self-confidence and self-righteousness. If the reader will diligently compare the two Songs of David recorded in 2 Samuel 22 and 23, the one written near the beginning of his life, the other near the end, he will be struck by the great difference of spirit manifested by the writer in each. Read 2 Samuel 22:22-25 and you will not be surprised that God suffered him to have such a fall. Then turn to chapter 23, and mark the blessed change. At the beginning of v. 5 there is a heart-broken confession of failure. In verses 10-12 there is a God-glorifying confession, attributing victory unto the Lord. The severe scourging of David was not in vain.

Job. Probably he tasted of every kind of suffering which falls to man's lot: family bereavements, loss of property, grievous bodily afflictions came fast, one on top of another. But God's end in it all was that Job should benefit therefrom and be a greater partaker of His holiness. There was not a little of self-satisfaction and self-righteousness in Job at the beginning. But at the end, when He was brought face to face with the thrice Holy One, he "abhorred himself" (42:6). In David's case the chastisement was retributive, in Job's corrective.

Abraham. In him we see an illustration of an entirely different aspect of chastening. Most of the trials to which he was subjected were neither because of open sins nor for the correction of inward faults. Rather were they sent for the development of spiritual graces. Abraham was sorely tried in various ways, but it was in order that faith might be strengthened and that patience might have its perfect work in him. Abraham was weaned from the things of this world, that he might enjoy closer fellowship with Jehovah and become the "friend" of God.

Paul. "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure (2 Cor. 12:7). This "thorn" was sent not because of failure and sin, but as a preventative against pride. Note the "lest" both at the beginning and end of the verse. The result of this "thorn" was that the beloved apostle was made more conscious of his weakness. Thus, chastisement has for one of its main objects the breaking down of self-sufficiency, the bringing us to the end of our selves.

Now in view of these widely different aspects chastenings (retributive, corrective, educative, and preventative), how incompetent are we to diagnose, and how great is the folly of pronouncing a judgment concerning others! Let us not conclude when we see a fellow-Christian under the rod of God that he is necessarily being taken to task for his sins. In our next meditation we shall consider the spirit in which Divine chastisements are to be received.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 8

Receiving Divine Chastisement

"My Son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him"

Hebrews 12:5

Not all chastisement is sanctified to the recipients of it. Some are hardened thereby; others are crushed beneath it. Much depends on the spirit in which afflictions are received. There is no virtue in trials and troubles in themselves: it is only as they are blest by God that the Christian is profited thereby. As Hebrews 12:11 informs us, it is those who are "exercised" under God's rod that bring forth "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." A sensitive conscience and a tender heart are the needed adjuncts.

In our text the Christian is warned against two entirely different dangers: despise not, despair not. These are two extremes against which it is ever necessary to keep a sharp look-out. Just as every truth of Scripture has its balancing counterpart, so has every evil its opposite. On the one hand there is a haughty spirit which laughs at the rod, a stubborn will which refuses to be humbled thereby. On the other hand, there is a fainting which utterly sinks beneath it and gives way to despair. Spurgeon said, "The way of righteousness is a difficult pass between two mountains of error, and the great secret of the Christian's life is to wind his way along the narrow valley."

1. *Despising the Rod.*

There are a number of ways in which Christians may "despise" God's chastenings. We mention four of them:

a. *By callousness.* To be stoical is the policy of carnal wisdom: make the best of a bad job. The man of the world knows no better plan than to grit his teeth and brave things out. Having no Divine Comforter, Counselor or Physician, he has to fall back on his own poor resources. It is inexpressibly sad when we see a child of God conducting himself as does a child of the Devil. For a Christian to defy adversities is to "despise" chastisement. Instead of hardening himself to endure stoically, there should be a melting of the heart.

b. *By complaining.* This is what the Hebrews did in the wilderness; and there are still many mumurers in Israel's camp. A little sickness, and we become so cross that our friends are afraid to come near us. A few days in bed, and we fret and fume like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. We peevishly ask, Why this affliction? What have I done to deserve it? We look around with envious eyes, and are discontented because others are carrying a lighter load. Beware, my reader: it goes hard with

murmurers. God always chastises twice if we are not humbled by the first. Remind yourself of how much dross there yet is among the gold. View the corruptions of your own heart, and marvel that God has not smitten you twice as severely. "My Son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord."

c. *By criticisms.* How often we question the usefulness of chastisement. As Christians we seem to have little more spiritual good sense than we had natural wisdom as children. As boys we thought that the rod was the least necessary thing in the home. It is so with the children of God. When things go as we like them, when some unexpected temporal blessing is bestowed, we have no difficulty in ascribing all to a kind Providence. But when our plans are thwarted, when losses are ours, it is very different. Yet, is it not written, "I form the light and create darkness. I make; peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. 45:7)?

How often is the thing formed ready to complain, "Why hast thou made me thus?" We say, I cannot see how this can possibly profit my soul. If I had better health I could attend the house of prayer more frequently! If I had been spared those losses in business I would have more money for the Lord's work! What good can possibly come of this calamity? Like Jacob, we exclaim: "All these things are against me. What is this but to "despise" the rod? Shall thy ignorance challenge God's wisdom? Shall thy shortsightedness arraign omniscience?"

d. *By carelessness.* So many fail to mend their ways. The exhortation of our text is much needed by all of us. There are many who have "despised" the rod, and in consequence they have not profited thereby. Many a Christian has been corrected by God, but in vain. Sickness, reverses, bereavements have come, but they have not been sanctified by prayerful self-examination.

O brethren and sisters, take heed. If God be chastening thee "consider your ways (Hag. 1:5), "ponder the path of thy feet" (Prov. 4:26). Be assured that there is some reason for the chastening. Many a Christian would not have been chastised half so severely had he diligently inquired the cause of it.

2. *Fainting Under It.*

Having been warned against "despising" the rod, now we are admonished not to give way to despair under it. There are at least three ways in which the Christian may "faint" beneath the Lord's rebukes:

a. *When he gives up all exertion.* This is done when we sink down in despondency. The smitten one concludes that it is more than he can possibly endure. His heart fails him; darkness swallows him up; the sun of hope is eclipsed, and the voice of thanksgiving is silent. To "faint" means rendering ourselves unfit for the discharge of our duties. When a person faints, he is rendered motionless. How many Christians are ready to completely give up the fight when adversity enters their life. How many are rendered quite inert when trouble comes their way. How many, by their attitude, say, God's hand is heavy upon me: I can do nothing. Ah, beloved, "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13). "Faint not when thou art rebuked of Him." Go to the Lord about it: recognize His hand in it. Remember thine afflictions are among the "all things" which work together for good.

b. *When he questions his sonship.* There are not a few Christians who, when the rod descends upon them, conclude that they are not sons of God after all. They forget that it is written "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Ps. 34:19), and that "we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). One says, "But if I were His child I should not be in this poverty, misery, pain." Listen to verse 8: "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." Learn, then, to look upon trials as proofs of God's love purging, pruning, purifying thee. The father of a family does not concern himself much about those on the outside of his household: it is they who are within whom he guards and guides, nurtures and conforms to his will. So it is with God.

c. *When he despairs.* Some indulge the fancy that they will never get out of their trouble. One says, I have prayed and prayed, but the clouds have not lifted. Then comfort yourself with this reflection: It is always the darkest hour that precedes the dawn. Therefore, "faint not" when thou art rebuked of Him. But, says another, I have pleaded His promise, and things are no better. I thought He delivered

those who called upon Him; I have called, and He has not answered, and I fear He never will. What, child of God, speak of thy Father thus! You say He will never leave off smiting because He has smitten so long. Rather say He has now smitten so long I must soon be delivered. Despise not: faint not. May Divine grace preserve both writer and reader from either sinful extreme.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 9

God's Inheritance

"For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance"

Deuteronomy 32:9

This verse brings before us a most blessed and wonderful line of truth, so wonderful that no human mind could possibly have invented it. It speaks of the mighty God having an "inheritance," and it tells us that this inheritance is in His own people! God refused to take this world for His inheritance—it will yet be burnt up. Nor did heaven, peopled with angels, satisfy His heart. In eternity past Jehovah said, by way of anticipation, "My delights were with the sons of men" (Prov. 8:31).

This is by no means the only scripture which teaches that God's inheritance is in His saints. In Psalm 135:4 we read, "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure." In Malachi 3:17 the Lord speaks of His people as His "special treasure" (see margin)—so "special" that the highest manifestations of His love are made to them, the richest gifts of His hand are bestowed on them, the mansions on High are prepared and reserved for them!

The same wondrous truth is taught in the New Testament. In Ephesians 1 we behold the apostle Paul praying that God would give unto His people the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of their understanding being enlightened that they might know "what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (v. 18). This is a truly amazing expression; not only do the saints obtain an inheritance in God, but He also secures an inheritance in them! How overwhelming the thought that the great God should deem Himself the richer because of our faith, our love and worship! Surely this is one of the most marvelous truths revealed in Holy Writ—that God should pick up poor sinners and make them His "inheritance"! Yet so it is.

But what need has God of us? How can we possibly enrich Him? Does He not have everything—wisdom, power, grace and glory? All true, yet there is something that He needs, yes, needs, namely, vessels. Just as the sun needs the earth to shine upon, so God needs vessels to fill, vessels through which His glory may be reflected, vessels on which the riches of His grace may be lavished.

Mark that God's people are not only called His "portion," His "special treasure," but also His "inheritance." This suggests three things. First, an "inheritance is obtained through death: so God's inheritance is secured to Him through the death of His beloved Son. Second, an "inheritance" denotes

perpetuity—"to a man and his heirs forever" are the terms often used. Third, an "inheritance" is for possession, it is something which is entered into, lived upon, enjoyed. Let us now consider five things about God's inheritance:

1. *God purposed to have such an inheritance:* "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Ps. 33:12). The "nation" here is identical with the holy nation," the "chosen generation, royal priesthood, peculiar people" of 1 Peter 2:9. This favored people was chosen by God to be His inheritance: it was not an afterthought with Him, but decreed by Him in eternity past. Ere the foundation of the world God fixed His heart upon having them for Himself.
2. *God has purchased His people for an inheritance.* In Ephesians 1:14 we are told that the Holy Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." So again in Acts 20:28 we read of "the Church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood." God has not only redeemed His people from bondage and death but for Himself.
3. *God comes and dwells in the midst of His inheritance:* "For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance" (Ps. 94:14) —a clear proof that these scriptures are not referring to the nation of Israel after the flesh. Just as Jehovah tabernacled in the midst of the redeemed Hebrews, so He now indwells His church, both collectively and individually. "Know ye not that ye (plural) are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). "Know ye not that your body (singular) is the temple of the Holy Spirit?" (1 Cor. 6:19).
4. *God beautifies His inheritance:* Just as a man who has inherited a house or an estate takes possession of it and then makes improvements, so God is now fitting His people for Himself. He who has begun a good work within His own is now performing it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). He is now conforming us to the image of His Son: each Christian can say with the Psalmist, "the Lord will perfect that which concerneth me" (Ps. 138:8). Nor will God be satisfied until we have been glorified. The Lord Jesus Christ "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (Phil. 3:21). "When he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2).
5. And what of the future? *God will yet possess, live upon, enjoy His inheritance.* In the unending ages yet to be, God will make known the "riches of his glory" on the vessels of His mercy (Rom. 9:23). The glory which God shall ever live upon—as upon an inheritance—shall rise out of His people. What a marvelous statement is that which is found at the close of Ephesians 2, where the saints are likened unto a building "fitly framed together (which) groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord," of whom it is said, "in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

A. wonderful and glorious is the picture presented before us in Revelation 21: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing; and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (vv. 1-3).

What a marvelous statement is that in Zephaniah 3:17: "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." The great God will yet say, "I am satisfied: here will I rest. This is Mine inheritance that I will live upon forever, even the glory which I have bestowed on redeemed sinners." Surely we have to say with the Psalmist, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (139:6). May Divine grace enable us to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 10

God's Securing His Inheritance

"He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about. He instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye"

Deuteronomy 32:10

In the previous verse we have the amazing statement that the Lord's "portion" is His people, and that there may be no misunderstanding, the same truth is expressed in another form: "Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." Here in our text we learn something of the pains which God takes to secure His heritage. There are four things to be noted and feasted upon.

1. *Jehovah Finding His People.*

"He found him in a desert land." It needs hardly to be said that the word "found" necessarily implies a "search." Here then we have presented to our view the amazing spectacle of a seeking God! Sin came in between the creature and the Creator, causing alienation and separation. Not only so, but, as the result of the Fall, every human being enters this world with a mind that is "enmity against God." Consequently, there is none that seeketh after God. Therefore, God, in His marvelous condescension and grace, becomes the Seeker.

The word "found" not only implies a search but, when we consider the sinful character and unworthiness of the objects of His search, it also tells of the love of the Seeker. The great God becomes the Seeker because He set His heart upon those whom He marked out to be the recipients of His sovereign favors. God had set His heart upon Abraham, and therefore did He seek and find him amid the heathen idolators in Ur of Chaldea. God set His heart upon Jacob, and therefore did He seek out and find him as a fugitive from his brother's vengeance, when he lay asleep on the bare earth. So too it was because He had loved Moses with an everlasting love that the Lord sought out and found him in Midian, at "the backside of the desert." Equally true is this with every real Christian living in the world today: "I was found of them that sought me not; I was manifest unto them that asked not after me (Rom. 10:20).

Has God "found" you? To help you answer this question, ponder the remainder of the first clause of our text: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness." Is that how this world appears unto you? Do you find everything under the sun only "vanity and vexation of spirit"? Are you made to groan daily at what you witness on every hand? Do you find that the world furnishes nothing to satisfy the heart, yea nothing to even minister to it? *Is the world, really, a "waste howling*

wilderness" to *you*?

Let a second test be applied: when God truly "finds" one of His own He reveals Himself. He imparts to the soul a realization of His sovereign majesty, His awe-some power, His ineffable holiness, His wondrous mercy. Has He thus made Himself known unto you? Has He given you, in any measure, a vision of His Divine glory, His sovereign grace, His wondrous love? *Has* He? "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the One true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

Here is a third test: If God has revealed Himself, He has given you a sight of yourself, for in His light we "see light." A most humbling, painful, and never-to-be-forgotten experience this is. When God was revealed to Abraham, he said, "I am but dust and ashes" (Gen. 18:27). When He was revealed to Isaiah, the prophet said, "Woe is me for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5). When God revealed Him-self to Job, he said, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6)—note, not merely I abhor my wicked ways, but my vile self. Is this your experience, my reader? Have you discovered your depravity and lost condition? Have you found there is not a single good thing in you? Have you seen yourself to be fit for and deserving only of hell? Have you, truly? Then that is good evidence, yea, it is proof positive that the Lord God has "found" you.

2. Jehovah *Leading His People*.

"He led him about." The "finding" is not the end, but only the beginning of God's dealings with His own. Having found him, He remains never more to leave him. Now that He has found His wandering child He teaches him to walk in the Narrow Way. There is a beautiful word on God "leading" in Hosea 11:3: "I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms. Just as a fond mother takes her little one, whose feet are yet too weak and untrained to walk alone, so the Lord takes His people by their arms and leads them in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Such is His promise: "He will keep the feet of His saints" (1 Sam. 2:9). There is a threefold "leading" of the Lord:

Evangelical.—The Lord Jesus declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me" (John 14:6). But again He said, "No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him" (John 6:44). Here then is how God leads: He leads the poor sinner to Christ. Have you, my reader, been brought to the Saviour? Is Christ your only hope? Are you trusting in the sufficiency of His precious blood? If so, what cause have you to praise God for having led you to His blessed Son!

Doctrinal.—The Lord Jesus declared, "When He the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). We are not capable of discovering or entering into the Truth of ourselves, therefore do we have to be guided into it. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:14). It is He who makes us to lie down in the "green pastures of Scripture and who leads us beside the "still waters" of His promises. How thankful we ought to be for every ray of light which has been granted us from the lamp of God's Word.

Providential.—"Thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go" (Neh. 9:19). Just as Jehovah led Israel of old, so today He leads us step by step through this wilderness-world. What a mercy this is. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in his way" (Ps. 37:23). Yes, every detail of our lives is regulated by the Most High.

All my times are in Thy hand,
All events at Thy command,
All must come and last and end,
As doth please our Heavenly Friend.

3. God *Instructing His People*.

"He instructed him." So He does us. It was to instruct us that God, in His great mercy, gave us the Scriptures. He has not left us to grope our way in darkness, but has provided us with a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Nor are we left to our own unaided powers in the study of the Word. We are supplied with an infallible Instructor. The Holy Spirit is our teacher, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things . . . the anointing ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you" (I John 2:20, 27).

Right views of God's truth are not an intellectual attainment, but a blessing bestowed upon us by God. It is written, "a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John 3:27). No matter how legibly a letter may be written, if the recipient be blind he cannot read it. So we are told, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). And spiritual discernment is imparted only by the Holy Spirit.

"He instructed him." How patiently God bears with our dullness! How graciously He repeats "line upon line and precept upon precept"! (Isa. 28:10) Yet slow as we are, He perseveres with us, for He has promised to perfect that which concerns us (Ps. 138:8). Has He "instructed" you, my reader? Has He taught you the total depravity of man and the utter inability of the sinner to deliver himself? Has He taught you the humbling truth "Ye must be born again," and that regeneration is the *sole* work of God—man having *no* part or hand in it (John 1:13). Has He revealed to you the infinite value and sufficiency of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, that His blood cleanses "from all sin"? Then what cause you have to be thankful for such Divine instruction.

4. *God Preserving His People.*

"He kept him as the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10) A religion of conditions, contingencies, and uncertainties is not Christianity—its technical name is Arminianism, and Arminianism is a daughter of Rome. It is that God dishonoring, Scripture-repudiating, soul-destroying system of Popery—whose father is the Devil—which prates about human merit, creature-ability, works of supererogation and a lot more blasphemous rubbish, and leaves its blinded dupes in the fogs and bogs of uncertainty. Christianity deals with certainties which originated in the purpose and love of an unchanging God, who when He begins a good work always completes it.

"For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved forever (Ps. 37:28). How blessed is this! Did Jehovah "forsake" Noah when he got drunk? No, indeed. Did He "forsake" Abraham when he lied to Abimelech? No, indeed. Did He "forsake" Moses for smiting the rock in anger? No, indeed, as His appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration abundantly proves. Did He "forsake" David when he committed those sins which ever since have given occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme? No, indeed. He led him to repentance, caused him to confess his awful wickedness, and then sent one of His servants to say, "The Lord hath put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13).

"The Lord is thy Keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from 'this time forth and even for evermore" (Ps. 121:5-8). Here are the covenant verities of our faithful God: here are the infallible "shall's" of the triune Jehovah: here are the sure promises of Him who cannot lie. Note there were no "if's" or preadventure's, but the unconditional and unqualified declarations of the Most High. No circumstances can ever place the believer beyond the reach of Divine preservation. No change can alter or affect this Divine certainty. Wealth may ensnare, poverty may strip, Satan may tempt, inward corruptions may annoy, but nothing can ever destroy or lead to the destruction of a single sheep of Christ; nay, all these things only serve to display more manifestly and more gloriously the preserving hand of our God.

We "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5). The rage of heathen monarchs, with their den of lions and fiery furnace, may be

employed to try the faith of God's elect, but destroy them, harm them, they cannot. O brethren in Christ, what cause we have to praise the finding, instructing, and preserving, Triune Jehovah!





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 11

Mourning

"Blessed are they that mourn"

Matthew 5:4

Mourning is hateful and irksome to poor human nature. From suffering and sadness our spirits instinctively shrink. By nature we seek the society of the cheerful and joyous. Our text presents an anomaly to the unregenerate, yet is it sweet music to the ears of God's elect. If "blessed" why do they "mourn"? If they "mourn" how can they be "blessed"? Only the child of God has the key to this paradox. The more we ponder our text the more we are constrained to exclaim, never man spake like this Man" (John 7:46)! "Blessed (happy) are they that mourn" is at complete variance with the world's logic. Men have in all places and in all ages, deemed the prosperous and the gay the happy ones, but Christ pronounces happy those who are poor in spirit and who mourn.

Now it is obvious that it is not every species of mourning that is here referred to. There is a "sorrow of the world which worketh death" (2 Cor. 2:10). The mourning for which Christ promises comfort must be restricted to that which is spiritual. The mourning which is blessed is the result of a realization of God's holiness and goodness which issues in a sense of our own wickedness—the depravity of our natures, the enormity and guilt of our conduct and the sorrowing over our sins with a godly sorrow.

We shall consider the eight Beatitudes as arranged in four pairs. The first of the eight is the blessing that Christ pronounced on those who are poor in spirit, which we took to mean, they who have been awakened to a sense of their own nothingness and emptiness. Now the transition from such poverty to mourning is easy to follow, in fact, it follows so closely that it is rather its companion.

The mourning which is here referred to is manifestly more than that of bereavement, affliction or loss. It is mourning for sin. 'It is mourning over the felt destitution of our spiritual state, and over the iniquities that have separated between us and God; mourning over the very morality in which we have boasted, and the self-righteousness in which we have trusted; sorrow for rebellion against God, and hostility to His will; and such mourning always goes side by side with conscious poverty of spirit" (Dr. Person).

A striking illustration and exemplification of the spirit upon which the Saviour here pronounced His benediction is to be found in Luke 18. There a vivid contrast is presented to our view. First, we are shown a self-righteous Pharisee looking up toward God and saying, "God, I thank Thee that I am not

as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess." This may have been all true as he looked at it, yet this man went down to his house in a state of condemnation. His fine garments were rags, his white robes were filthy, though he knew it not. Then we are shown the publican, standing afar off, who, in the language of the Psalmist was so troubled by his iniquities that he was not able to look up (Ps. 40:12). He dared not so much as lift up his eyes to Heaven, but smote upon his breast, conscious of the fountain of corruption within, and cried, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and that man went down to his house justified, because he was poor in spirit and mourned for sin.

Here then are the first birth-marks of the children of God, and he who has never come to be poor in spirit, and has never known what it is to really mourn for sin, though he belong to a church and be an office-bearer in it, has neither entered nor seen the kingdom of God. How thankful the Christian reader ought to be that the great God condescends to dwell in the humble and contrite heart! Where can we find anything in all the Old Testament more precious than that?—that He, in whose sight the heavens are not clean, who cannot find in any temple that man ever builded for Him, however magnificent, a proper dwelling place, has spoken Isaiah 66:2 and Isaiah 57:15 to us!

"Blessed are they that mourn. Though the primary reference be to that initial mourning, usually termed 'conviction of sin,' it is by no means to be limited to this. Mourning is ever a characteristic of the normal Christian state. There is much that the believer has to mourn over—the plague of his own heart makes him cry, O wretched man that I am"; the unbelief which "doth so easily beset us" and the sins which we commit that are more in number than the hairs of our head, are a continual grief; the barrenness and unprofitableness of our lives make us sigh and cry; our propensity to wander from Christ, our lack of communion with Him, the shallowness of our love for Him, cause us to hang our harps upon the willows. But this is not all. The hypocritical religion prevailing on every hand, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof; the awful dishonor done to the truth of God by the false doctrines taught in countless pulpits; the divisions among the Lord's people, the strife between brethren, occasion continual sorrow of heart. The awful wickedness in the world, men despising Christ, the untold sufferings around, make us groan within ourselves. The closer the Christian lives to God, the more will he mourn over all that dishonors Him. With the Psalmist he will say: 119:53; with Jeremiah, 13:17; 14:17; with Ezekiel, 9:4.

"They shall be comforted." This refers first of all to the removal of the conscious guilt which burdens the conscience. It finds its fulfillment in the Spirit's application of the Gospel of God's grace to the one whom He has convicted of his dire need of a Saviour. It issues in a sense of free and full forgiveness through the merits of the atoning blood of Christ. This Divine comfort is the peace of God which passeth all understanding filling the heart of the one who is now assured that he is "accepted in the Beloved." God wounds before healing, abases before He exalts. First there is a revelation of His justice and holiness, then the making known of His mercy and grace.

"They shall be comforted" also receives a constant fulfillment in the experience of the Christian. Though he mourns his excuseless failures and confesses them to God, yet he is comforted by the assurance that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses him from all sin. Though he groans over the dishonor done to God on every side, yet is he comforted by the knowledge that the day is rapidly approaching when Satan shall be removed from these scenes and when the Lord Jesus shall sit upon the throne of His glory and rule in righteousness and peace. Though the chastening hand of the Lord is often laid upon him and though "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," nevertheless, he is consoled by the realization that this is all working out for him "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Like the Apostle, the believer who is in communion with his Lord can say, "As sorrowful yet always rejoicing." He may often be called upon to drink of the bitter waters of Marah, but God has planted nearby a tree to sweeten them. Yes "mourning" Christians are comforted even now by the Divine Comforter, by the ministrations of His servants, by encouraging words from fellow Christians, and when these are not to hand, by the precious promises of the Word being brought home in power to his memory and heart.

"They shall be comforted." The best wine is reserved for the last. Sorrow may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. During the long night of His absence, the saints of God have been called to fellowship with Him who was the Man of Sorrows. But, blessed be God, it is written, "If we suffer with Him we shall also be glorified together." What comfort and joy will be ours when shall dawn the morning without clouds! Then shall "sorrow and sighing flee away" (Isa. 35:10). Then shall be fulfilled the saying of Revelation 21:3-4.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 12

Hungering

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled"

Matthew 5:6

In the first three Beatitudes we are called upon to witness the heart exercises of one who has been awakened by the Spirit of God. First, there is a sense of need, a realization of my nothingness and emptiness. Second, there is a judging of self, a consciousness of my guilt and sorrowing over my lost condition. Third, there is an end of seeking to justify myself before God, an abandonment of all pretences to personal merit, a taking of my place in the dust before God. Here, in the fourth, the eye of the soul is turned away from self to Another: there is a longing after that which I know I have not got and which I am conscious I urgently need.

There has been much needless quibbling as to the precise import of the word "righteousness" in our present text. The best way to ascertain its significance is to go back to the Old Testament scriptures where this term is used, and then turn on these the fuller light furnished by the New Testament Epistles.

"Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I, the Lord have created it" (Isa. 45:8). The first half of this verse refers, in figurative language, to the advent of Christ to this earth; the second half to His resurrection, when He was "raised again for our justification. "Hearken unto me, ye stouthearted, that are far from righteousness: I bring near my righteousness; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel my glory" (Isa. 46:12-14). "My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arms shall they trust" (Isa. 51:5). "Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed" (Isa. 56:1). "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10). These passages make it clear that God's "righteousness" is synonymous with God's "salvation."

The above scriptures are unfolded in the Epistle to the Romans where the "Gospel" receives its fullest exposition, see 1:1. In 1:16, 17, we are told "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith." In 3:22, 24 we read, "Even the

righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." In 5:19 the blessed declaration is made, "for as by one man's disobedience many were made (legally constituted) sinners, so by the obedience of One shall many be made (legally constituted) righteous." While in 10:4 we learn, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

The sinner is destitute of righteousness, for "there is none righteous, no not one." God has therefore provided in Christ a perfect righteousness for each and all of His people. This righteousness, this satisfying of all the demands of God's holy law against us, was wrought out by our Substitute and Surety. This righteousness is now imputed—legally placed to the account of the believing sinner. Just as the sins of God's people were all transferred to Christ, so His righteousness is placed upon them, see 2 Corinthians 5:21. Such is a brief summary of the teaching of Scripture on this vital and blessed subject of "Righteousness."

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." Hungering and thirsting express vehement desire, of which the soul is acutely conscious. First, the Holy Spirit brings before the heart the holy requirements of God. He reveals to us His perfect standard, which He can never lower. He reminds us that "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." Second, the trembling soul, conscious of its own abject poverty, realizing his utter inability to measure up to God's requirements, sees no help in self. This is a painful discovery, which causes him to mourn and groan. Have *you* done so? Third, the Holy Spirit now creates in the heart a deep "hunger and thirst," which causes the convicted sinner to look for relief and seek a supply outside of himself. The eye is now directed to Christ, "The Lord our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:6).

Like the previous ones, this fourth Beatitude begins in the unconverted, but is perpetuated in the saved sinner. There is a repeated exercise of this grace, felt at varying intervals. The one who longed to be saved by Christ now yearns to be made like Him. Looked at in its widest aspect, this hungering and thirsting refers to that panting of the renewed heart after God (Ps. 42:1), that yearning for a closer walk with Him, that longing for more perfect conformity to the image of His Son. It tells of those Inspirations of the new nature for Divine blessing which alone can strengthen, sustain and satisfy.

Our text presents such a paradox that it is evident no carnal mind ever invented it. Can one who has been brought into vital union with Him who is the Bread of Life, and in whom all fullness dwells, be found still hungering and thirsting? Yes, such is the experience of the renewed heart. Mark carefully the tense of the verb: it is not "Blessed are they which *have*," but "Blessed are they which *do* hunger and thirst." Do *you*, dear reader? Or are you content with your attainments and satisfied with your condition? Hungering and thirsting after righteousness has ever been the experience of God's saints: (see Psalm 82:4; Phil. 3:8, 14, etc).

"They shall be filled." Like the first part of our text, this also has a double fulfillment—an initial and a continuous. When God creates a hunger and a thirst in the soul it is that He may satisfy them. When the poor sinner is made to feel his need of Christ, it is that he may be drawn to and led to embrace Him. Like the prodigal, who came to the Father as a penitent, the believing sinner now feeds on the One figured by the "fatted calf." He is made to exclaim "surely in the Lord have I righteousness."

"They shall be filled." Not with wine wherein is excess, but "filled with the Spirit." "Filled" with "the peace of God that passeth all understanding." "Filled" with Divine blessing to which no sorrow is added. "Filled" with praise and thanksgiving unto Him who has wrought all our works in us. "Filled" with that which this poor world can neither give nor take away. "Filled" by the goodness and mercy of God, till their cup runneth over. And yet, all that is enjoyed now is but a little foretaste of what God has prepared for them that love Him. In the Day to come we shall be "filled" with Divine holiness, for we shall be "like him" (1 John 3:2). Then shall we be done with sin forever; then shall we "hunger no more, neither thirst anymore" (Rev. 7:16).





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 13

Heart Purity

"Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God"

Matthew 5:8

This is another of the Beatitudes which has been grossly perverted by the enemies of the Lord; enemies who have, like their predecessors the Pharisees, posed as the champions of the truth and boasted of a superior sanctity to that confessed by the true people of God. All through this Christian era there have been poor deluded souls who have claimed an entire purification of the old man, or who have insisted that God has so completely renewed them that the carnal nature has been eradicated, and in consequence that they not only commit no sins but have no sinful desires or thoughts. But God tells us: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). Of course such people appeal to the Scriptures in support of their vain delusion, applying to experience verses which describe the legal benefits of the Atonement. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" does not mean that our hearts have been washed from the corrupting defilements of evil, but that the sacrifice of Christ has availed for the judicial blotting out of sins. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17) refers not to our state in this world, but to the Christian's standing before God.

That purity of heart does not mean sinlessness of life is clear from the inspired record of the history of all of God's saints. Noah got drunk; Abraham equivocated; Moses disobeyed God; Job cursed the day of his birth; Elijah fled in terror from Jezebel; Peter denied Christ. Yes, perhaps someone will exclaim, But all these were before Christianity was established. True, but it has also been the same since then. Where shall we go to find a Christian of superior attainment to those of the apostle Paul? And what was his experience? Read Romans 7 and see. When he would do good, evil was present with him (v. 21); there was a law in his members warring against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin (v. 23). He did, with the mind, serve the law of God; nevertheless, with the flesh he served the law of sin (v. 25). Ah, Christian reader, the truth is that one of the most conclusive evidences that we do possess a pure heart is the discovery and consciousness of the impurity of the old heart dwelling side by side within. But let us come closer to our text.

"Blessed are the pure in heart." In seeking an interpretation to any part of this Sermon on the Mount the first thing to bear in mind is that those whom our Lord was addressing had been reared in Judaism. As said one who was deeply taught of the Spirit: "I cannot help thinking that our Lord, in using the terms before us, had a tacit reference to that character of external sanctity or purity which

belonged to the Jewish people, and to that privilege of intercourse with God which was connected with that character. They were a people separated from the nations polluted with idolatry; set apart as holy to Jehovah; and, as a holy people, they were permitted to draw near to their God, the only living and true God, in the ordinances of His worship". On the possession of this character, and on the enjoyment of this privilege, the Jewish people plumed themselves.

"A higher character, however, and a higher privilege, belonged to those who should be the subjects of the Messiah's reign. They should not only be externally holy, but, 'pure in heart'; and they should not merely be allowed to approach towards the holy place, where God's honour dwelt, but they should 'see God,' be introduced into the most intimate intercourse with Him. Thus viewed, as a description of the spiritual character and privileges of the subjects of the Messiah, in contrast with the external character and privileges of the Jewish people, the passage before us is full of the most important and interesting truth." (Dr. John Brown).

"Blessed are the pure in heart." Opinion is divided as to whether these words of Christ are to be understood literally or figuratively; whether the reference be to the new heart itself received at regeneration, or to the moral transformation of character which results from a Divine work of grace being wrought in the soul. Probably both aspects of the truth are combined here. In view of the late place which this Beatitude occupies in the series, it would appear that the purity of heart upon which our Saviour pronounced His blessing, is that internal cleansing which accompanies and follows the new birth. Yet, inasmuch as no heart purity exists in the natural man, what is here affirmed by Christ must be traced back to regeneration itself.

The Psalmist said, "Behold Thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (Ps. 51:6). How far this goes beneath the outward renovation and reformation which comprises such a large part of the efforts now being put forth in Christendom! Much that we see around us is a hand religion—seeking salvation by works—or a head religion, which rests satisfied with an orthodox creed. But God looketh on the heart—an expression which appears to include the understanding, the affections and the will. It is because God looketh within that He gives a "new heart" (Ezek. 36:26) to His own people, and "blessed" indeed are they who have received such, for it is a "pure heart."

As intimated above, we believe this sixth Beatitude contemplates both the new heart received at regeneration and the transformation of character which follows God's work of grace in the soul. First, there is a "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5) by which we understand a cleansing of the affections, which are now set upon things above, instead of things below; this is parallel with "purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:9). Accompanying this is the cleansing of the conscious—"having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22), which refers to the removal of the burden of conscious guilt, the inward realization that being justified by faith we "have peace with God."

But the purity of heart commended here by Christ goes further than this. What is purity? Freedom from defilement, undivided affections, sincerity and genuineness. As a quality of Christian character, we would define it as godly simplicity. It is the opposite of subtlety and duplicity. Genuine Christianity lays aside not only malice, but guile and hypocrisy. It is not enough to be pure in words and in outward deportment; purity of desires, motives, intents, are what should, and do in the main, characterize the child of God. Here then is a most important test for every professing Christian to apply to himself: Are my affections set upon things above? Are my motives pure? Why do I assemble with the Lord's people?—to be seen of men, or to meet with the Lord and enjoy sweet communion with Him?

"For they shall see God." Once more we would point out how that the promises attached to these Beatitudes have both a present and a future fulfillment. The pure in heart possess spiritual discernment and with the eyes of their understanding they obtain clear views of the Divine character and perceive the excellency of His attributes. When the eye is single the whole body is full of light. In the truth, the faith of which purifies the heart, they 'see God'; for what is that truth but a manifestation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—an illustrious display of the combined

radiance of Divine holiness and Divine benignity!. . . And he not only obtains clear and satisfactory views of the Divine character, but he enjoys intimate and delightful communion with God. He is brought very near God; God's mind becomes his mind; God's will becomes his will; and his fellowship is truly with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

"They who are pure in heart 'see God' in this way, even in the present world; and in the future state their knowledge of God will become far more extensive and their fellowship with Him far more intimate; for though, when compared with the privileges of a former dispensation, even now 'as with open face we behold the glory of the Lord,' yet, in reference to the privileges of a higher economy, we yet see but 'through a glass darkly'—we 'know but in part'—we understand but in part, we enjoy but in part. But 'that which is in the part shall be done away,' and 'that which is perfect shall come.' We shall yet see face to face and know even as we are known (1 Cor. 13:9-12); or to borrow the words of the Psalmist, we 'shall behold his face in righteousness, and shall be satisfied when we awake in his likeness' (Ps. 17:15). Then, and not till then, will the full meaning of these words be understood 'the pure in heart shall see God.'" (Dr. John Brown).





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 14

The Beatitudes and Christ

The Beatitudes and Christ Our meditations upon the Beatitudes would not be complete unless they turned our thoughts to the person of our blessed Lord. As we have endeavored to show, they describe the character and conduct of a Christian, and as Christian character is nothing more or less than being experimentally conformed to the image of God's Son we must turn to Him for the perfect pattern. In the Lord Jesus Christ we find the brightest manifestations of the highest exemplifications of the different spiritual graces which are found, dimly reflected, in His followers. Not one or two but all of these perfections were displayed by Him, for He is not only "lovely," but "altogether lovely." May the Holy Spirit who is here to glorify Him take now of the things of Christ and show them unto us.

First, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Most blessed is it to see how the Scriptures speak of Him who was rich becoming poor for our sakes, that we through His poverty might be rich. Great indeed was the poverty into which He entered. Born of parents who were poor in this world's goods, He commenced His earthly life in a manger. During His youth and early manhood He toiled at the carpenter's bench. After His public ministry had begun He declared that though the foxes had their holes and the birds of the air their nests, the Son of Man had not where to lay His head. If we trace out the Messianic utterances recorded in the Psalms by the Spirit of prophecy, we shall find that again and again He confessed to God His poverty of spirit: "I am poor and sorrowful" (Ps. 69:29); and, "Bow down thine ear, O Jehovah, for I am poor and needy" (Ps. 86:1); and again, "For I am poor and needy, and My heart is wounded within me" (Ps. 109:22).

Second, "Blessed are they that mourn." Christ was indeed the chief Mourner. Old Testament prophecy contemplated Him as "the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief." See Him "grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (Mark 3:5) Behold Him "sighing" ere He healed the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:34). Mark Him weeping by the graveside of Lazarus. Hear His lamentation over the beloved city, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . how often would I have gathered thy children together" (Matthew 23:37). Draw near and reverently behold Him in the gloom of Gethsemane, pouring out His petitions to the Father "with strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7). Bow in worshipful wonderment as you hear Him crying from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34). Harken to His plaintive plea, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow" (Lam. 1:12).

Third, "Blessed are the meek." A score of examples might be drawn from the Gospels illustrating the lovely lowliness of the incarnate Lord of glory. Mark it in the men selected by Him to be His ambassadors: He chose not the wise, the learned, the great, the noble, but poor fishermen for the most part. Witness it in the company which He kept: He sought not the rich and renowned, but was "the Friend of publicans and sinners." See it in the miracles which He wrought: again and again He enjoined the healed to go and tell no man what had been done for them. Behold it in the unobtrusiveness of His service: unlike the hypocrites who sounded a trumpet before them, He sought

not the lime-light, shunned advertising, and disdained popularity. When the crowds would make Him their Idol, He avoided them (Mark 1:45; 7:17). When they would come and "Take Him by force to make Him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone" (John 6:15). When His brethren urged, "Show Thyself to the world," He declined, and went up to the feast in secret (John 7) . When He, in fulfillment of prophecy, presented Himself to Israel, as their King, He entered Jerusalem "lowly, and riding upon an ass" (Zech. 9:9).

Fourth, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." What a summary is this of the inner life of the Man Christ Jesus! Before the Incarnation, the Holy Spirit announced, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins" (Isa. 4:5). When He entered this world, He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:17). As a Boy of twelve He asked, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:41). At the beginning of His public ministry He declared, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). To His disciples He declared, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me (John 4:34). Of Him the Holy Spirit has said, "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows" (Ps. 45:7). Well may He be called "The Lord our righteousness."

Fifth, "Blessed are the merciful." In Christ we see mercy personified. It was mercy to poor lost sinners which caused the Son of God to exchange the glory of Heaven for the shame of earth. It was mercy, wondrous and matchless, which took Him to the Cross, there to be made a curse for His people. So it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us" (Titus 3:5). He still exercises mercy to us as our "merciful and faithful High Priest" (Heb. 2:17). So also we are to be "looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 21), because He will show us mercy in "that Day" (2 Tim. 1:18).

Sixth, "Blessed are the pure in heart." This too was perfectly exemplified in Christ. He was the Lamb "without spot and without blemish. In becoming Man, He was uncontaminated, contracting none of the defilement's of sin. His humanity was "holy" (Luke 1:35). He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26). "In him was no sin" (1 John 3:5), therefore He "did no sin" (1 Pet. 2:22) and "knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21). "He is pure" (1 John 3:3). Because He was absolutely pure in nature, His motives and actions were always pure. "I seek not Mine own glory" (John 8:50) sums up the whole of His earthly career.

Seventh, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Supremely true is this of our blessed Saviour. He is the One who "made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). He was appointed to be "a propitiation" (Rom. 3:25), that is, the One who should pacify God's wrath, satisfy every demand of His broken law, glorify His justice and holiness. So, too, has He made peace between the alienated Jew and Gentile: see Eph. 2:14-15. In a coming day He will yet make peace on this sin-cursed and war-stricken earth. When He shall sit upon the throne of His father, David, then shall be fulfilled that word, "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end" (Isa. 9:7). Well may He be called "The Prince of Peace."

Eighth, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake." None was ever persecuted as was the Righteous One. What a word is that in Revelation 12:4! By the spirit of prophecy He declared, "I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up" (Ps. 88:15). On His first public appearance we are told they "rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong" (Luke 4:29). In the temple precincts they "took up stones to cast at him" (John 9:59). All through His ministry His steps were dogged by enemies. The religious leaders charged Him with having a demon (John 8:38). Those who sat in the gate spake against Him, and He was the song of the drunkards (Ps. 69:12). At His trial they plucked off His hair (Isa. 50:6) , spat in His face, buffeted Him, and smote Him with the palms of their hands (Matthew 26:67). After He was scourged by the soldiers and crowned with thorns, carrying His own cross, He was led to Calvary, where they crucified Him. Even in His dying hours He was not left in peace, but was persecuted by revilings and scoffings. How unutterably mild in

comparison is the persecution we are called on to endure for His sake!

In like manner, each of the promises attached to the Beatitudes find their accomplishment in Christ. Poor in spirit He was, but His supremely is the kingdom. Mourn He did, yet will He be comforted as He sees of the travail of His soul. Meekness personified, yet shall He Sit on a throne of glory. He hungered and thirsted after righteousness, yet now is He filled with satisfaction as He beholds the righteousness He wrought imputed to His people. Pure in heart, He sees God as none other does (Matthew 11:27). As the Peacemaker, He is owned the Son of God by all the blood-bought children. As the persecuted One, great is His reward, having been given the Name above all others. May the Spirit of God occupy us more and more with Him who is fairer than the children of men.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 15

Affliction and Glory

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory"

2 Corinthians 4:17

These words supply us with a reason why we should not faint under trials nor be overwhelmed by misfortunes. They teach us to look at the trials of time in the light of eternity. They affirm that the present buffetings of the Christian exercise a beneficent effect on the inner man. If these truths were firmly grasped by faith they would mitigate much of the bitterness of our sorrows. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." This verse sets forth a striking and glorious antithesis, as it contrasts our future state with our present. Here there is "affliction," there "glory." Here there is a "light affliction," there a "might of glory." In our affliction there is both levity and brevity; it is a light affliction, and it is but for a moment; in our future glory there is solidity and eternity! To discover the preciousness of this contrast let us consider, separately, each member, but in the inverse order of mention.

1. "A far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It is a significant thing that the Hebrew word for "glory," kabod, also means "weight." When weight is added to the value of gold or precious stones this increases their worth. Heaven's happiness cannot be told out in the words of earth; figurative expressions are best calculated to convey some imperfect views to us. Here in our text one term is piled up on top of another. That which awaits the believer is "glory," and when we say that a thing is glorious we have reached the limits of human language to express that which is excellent and perfect. But the "glory" awaiting us is weighted, yea it is "far more exceeding" weighty than anything terrestrial and temporal; its value defies computation; its transcendent excellency is beyond verbal description. Moreover, this wondrous glory awaiting us is not evanescent and temporal, but Divine and eternal; for "eternal" it could not be unless it were Divine. The great and blessed God is going to give us that which is worthy of Himself, yea that which is like Himself, infinite and everlasting.

2. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment."

a. "Affliction" is the common lot of human existence; "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). This is part of the entail of sin. It is not meet that a fallen creature should be perfectly happy in his sins. Nor are the children of God exempted; "Through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). By a hard and rugged road does God lead us to glory and immortality.

b. Our affliction is "light." Afflictions are not light in themselves for oft times they are heavy and grievous; but they are light comparatively! They are light when compared with what we really deserve. They are light when compared with the sufferings of the Lord Jesus. But perhaps their real lightness is best seen by comparing them with the weight of glory which is awaiting us. As said the same apostle in another place, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

c. "Which is but for a moment. Should our afflictions continue throughout a whole lifetime, and that life be equal in duration to Methuselah's, yet is it momentary if compared with the eternity which is before us. At most our affliction is but for this present life, which is as a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. O that God would enable us to examine our trials in their true perspective.

3. Note now the connection between the two. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The present is influencing the future. It is not for us to reason and philosophize about this, but to take God at His Word and believe it. Experience, feelings, observation of others, may seem to deny this fact. Oft times afflictions appear only to sour us and make us more rebellious and discontented. But let it be remembered that afflictions are not sent by God for the purpose of purifying the flesh: they are designed for the benefit of the "new man." Moreover, afflictions help to prepare us for the glory hereafter. Affliction draws away our heart from the love of the world; it makes us long more for the time when we shall be translated from this scene of sin and sorrow; it will enable us to appreciate (by way of contrast) the things which God had prepared for them that love Him.

Here then is what faith is invited to do: to place in one scale the present affliction, in the other, the eternal glory. Are they worthy to be compared? No, indeed. One second of glory will more than counterbalance a whole lifetime of suffering. What are years of toil, of sickness, of battling against poverty, of persecution, yea, of a martyr's death, when weighed over against the pleasures at God's right hand, which are for evermore! One breath of Paradise will extinguish all the adverse winds of earth. One day in the Father's House will more than counterbalance the years we have spent in this dreary wilderness. May God grant unto us that faith which will enable us to anticipatively lay hold of the future and live in the present enjoyment of it.





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 16

Contentment

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content"

Philippians 4:11

Discontent! Was there ever a time when there was so much restlessness in the world as there is today? We very much doubt it. Despite our boasted progress, the vast increase of wealth, the time and money expended daily in pleasure, discontent is everywhere. No class is exempt. Everything is in a state of flux, and almost everybody is dissatisfied. Many even among God's own people are affected with the evil spirit of this age.

Contentment! Is such a thing realizable, or is it nothing more than a beautiful ideal, a mere dream of the poet? Is it attainable on earth or is it restricted to the inhabitants of heaven? If practicable here and now, may it be retained, or are a few brief moments or hours of contentment the most that we may expect in this life? Such questions as these find answer, an answer at least, in the words of the apostle Paul: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

The force of the apostle's statement will be better appreciated if his condition and circumstances at the time he made it be kept in mind. When the apostle wrote (or most probably dictated) the words, he was not luxuriating in a special suite in the Emperor's palace, nor was he being entertained in some exceptional Christian household, the members of which were marked by unusual piety. Instead, he was "in bonds" (cf. Phil. 1:13, 14); "a prisoner" (Eph. 4:1), as he says in another Epistle. And yet, notwithstanding, he declared he was content!

Now, there is a vast difference between precept and practice, between the ideal and the realization. But in the case of the apostle Paul contentment was an actual experience, and one that must have been continuous, for he says, "in whatsoever state I am." How then did Paul enter into this experience, and of what did the experience consist? The reply to the first question is to be found in the word, "I have learned . . . to be content." The apostle did not say, "I have received the baptism of the Spirit, and therefore contentment is mine." Nor did he attribute this blessing to his perfect "consecration." Equally plain is it that it was not the outcome of natural disposition or temperament. It is something he had learned in the school of Christian experience. It should be noted, too, that this statement is found in an Epistle which the apostle wrote near the close of his earthly career!

From what has been pointed out it should be apparent that the contentment which Paul enjoyed was

not the result of congenial and comfortable surroundings. And this at once dissipates a vulgar conception. Most people suppose that contentment is impossible unless one can have gratified the desires of the carnal heart. A prison is the last place to which they would go if they were seeking a contented man. This much, then, is clear: contentment comes from within not without; it must be sought from God, not in creature comforts.

But let us endeavor to go a little deeper. What is "contentment"? It is the being satisfied with the sovereign dispensations of God's providence. It is the opposite of murmuring, which is the spirit of rebellion—the clay saying to the Potter, "Why hast Thou made me thus?" Instead of complaining at his lot, a contented man is thankful that his condition and circumstances are no worse than they are. Instead of greedily desiring something more than the supply of his present need, he rejoices that God still cares for him. Such an one is "content" with such as he has (Heb. 13:5).

One of the fatal hindrances to contentment is covetousness, which is a canker eating into and destroying present satisfaction. It was not, therefore, without good reason, that our Lord gave the solemn commandment to His followers—"Take heed, and beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15). Few things are more insidious. Often it poses under the fair name of thrift, or the wise safeguarding of the future—present economy so as to lay up for a "rainy day." The Scripture says, covetousness which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5), the affection of the heart being set upon material things rather than upon God. The language of a covetous heart is that of the horseleach's daughter, Give! Give! The covetous man is always desirous of more, whether he has little or much. How vastly different the words of the apostle—"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). A much needed word is that of Luke 3:14: "Be content with your wages"!

"Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6). Negatively, it delivers from worry and fretfulness, from avarice and selfishness. Positively, it leaves us free to enjoy what God has given us. What a contrast is found in the word which follows: "But they that will be (desire to be) rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9,10). May the Lord in His grace deliver us from the spirit of this world, and make us to be "content with such things as we have."

Contentment, then, is the product of a heart resting in God. It is the soul's enjoyment of that peace which passeth all understanding. It is the outcome of my will being brought into subjection to the Divine will. It is the blessed assurance that God doeth all things well, and is, even now, making all things work together for my ultimate good. This experience has to be "learned" by "proving what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Contentment is possible only as we cultivate and maintain that attitude of accepting everything which enters our lives as coming from the Hand of Him who is too wise to err, and too loving to cause one of His children a needless tear.

Let our final word be this: real contentment is only possible by being much in the presence of the Lord Jesus. This comes out clearly in the verses which follow our opening text; "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me" (Phil. 4:12, 13). It is only by cultivating intimacy with that One who was never discontent that we shall be delivered from the sin of complaining. It is only by daily fellowship with Him who ever delighted in the Father's will that we shall learn the secret of contentment. May both writer and reader so behold in the mirror of the Word the glory of the Lord that we shall be "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).





COMFORT FOR CHRISTIANS

Chapter 17

Precious Death

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints"

Psalm 116:15

This is one of the many comforting and blessed statements in Holy Scripture concerning that great event from which the flesh so much shrinks. If the Lord's people would more frequently make a prayerful and believing study of what the Word says upon their departure out of this world, death would lose much, if not all, of its terrors for them. But alas, instead of doing so, they let their imagination run riot, they give way to carnal fears, they walk by sight instead of by faith. Looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance, let us endeavor to dispel, by the light of Divine revelation, some of the gloom which unbelief casts around even the death of a Christian.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." These words intimate that a dying saint is an object of special notice unto the Lord, for mark the words "in the sight of." It is true that the eyes of the Lord are ever upon us, for He never slumbers nor sleeps. It is true that we may say at all times "Thou God seest me." But it appears from Scripture that there are occasions when He notices and cares for us in a special manner. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee" (Isaiah 43:2).

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." This brings before us an aspect of death which is rarely considered by believers. It gives us what may be termed the Godward side of the subject. Only too often, we contemplate death, like most other things, from our side. The text tells us that from the viewpoint of Heaven the death of a saint is neither hideous nor horrible, tragic or terrible, but "precious." This raises the question, Why is the death of His people precious in the sight of the Lord? What is there in the last great crisis which is so dear unto Him? Without attempting an exhaustive reply, let us suggest one or two possible answers.

1. *Their persons are precious to the Lord.*

They ever were and always will be dear to Him. His saints! They were the ones on whom His love was set before the earth was formed or the heavens made. These are they for whose sakes He left His Home on high and whom He bought with His precious blood, cheerfully laying down His life for them. These are they whose names are borne on our great High Priest's breast and engraven on the palms of His hands. They are His Father's love-gift to Him, His children, members of His body; therefore, everything that concerns them is precious in His sight. The Lord loves His people so

intensely that the very hairs of their heads are numbered: the angels are sent forth to minister unto them; and because their persons are precious unto the Lord so also are their deaths.

2. Because death terminates the saint's sorrows and sufferings.

There is a needs-be for our sufferings, for through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). Nevertheless, the Lord does not "afflict willingly" (Lam. 3:33). God is neither unmindful of nor indifferent to our trials and troubles. Concerning His people of old it is written, "In all their affliction he was afflicted" (Isa. 63:9). "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:13). So also are we told that our great High Priest is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15). Here, then, may be another reason why the death of a saint is precious in the sight of the Lord—because it marks the termination of his sorrows and sufferings.

3. Because death affords the Lord an opportunity to display His sufficiency.

Love is never so happy as when ministering to the needs of its cherished object, and never is the Christian so needy and so helpless as in the hour of death. But man's extremity is God's opportunity. It is then that the Father says to His trembling child, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness" (Isa. 41:10). It is because of this that the believer may confidently reply, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." Our very weakness appeals to His strength, our emergency to His sufficiency. Most blessedly is this principle illustrated in the well-known words "He shall gather the lambs (the helpless ones) with his arm, and carry them in his bosom" (Isaiah 40:11). Yes, His strength is made perfect in our weakness. Therefore is the death of the saints "precious" in His sight because it affords the Lord a blessed occasion for His love, grace and power to minister unto and undertake for His helpless people.

4. Because at death the saint goes direct to the Lord.

The Lord delights in having His people with Himself. Blessedly was this evidenced all through His earthly ministry. Wherever He went, the Lord took His disciples along with Him. Whether it was to the marriage at Cana, to the holy feasts in Jerusalem, to the house of Jairus when his daughter lay dead, or to the Mount of Transfiguration, they ever accompanied Him. How blessed is that word in Mark 3:14, "He ordained twelve, that they should be with him." And He is "the same yesterday and today and for ever." Therefore has He assured us, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Precious then is the death of the saints in His sight, because absent from the body we are "present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

While we are sorrowing over the removal of a saint, Christ is rejoicing. His prayer was "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory" (John 17:24), and in the entrance into Heaven of each one of His own people, He sees an answer to that prayer and is glad. He beholds in each one that is freed from "this body of death" another portion of the reward for His travail of soul, and He is satisfied with it. Therefore the death of His saints is precious to the Lord, for it occasions Him ground for rejoicing.

It is most interesting and instructive to trace out the fullness of the Hebrew word here translated "precious." it is also rendered "excellent." "How excellent is Thy loving kindness, O God!" (Ps. 36:7). "A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit" (Prov. 17:27). However worthily or unworthily he may live, the death of a saint is excellent in the sight of the Lord.

The same Hebrew word is also rendered "honorable." "Kings' daughters were among thy honorable women" (Ps. 45:9). So Ahasuerus asked of Haman "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" (Esther 6:6). Yes, the exchange of heaven for earth is truly honorable, and "This honour have all his saints. Praise ye the Lord."

This Hebrew word is also rendered "brightness." "If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness" (Job 31:26). Dark and gloomy though death may be unto those whom the Christian leaves behind, it is brightness "in the sight of the Lord": "at evening time it shall be light" (Zech. 14:7). Precious, excellent, honorable, brightness in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. May the Lord make this little meditation precious unto His saints.

