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—*Christian Classic Series*—

THE MUTE CHRISTIAN UNDER THE SMARTING ROD

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted...”

—Psalm 119:71

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

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The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod first appeared in 1659. Brooks stated his purpose in the preface: “that all afflicted and distressed Christians may have a proper salve for every sore, a proper remedy against every disease, at hand. Here he may find arguments to silence him, and means to quiet him, when it is at worst with him.”

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680) was a Nonconformist preacher who was born into a Puritan family. He studied at Cambridge, became a Congregationalist, and served as a chaplain in the English Civil War. In 1648, he became rector in the Church of England parish of St. Margaret’s in London, but only after making his Congregational principles clear. On several occasions, he preached before Parliament. But he was ejected after the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and remained in London as a Nonconformist preacher. He ministered in London during the Great Plague and Great Fire; and in 1672 he was granted a license to preach in Lime Street.

Brooks wrote over a dozen books, which include *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices*, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, and *Heaven on Earth*. His writings are always Christ-centered, filled with Scripture, and usually devotional in character. Charles Spurgeon once told his students, “Thomas Brooks is a signal instance of the wise and wealthy use of holy fancy...He hath dust of gold; for even in the margins of his books there are sentences of exceeding preciousness and hints at classic stories. His style is clear and full; he never so exceeds in illustration as to lose sight of his doctrine. His floods of metaphor never drown his meaning, but float it upon their surface. If you have never read his works I almost envy you the joy of entering for the first time...” Brooks was buried in Bunhill Fields, London.

THE MUTE CHRISTIAN UNDER THE SMARTING ROD

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth¹
every son whom he receiveth.”

—*Hebrews 12:6*

When He shows no anger!

There cannot be a greater evidence of God’s hatred and wrath than His *refusing* to correct men for their sinful courses and vanities!

Where God refuses to correct, there God resolves to destroy! There is no man so near God’s axe, so near the flames, so near hell, as he whom God will not so much as spend a rod upon! “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.” (Rev 3:19).

God is most angry *when He shows no anger!*

Who can seriously meditate upon this and not be silent under God’s most smarting rod?

¹ **scourgeth** – to punish severely, implying whipping.

All the hell that you shall ever have!

Consider Christian, that all your...

- trials and troubles,
- calamities and miseries,
- crosses and losses,

which you meet with in this world are *all the hell that you shall ever have!*

Here and now, you have your hell. Hereafter you shall have your heaven! This is the worst of your condition; the best is yet to come!

Lazarus had his hell first, his heaven last; but Dives² had his heaven first and his hell at last. You have all your pangs, and pains, and throes here that you shall ever have! Your ease, and rest, and pleasure are yet to come!

Here you have all your bitters; your sweets are yet to come! Here you have your sorrows; your joys are yet to come! Here you have all your *winter nights*; your *summer days* are yet to come! Here you have your evil things; your good things are yet to come!

Death will put an end to all your sins and to all your sufferings! Death will be an inlet to those joys, delights, and comforts which shall never have an end!

Who can seriously meditate upon this and not be silent under God's most smarting rod?

Then the scum appears!

Few Christians see themselves and understand themselves rightfully. By trials, God reveals much of a man's sinful self to his pious self. When the fire is put under the pot, then the scum appears. So when God tries a poor soul, Oh! how does...

- the scum of pride,
- the scum of murmuring,
- the scum of distrust,
- the scum of impatience,
- the scum of worldliness,
- the scum of carnality,³
- the scum of foolishness,
- the scum of willfulness

—reveal itself in the heart of the poor creature?

Trials are God's looking glass, in which His people see their own faults. Oh! that looseness, that vileness, that wretchedness, that sink of filthiness, that gulf of wickedness, which trials show to be in their hearts!

“Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction” (Isa 48:10).

When Munster⁴ lay sick

*“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten:
be zealous therefore, and repent.”—Revelation 3:19*

*“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth
every son whom he receiveth.”—Hebrews 12:6*

All the afflictions which come upon the saints are the fruits of divine love.

When Munster lay sick, and his friends asked him how he did and how he felt, he pointed to his sores and ulcers, whereof he was full, and said, “These are God's gems and jewels with which He decks His best friends, and to me they are more precious than all the gold and silver in the world!”

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted...” (Psa 119:71).

God afflicts you, O Christian, in love! Therefore Luther⁵ cries out, “Strike, Lord, strike, Lord! And spare not!”

² **Dives** – the Latin word for “rich (man)” occurring in the Vulgate, Luke 16; commonly taken as the proper name of the rich man in that parable and used generically for “rich man.”

³ **carnality** – a state of being fleshly; unspirituality; sensuality.

⁴ Possibly **Sebastian Munster** (1488-1522) – a Hebrew scholar and an early associate of the Reformer Martin Luther. Munster died of the plague in 1552 and Brooks' reference possibly relates to the sores and ulcers resulting from the disease of which he died.

⁵ **Martin Luther (1483-1586)** – German theologian and leader of the Reformation.

Father knows best!

“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.”—Hebrews 12:10

What God our Father wills is best. When He wills sickness, sickness is better than health. When He wills weakness, weakness is better than strength. When He wills poverty, poverty is better than wealth. When He wills reproach, reproach is better than honor. When He wills death, death is better than life.

As God is wisdom itself, and so knows that which is best, so He is goodness itself and therefore cannot do anything but that which is best; therefore remain silent before the Lord.

Everything on this side of hell is mercy

Oh! Labor every day to be more humble and more low and little in your own eyes. “Who am I,” says the humble soul, “but that God should cross me in this mercy, and take away that mercy, and pass a sentence of death upon every mercy? I am not worthy of the least mercy; I deserve not a crumb of mercy; I have forfeited every mercy.”

Only by pride comes contention. It is only pride that puts men upon contending with God and men. A humble soul will lie quiet at the foot of God, it will be contented with bare necessities. A dinner of green herbs relishes well with the humble man’s palate, whereas a stalled ox⁶ is but a coarse dish to a proud man’s stomach. A humble heart thinks none less than himself, nor none worse than himself. A humble heart looks upon small mercies as great mercies, and great afflictions as small afflictions, and small afflictions as no afflictions, and therefore sits mute and quiet under all. Do but keep humble, and you will keep silent before the Lord.

Pride kicks, and flings,⁷ and frets;⁸ but a humble man has still his hand upon his mouth. *Everything on this side of hell is mercy*, much mercy, rich mercy to a humble soul; and therefore he remains mute under the smarting rod.

One unmortified lust!

It is not your strongest resolutions or purposes, without the grace of the Spirit, which can overmaster a lust. A *soul-sore* will continue to run, though we resolve and say it shall not. It was the *blood* of the sacrifice and the *oil*, which cleansed the leper in the Law. And by them is meant the blood of Christ and the grace of His Spirit (Lev 14:14-16). It was a touch of Christ’s garment which cured the woman of her bloody issue.

Your strongest resolutions or purposes may hide a sin, but cannot quench it. They may cover a sin, but cannot cut off a sin. A black patch⁹ may cover a sore, but it does not cure it! Neither is it the papists’ purgatories, watchings, whippings, nor the kissing of the statue of St. Francis, or licking of lepers’ sores, which will cleanse the fretting leprosy¹⁰ of sin!

In the strength of Christ and in the power of the Spirit, set soundly upon the mortifying of every lust! Oh, hug none, indulge none, but resolutely set upon the ruin of every lust!

One leak in a ship will sink it!

One stab strikes Goliath just as dead as twenty-three did Caesar!

One Delilah may do Samson as much mischief as all the Philistines!

One broken wheel spoils the whole clock!

One vein bleeding will let out all the vitals!

One fly will spoil a whole box of ointment!

One bitter herb will spoil all the pottage!¹¹

By eating one apple, Adam lost paradise!

One lick of honey endangered Jonathan’s life!

One Achan was a trouble to all Israel!

One Jonah raises a storm and becomes a load too heavy for the whole ship!

Just so, one unmortified lust will raise very strong storms and tempests in the soul! And therefore, as you would have a blessed calm and quietness in your own spirits under your sharpest trials, set thoroughly upon the work of mortification.

⁶ **stalled ox** – an ox fattened in a stall for killing.

⁷ **flings** – flies out into violent and irregular motions.

⁸ **frets** – worries.

⁹ **black patch** – a small piece of black silk, often of fanciful shape, worn on the face either to hide a fault or, more usually, to show off the complexion by contrast. Fashionable, especially among women in 17th and 18th centuries.

¹⁰ **fretting leprosy** – a bacterial disease, characterized by ulcers, which slowly frets or eats away the body.

¹¹ **pottage** – boiled food; soup or stew.

Gideon had seventy sons, and but one bastard child, yet that bastard child destroyed all his seventy sons! Ah, Christian! Do you not know what a world of mischief *one unmortified lust* may do? Therefore, let nothing satisfy you but the blood of all your lusts!¹²

You have been long a-gathering rust

Oh! But *my* afflictions are greater than other men's afflictions are! Oh! There is no affliction like *my* affliction! How can I not murmur?

It may be your sins are greater than other men's sins. If you have sinned against more light, more love, more mercies, more promises—than others, no wonder if your afflictions are greater than others! If this be your case, you have more cause to be mute than to murmur!

It may be that the Lord sees that it is very needful that your afflictions should be greater than others. It may be your heart is harder than other men's hearts, and prouder and stouter than other men's hearts. It may be your heart is more impure than others, and more carnal than others, or else more selfish and more worldly than others, or else more deceitful and more hypocritical than others, or else more cold and careless than others, or more formal and lukewarm than others.

Now, if this is your case, certainly God sees it very necessary for the breaking of your hard heart, the humbling of your proud heart, the cleansing of your foul heart, and the spiritualizing of your carnal heart—that your afflictions should be greater than others; and therefore do not murmur!

Where the disease is strong, the remedy must be strong; else, the cure will never be wrought! God is a wise physician, and He would never give strong medicine, if a weaker one could effect the cure!

The more rusty the nail is, the oftener we put it into the fire to purify it. And the more crooked it is, the more blows and the harder blows we give to straighten it.

You have been long a-gathering rust; and therefore, if God deal thus with you, you have no cause to complain.

‘For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.’—Heb 12:6

If you attempt to enthrone the creature!

O Christian! God has removed one of your sweetest mercies, comforts, or enjoyments! It may be you have over-loved them, and over-prized them, and over-much delighted yourself in them. It may be they have often had your heart, when they should have had but your hand. It may be that care, that concern, that confidence, that joy, which should have been expended upon more noble objects, has been expended upon them!

Your heart is Christ's bed of spices, and it may be you have bedded your mercies with you, when Christ has been made to lie outside! You have had room for them, when you have had none for Him! They have had the best, when the worst have been counted good enough for Christ!

It is said of Reuben, that he went up to his father's bed (Gen 49:4). Ah! How often has one creature comfort, and sometimes another, been put in between Christ and your souls! How often have your dear enjoyments gone up to Christ's bed! Your near and dear mercies have come into Christ's bed of love—your hearts!

Now, if you take a husband, a child, a friend into that room in your soul which only belongs to God, He will either embitter it, remove it, or be the death of it.

If once the love of a wife runs out more to a servant than to her husband, the husband will remove that servant, though otherwise he was a servant worth gold.

Now, if God has stripped you of that very mercy with which you have often committed spiritual adultery and idolatry, have you any cause to murmur?

There are those who love their mercies into their graves, who hug their mercies to death, who kiss them until they kill them! Many a man has slain his mercies by setting too great a value upon them! Many a man has sunk his *ship of mercy* by overloading it. Over-loved mercies are seldom long-lived. The way to lose your mercies is to indulge them! The way to destroy them is to fix your minds and hearts upon them. You may write bitterness and death upon that mercy first, which has first taken away your heart from God.

Christian! Your heart is Christ's royal throne, and in this throne Christ will be chief! He will endure no competitor! If you attempt to enthrone the creature, be it ever so near and dear unto you, Christ will dethrone it! He will destroy it! He will quickly lay them in a bed of dust, who shall aspire to His royal throne!

‘Speak unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pitieth; and your sons and your daughters whom ye have left shall fall by the sword’—Ezekiel 24:21.

¹² **blood of all your lusts** – in other words, the Christian should not be content until by the grace of Christ he has put to death his lusts.

You are the one who has done this!

*“I was dumb, I opened not my mouth;
because thou didst it.”—Psalm 39:9*

In the words, you may observe three things:

1. The person speaking, and that is, David. David a king, David a saint, David “a man after God’s own heart,” David a Christian. And here we are to look upon David, not as a king, but as a Christian, as a man whose heart was right with God.
2. The action and carriage of David under the hand of God, in these words, “I was silent; I would not open my mouth.”
3. The reason of this humble and sweet carriage of his, in these words, “thou didst it,” or, in other words, “You are the one who has done this!”

The proposition is this: That it is the great duty and concern of gracious souls to be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences, and sharpest trials that they meet with in this world.

David’s silence is an acknowledgment of God as the author of all the afflictions that come upon us. There is no sickness so little, but God has a finger in it; though it be but the aching of the little finger.

David looks through all secondary causes to the first cause, and is silent. He sees a hand of God in all, and so sits mute and quiet. The sight of God in an affliction is of an irresistible efficacy to silence the heart, and to stop the mouth of a godly man.

Men who don’t see God in an affliction are easily cast into a feverish fit. They will quickly be in a flame; and when their passions are up, and their hearts on fire, they will begin to be saucy¹³ and make no bones of telling God to His teeth, that they do well to be angry.

Those who will not acknowledge God to be the author of all their afflictions will be ready enough to fall in with that mad principle of the Manichees,¹⁴ who maintained the devil to be the author of all calamities; as if there could be any evil or affliction in the city, and the Lord have no hand in it (Amo 3:6).

If God’s hand be not seen in the affliction, the heart will do nothing but fret and rage under affliction. Those who can see the ordering hand of God in all their afflictions, will with David lay their hands upon their mouths, when the rod of God is upon their backs!

They see that it was a Father who put those bitter cups in their hands; and love that laid those heavy crosses upon their shoulders; and grace that put those yokes around their necks, and this caused much quietness and calmness in their spirits.

When God’s people are under the rod, He makes by His Spirit and word, such sweet music in their souls, as allays¹⁵ all tumultuous motions, passions, and perturbations.¹⁶

‘I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it’ (Psa 39:9).

All honey would harm us

*“For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life:
weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh
in the morning.”—Psalm 30:5*

Their mourning shall last but until morning. God will turn...

- their winter’s night into a summer’s day,
- their sighing into singing,
- their grief into gladness,
- their mourning into music,
- their bitter into sweet,
- their wilderness into a paradise.

The life of a Christian is filled up with interchanges of

- sickness and health,
- weakness and strength,
- want and wealth,
- disgrace and honor,
- crosses and comforts,

¹³ **saucy** – insolent toward superiors; disrespectful.

¹⁴ **Manichees** also **Manichaeans** – believers in a religious system widely accepted from the third to the fifth centuries founded by the Persian Manes; a special feature of the system was that Satan was represented as co-eternal with God.

¹⁵ **allays** – calms.

¹⁶ **perturbations** – disturbances; mental agitations.

- *miseries and mercies,*
- *joys and sorrows,*
- mirth and mourning.

All honey would harm us; all wormwood¹⁷ would undo us, a composition of both is the best way to keep our souls in a healthy constitution. It is best and most for the health of the soul that *the warm south wind of mercy,* and *the cold north wind of adversity* do both blow upon it. And though every wind which blows shall blow good to the saints, yet certainly their sins die most and their graces thrive best when they are under the frigid, drying, nipping north wind of calamity, as well as under the warm, nourishing south wind of mercy and prosperity.

The more a Christian is tempted

God had but one Son without corruption, but He had none without temptation! By temptations, the Lord will make His people more and more conformable to the image of His Son. Christ was much tempted; He was often in *the school of temptation.* And *the more a Christian is tempted,* the more into the likeness of Christ he will be transformed. The most tempted Christians do most resemble Christ in meekness, lowliness, holiness, heavenliness, etc. The image of Christ is most fairly stamped upon tempted souls. Tempted souls are much in looking up to Jesus, and every gracious look upon Christ changes the soul more and more into the image of Christ. Tempted souls experience much of the succoring¹⁸ of Christ, and the more they experience the sweet of the succoring of Christ, the more they grow up into the likeness of Christ.

Temptations are the tools by which the Father does more and more carve, form, and fashion His precious saints into the similitude and likeness of His dearest Son.

By temptations, God makes sin more hateful, the world less delightful, and relations less hurtful.

Distasteful temptations

No man is the less loved by God because he is tempted. Those whom God loves best are usually tempted most. Witness David, Job, Joshua, Peter, Paul, yes, Christ Himself, Who, as He was beloved above all others, so He was tempted above all others! He was tempted to question His Sonship; He was tempted to the worst idolatry, even to worship the devil himself; to the greatest infidelity, to distrust His Father's providence, and to use unlawful means for necessary supplies; and to self-murder, "Cast yourself down!" etc. God had but one Son without corruption, but He had none without temptation!

Those who were once glorious on earth and are now triumphing in heaven have been severely tempted and assaulted by Satan. It is as natural and common for the choicest saints to be tempted, as it is for the sun to shine, the bird to fly, the fire to burn. The eagle complains not of her wings, nor the peacock of her train of feathers, nor the nightingale of her voice because these are natural to them. No more should saints of their temptations, because they are natural to them.

"Our whole life is nothing but a temptation!" The best men have been the worst tempted!

Temptations which are resisted and bewailed will never hurt you nor harm you.

Distasteful temptations seldom or never prevail. So long as the soul distastes them and the will remains firmly averse against them, they can do no hurt. So long as the language of the soul is, "Get behind me, Satan!" the soul is safe.

It is not Satan tempting, but my assenting; it is not his enticing, but my yielding, which undoes me! Temptations may be troubles to my mind, but they are not sins upon my soul, while I am in arms against them. If your heart trembles and your flesh quakes when Satan tempts, your condition is safe enough. If Satan's temptations are your greatest afflictions, his temptations shall never conquer you nor harm you!

But a fleabite!

Christian! Your present afflictions are not great, if compared with the afflictions and torments of many of the damned, who, when they were in this world, never sinned at so high a rate as you have done! There are many now in hell, who never sinned against such clear light as you have done, nor against such special love as you have done, nor against such precious mercies as you have done! Certainly, there are many now a-roaring in everlasting burnings, who never sinned as you have done!

What are your afflictions, your present torments, compared to the torments of the damned, whose torments are numberless, bottomless, remediless, and endless!

Whose pains are without intermission of mitigation;¹⁹ who have weeping served for the first course, gnashing of teeth for the second course, the gnawing worm for the third course, and intolerable pain for the fourth course!

¹⁷ **wormwood** – a plant proverbial for its bitter taste; therefore, used for anything bitter or grievous to the soul.

¹⁸ **succoring** – assistance.

¹⁹ **mitigation** – the action of making something milder.

Yet the pain of the body is the least part of pain. The very soul of sorrow and pain is the soul's sorrow and pain! The everlasting alienation and separation from God is served for the fifth course!

Ah, Christian! How can you seriously think on these things and not lay your hand upon your mouth, even when you are under the greatest temporal sufferings? Your sins have been far greater than many of those who are now in hell, and your "great" afflictions are *but a fleabite* compared to theirs! Therefore, hush your murmuring, and be silent before the Lord!

Our present sufferings

Such is the splendor, the brightness, the glory, the happiness, and blessedness which is reserved for the saints in heaven, that had I all the tongues of men on earth, and all the excellencies of the angels in heaven, yet I would not be able to conceive nor to express that vision of glory to you! That glory is inconceivable and inexpressible! It is best to be hastening there, that we may feel and enjoy that which we shall never be able to declare!

All the troubles, afflictions, and sorrows of this life, in comparison with eternal happiness and blessedness, are to be considered as nothing. They are but as the point of a pin compared to the starry heavens.

"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.

And will you murmur?

Is not Christ your treasure? Is not heaven your inheritance, *and will you murmur?*

Have you not much in hand, and more in hope? Have you not much in possession, but much more reserved in heaven, *and will you murmur?*

Has not God given you...

- a changed heart,
- a renewed nature, and
- a sanctified soul
- and will you murmur?

Has He not given you...

- Himself to satisfy you,
- His Son to save you,
- His Spirit to lead you,
- His grace to adorn you,
- His covenant to assure you,
- His mercy to pardon you,
- His righteousness to clothe you
- and will you murmur?

Has He not made you...

- a friend,
- a son,
- a brother,
- a bride,
- an heir
- and will you murmur?

Has not God often turned...

- your water into wine,
- your brass into silver, and
- your silver into gold
- and will you murmur?

- When you were dead, did not He quicken you?*
- When you were lost, did not He seek you?*
- When you were wounded, did not He heal you?*
- When you were falling, did not He support you?*
- When you were down, did not He raise you?*
- When you were staggering, did not He establish you?*
- When you were erring, did not He correct you?*

*When you were tempted, did not He support you? and
When you went in dangers, did not He deliver you?
—and will you murmur?*

What! You who are so highly advanced and exalted above many thousands in the world? Murmuring suits none so badly as saints.

Some Delilah

God cures David of adultery by killing his endeared child. There is *some Delilah*, some darling, some beloved sin or other that a Christian's calling, condition, constitution, or temptations leads him to play with and to hug in his own bosom. As in a plot of ground that lies untilled, among the great variety of weeds there is usually some master-weed, which is more plentiful and more repulsive than all the rest. So it is also in the souls of men, though there be a general mixture and medley of all evil and corrupt qualities, yet there is someone sin which is usually paramount, which is most powerful and prevalent, which sways and manifests itself more eminently and evidently than any other of them.

So, though the root of sin and bitterness has spread itself over all, yet every man has his inclination to one kind of sin, rather than another. And this may be called a man's besetting sin, his bosom sin, his darling sin.

Now, it is one of the hardest works in this world to subdue and bring under control this bosom sin! Oh! The prayers, the tears, the sighs, the sobs, the groans, the distress that it will cost a Christian before he subdues this darling sin!

A man may easily subdue and mortify such and such sins, but when it comes to the master-sin, to the bosom-sin, oh! What tugging and pulling is there! What striving and struggling is there to get off that sin, to get down that sin!

Now, if the Lord, by smiting you in some near and dear enjoyment, shall draw out your heart to fall upon the smiting of your master-sin and shall so sanctify the affliction as to make it issue in the mortification of your bosom corruption, what eminent cause will you have rather to bless Him than to sit down and murmur against Him! And doubtless if you are dear to God, God will, by striking your dearest mercy, put you upon striking at your darling sin! Therefore, do not murmur, even when God touches the apple of your eye; even when He has snatched the fairest and the sweetest flower out of your bosom.

Paulinus Nolanus²⁰

Paulinus Nolanus, when his city was taken from him, prayed thus: "Lord! Let me not be troubled at the loss of my gold, silver, honor; for You are all, and much more than all these unto me!"

Christian! In the absence of all your sweetest enjoyments, Christ will be all in all unto you!

"My jewels are my husband," said one. "My ornaments are my two sons," said another. "My treasures are my friends," said yet another.

And so may a Christian, under his greatest losses say, "Christ is my richest jewel, my chief treasure, my best ornament, my sweetest delight! What all these things are to a carnal heart, to a worldly heart, that and more is Christ to me!" "Christ is all!" (Col 3:11).

A jewel more worth than a world!

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."—Ephesians 5:16

Time is *a jewel more worth than a world!* Time is not yours to dispose of as you please; it is a glorious talent that men must be accountable for, as well as any other talent. Of all talents, time is the hardest well to improve.

Ah, beloved, have not you need to improve your time, who have much work to do in a short time:

- *your souls to save,*
- *a God to honor,*
- *a Christ to exalt,*
- *a hell to escape,*
- *a race to run,*
- *a crown to win,*
- *temptations to withstand,*
- *corruptions to conquer,*
- *afflictions to bear,*
- *mercies to improve, and*
- *your generation to serve.*

²⁰ **Paulinus Nolanus** (ca. 353 - 431) – one of the most important Latin poets of his time.

A man too big for temptations to conquer!

Communion with God is...

- *the life of your graces,*
- *the sweetener of all ordinances, providences, and mercies,*
- *the strengthener of your hearts and hands,*
- *the soul of your comforts, and*
 - *the crown of your souls.*

Communion with God makes the bitter things sweet; and massive things light. Nothing like communion with God to fence you against temptations, to sweeten all afflictions, and to make you cleave to God in the face of all troubles and oppositions.

A man high in communion with God is *a man too big for temptations to conquer* or troubles to overcome. Souls that have no communion or but little communion with God—they are usually as soon conquered as tempted, as soon vanquished as assaulted.

Such lessons!

*“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD,
and teachest him out of thy law.”—Psalm 94:12*

All the chastening in the world without divine teaching will never make a man blessed. That man, who finds correction attended with instruction and lashing with lessoning, is a happy man.

If God, by the affliction which is upon you, shall teach you:

- *how to loathe sin more, and*
- *how to trample upon the world more, and*
- *how to walk with God more*
 - your afflictions are in love.

If God shall teach you by afflictions:

- *how to die to sin more, and*
- *how to die to your relations more, and*
- *how to die to your self-interest more*
 - your afflictions are in love.

If God shall teach you by afflictions:

- *how to live to Christ more,*
- *how to lift up Christ more, and*
- *how to long for Christ more*
 - your afflictions are in love.

If God shall teach you by afflictions:

- *how to mind heaven more,*
- *how to live in heaven more, and*
- *how to fit for heaven more*
 - your afflictions are in love.

If God by afflictions shall teach:

- *your proud heart how to lie more low,*
- *your hard heart how to grow more tender,*
- *your censorious heart how to grow more charitable,*
- *your carnal heart how to grow more spiritual,*
- *your froward²¹ heart how to grow more quiet*
 - your afflictions are in love.

When God teaches your thoughts as well as your brains, your heart as well as your head, any of these lessons, your afflictions are in love. Where God loves, He afflicts in love; and wherever God afflicts in love, there He will, sooner or later, teach such souls *such lessons* as shall do them good to all eternity.

²¹ **froward** – stubbornly contrary and disobedient.

If our afflictions are so sanctified

If our afflictions are so sanctified as that they draw out our soul...

- to love the Lord more, and
 - to fear the Lord more, and
 - to please the Lord more, and
 - to cleave to the Lord more, and
 - to wait on the Lord more, and
 - to walk with the Lord more
- then they are sent in love. Oh, then they are the wounds of a friend indeed!

If the afflictions that are upon us do:

- increase our courage,
 - strengthen our patience,
 - raise our faith,
 - inflame our love, and
 - enliven our hopes
- certainly they are sent in love, and all our wounds are the wounds of a friend.

If this cockatrice²² be not crushed in the egg!

There is infinitely more evil in the least sin than there is in the greatest miseries and afflictions that can possibly come upon you! Yes, there is more evil in the least sin than there is in all the troubles that ever come upon the world; yes, than there is in all the miseries and torments of hell!

The least sin...

- is an offense to the great God;
- is a wrong to the immortal soul;
- is a breach of God's righteous law;
- cannot be washed away but by the blood of Jesus;
- will shut the soul out of heaven, and
- shut the soul up as a prisoner in hell forever and ever!

The least sin is rather to be avoided and prevented than the greatest sufferings. *If this cockatrice be not crushed in the egg*, it will soon become a serpent!

Sin, if but thought on and pondered, will break out into action, action into custom, custom into habit, and then both body and soul are lost irrecoverably to all eternity!

The least sin is very dangerous!

- Caesar was stabbed to death with a small needle;
- Herod was eaten up by small worms;
- Pope Adrian was choked with a gnat;
- a mouse is but little, yet kills an elephant if he gets up into his trunk;
- a scorpion is little, yet able to sting a lion to death;
- though the leopard be great, yet he is poisoned with a head of garlic;
- the least spark may consume the greatest house;
- the least leak will sink the greatest ship;
- a whole arm has been gangrened by a pick of the little finger;
- a little opened door may betray the greatest city;
- a pinch of poison diffuses itself into all parts until it strangles the vital spirits, and turns out the soul from the body.

If the serpent can but wriggle in his tail by an evil thought, he will soon make a surprise of the soul, as you see in that sad instance of Adam and Eve.

He who has deserved a hanging

"Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?"—Lamentations 3:39

He who has deserved a hanging has no reason to charge the judge with cruelty if he escapes with a whipping!

²² **cockatrice** – a poisonous serpent; a viper.

And we who have deserved a damning have no reason to charge God for being too severe if we escape with a fatherly lashing!

He never lacks an apple²³ for an Eve

It is ten thousand times a greater judgment and affliction to be given to a fretful spirit, a froward²⁴ spirit, a muttering spirit under an affliction than it is to be afflicted. This is both the devil's sin and the devil's punishment. God is still afflicting, crossing, and vexing him; and he is still a-fretting,²⁵ repining,²⁶ vexing, and rising up against God. [There is] no sin like the devil's sin, no punishment like the devil's punishment.

A man were better to have all the afflictions of all the afflicted throughout the world at once upon him than to be given up to a froward spirit, to a muttering, murmuring heart under the least affliction. When you see a soul fretting, vexing, and stamping under the mighty hand of God, you see one of Satan's first-born, one who resembles him to the life. No child can be so much like the father, as this froward soul is like to the father of lies.

Though he has been in chains almost this six thousand years, yet he has never lain still one day, nor one night, no, nor one hour in all this time, but is still a-fretting, vexing, tossing and tumbling in his chains, like a princely bedlam.²⁷

He is a lion, not a lamb; a roaring lion, not a sleepy lion; not a lion standing still, but a lion going up and down.

He is not satisfied with the prey he has already gotten, but is restless in his designs to fill hell with souls.

He never lacks...

- an apple for an Eve,

- nor a grape for a Noah,

- nor a change of clothing for a Gehazi,

- nor a wedge of gold for an Achan,

- nor a crown for an Absalom,

- nor a bag of silver for a Judas,

- nor a world for a Demas!

If you look into one company, there you shall find Satan dishing out his meat to every palate. If you look into another company, there you shall find him fitting a lace to every shoe. If you look into a third company, there you shall find him suiting a garment to every back. He is under wrath, and cannot but be restless.

Here, with Jael, he allures poor souls in with milk and murders them with a nail! There, with Joab, he embraces with one hand and stabs with another!

Here, with Judas, he kisses and betrays! And there, with the whore of Babylon, he presents a golden cup with poison in it!

He cannot be quiet, though his chains be always on!

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

He has a mint²⁸ constantly going in hell

Christians should be mute and silent under their afflictions, because hereby they shall cross and frustrate Satan's great design and expectation. In all the afflictions he brought upon Job, Satan's design was not so much to make Job a beggar, as it was to make him a blasphemer. It was not so much to make Job outwardly miserable, as it was to make Job inwardly miserable by occasioning him to mutter and murmur against the righteous hand of God, so that he might have had some matter of accusation against him to the Lord.

Satan is the unwearied accuser of the brethren: "...the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (Rev 12:10). Satan is the great tempter and accuser between God and His children. *He has a mint constantly going in hell*, where, as an untiring mint-master, he is still coming and hammering out of accusations against the saints! First, he tempts and allures souls to sin, and then accuses them of those very sins he has tempted them to, so that he may disgrace them before God and bring them, if it were possible, out of favor with God. And though he knows beforehand that God and His people are, by the bond of the covenant and by the blood of the Redeemer, so closely united that

²³ **apple** – the Word of God does not tell us that Eve took a bite from an apple; rather it says that "she took of the fruit thereof" (Gen 3:6).

²⁴ **froward** – stubbornly contrary and disobedient.

²⁵ **a-fretting** – being irritated.

²⁶ **repining** – being discontented.

²⁷ **Bedlam** – Bedlam was the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem in London, England, used as an asylum for mentally deranged persons; therefore, the word became an expression for a madman.

²⁸ **mint** – a place in which the fabrication of anything is carried on.

they can never be severed, yet such is his rage and wrath, envy and malice, that he will endeavor that which he knows he shall never effect!

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

Can a worm ward off the blow of the Almighty?

It is fruitless and futile to strive, to contest or contend with God. No man has ever got anything by muttering or murmuring under the hand of God, except it has been more frowns, blows, and wounds. Those who will not lie quiet and still, when mercy has tied them with silken cords, justice will put them in iron chains! If *golden fetters* will not hold you, *iron fetters* shall!

If Jonah will vex and fret and fling, justice will fling him overboard to cool him, and quell²⁹ him, and keep him prisoner in the whale's belly until he is vomited up and his spirit made quiet before the Lord.

What you get by struggling and grumbling, you may put in your eye and weep it out when you are done. "Do they provoke me to anger? saith the LORD: do they not provoke themselves to the confusion of their own faces? Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place, upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched" (Jer 7:19-20). "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?" (1Co 10:22).

Zanchy³⁰ observes these two things from these words:

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

Though the cup be bitter, yet it is put into your hand by your Father! Though the cross be heavy, yet He who has laid it on your shoulders will bear the heaviest end of it Himself! Why, then, should you mutter? Shall bears and lions take blows and knocks from their keepers; and will you not take a few blows and knocks from the keeper of Israel? Why should the clay contend with the potter, or the creature with his Creator, or the servant with his master, or weakness with strength, or a poor nothing creature with an omnipotent God? Can stubble stand before the fire? Can chaff abide before the whirlwind? *Can a worm ward off the blow of the Almighty?*

A froward and impatient spirit under the hand of God will but add chain to chain, cross to cross, yoke to yoke, and burden to burden. The more men tumble and toss in their feverish fits, the worse they distemper;³¹ and the longer it will be before the cure be effected. The easiest and the surest way of cure is to lie still and quiet until the poison of the distemper³² be sweat out. Where patience has its perfect work, there the cure will be certain and easy.

When a man has his broken leg set, he lies still and quiet, and so his cure is easily and speedily wrought. But when a horse's leg is set, he frets and flings, he flounces³³ and flies out, unjointing it again and again, and so his cure is the more difficult and tedious. Those Christians who, under the hand of God, are like the horse or mule, fretting and flinging, will but add to their own sorrows and sufferings and put the day of their deliverance further off.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous

The choicest saints are "...born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). "*Many are the afflictions of the righteous*" (Psa 34:19). God, who is infinite in wisdom and matchless in goodness, has ordered troubles, yes, many troubles to come trooping in upon us on every side. Our crosses seldom come single. They usually come treading one upon the heels of another; they are like April showers, no sooner is one over but another comes. And yet, Christians, it is mercy, it is rich mercy, that every affliction is not an execution, that every correction is not a damnation.

²⁹ **quell** – overcome; subdue.

³⁰ **Jerome Zanchius** also **Girolamo Zanchi** (1516-1590) – Italian Protestant Reformer, author of *Absolute Predestination*.

³¹ **distemper** – *verb*: disorder the physical condition; sicken.

³² **distemper** – *noun*: disease.

³³ **flounces** – produces abrupt, jerky movements.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted!

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted....”—Psalm 119:71

A gracious soul secretly concludes, as stars shine brightest in the night, so God will make my soul shine and glisten like gold, while I am *in* this furnace, and when I come out of the furnace of affliction. “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Surely, as the taste of honey opened Jonathan’s eyes, so this cross, this affliction shall open my eyes. By this stroke I shall come to have a clearer sight of my *sins* and of *myself*, and a fuller sight of my *God* (Job 33:27-28; 40:4-5; 13:1-7)!

Surely this affliction shall proceed in the purging away of my dross (Isa 1:25)!

Surely as plowing of the ground kills the weeds, and harrowing breaks hard clods, so these afflictions shall kill my sins and soften my heart (Hos 5:15; 6:1-3)!

Surely as the plaster³⁴ draws out the infectious core, so the afflictions which are upon me shall draw out the core of *pride*, the core of *self-love*, the core of *envy*, the core of *earthliness*, the core of *formality*, the core of *hypocrisy* (Psa 119:67, 71)!

Surely by these afflictions, the Lord will crucify my heart more and more to the world and the world to my heart (Gal 6:14; Psa 131:1-3)!

Surely by these afflictions, the Lord will keep pride from my soul (Job 33:14-21)!

Surely these afflictions are but the Lord’s pruning-knives, by which He will bleed my sins, and prune my heart, and make it more fertile and fruitful! They are but the Lord’s potion, by which He will clear me, and rid me of those spiritual diseases and maladies which are most deadly and dangerous to my soul! Affliction is such a *healing potion*, as will carry away all soul-diseases, better than all other remedies (Zec 13:8-9)!

Surely these afflictions shall increase my spiritual communion with God (Rom 5:3-4)!

Surely by these afflictions, I shall be made to partake more of God’s holiness (Heb 12:10)! As black soap makes white clothes, so do sharp afflictions make holy hearts!

Surely by these afflictions, the Lord will draw out my heart more and more to seek Him! “In their afflictions they will seek me early” (Hos 5:15)! In times of affliction, Christians will industriously, speedily, early seek unto their Lord!

Surely by these trials and troubles, the Lord will fix my soul more than ever upon the great concerns of the eternal world (Joh 14:1-3; Rom 8:17, 18; 2Co 4:16-18)!

Surely by these afflictions the Lord will work in me more tenderness and compassion towards those who are afflicted (Heb 10:34, 13:3)!

Surely these afflictions are but *God’s love-tokens!* “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev 3:19)! So says the holy Christian, “O my soul! be quiet, be still. All is sent in love, all is a fruit of divine favor. I see honey upon the top of every twig; I see the rod is but a rosemary branch;³⁵ I have sugar with my gall,³⁶ and wine with my wormwood; therefore be silent, O my soul!”

Afflictions abase the carnal attractions of the world outside us that might entice us! Affliction abates the lustiness of the flesh within us that might otherwise ensnare us!

Afflictions humble us and keep us low! Holy hearts will be humble under the afflicting hand of God. When God’s rod is upon their backs, their mouths shall be in the dust! A godly heart will lie lowest, when the hand of God is lifted highest.

All this proves that affliction is a mighty advantage to us! “It is good for me that I have been afflicted...” (Psa 119:71).

The honey and the sting!

*“For he doth not afflict willingly [or as the Hebrew has it, “from His heart”]
nor grieve the children of men.”*—Lamentations 3:33

Christians conclude that God’s heart was not in their afflictions, though His hand was. He takes no delight to afflict His children; it goes against His heart.

It is a grief to Him to be grievous to them, a pain to Him to be punishing of them, a sorrow to Him to be striking them. He has no will, no desire, no inclination, no disposition to that work of afflicting of His people. And therefore, He calls it “His strange work” (Isa 28:21).

Mercy and punishment—they flow from God, as *the honey and the sting* from the bee. The bee yields honey of her own nature, but she does not sting but when she is provoked.

³⁴ **plaster** – a paste-like mixture applied to a part of the body for healing.

³⁵ **rosemary branch** – rosemary is an evergreen shrub of the mint family, which grows in Southern Europe and Asia Minor and yields a fragrant essential oil. In literature and folklore, it is a symbol of remembrance and faithfulness. God’s rod is then a fragrant reminder of His faithfulness to us.

³⁶ **gall** – something bitter to endure.

God takes delight in showing of mercy (Mic 7:18). He takes no pleasure in giving His people up to adversity (Hos 11:8). Mercy and kindness flow from Him freely, naturally. He is never severe, never harsh. He never stings, He never terrifies us, but when He is sadly provoked by us.

God's hand sometimes may lie very hard upon His people, when His heart, His affections at those very times may be yearning towards them (Jer 31:18-20).

No man can tell the heart of God by His hand. God's hand of mercy may be open to those against whom His heart is set, as you see in the rich poor fool, and Dives, in the Gospel. And His hand of severity may lie hard upon those on whom He has set His heart, as you may see in Job and Lazarus.

You have a greater interest in me, than I have in myself

The godly man gives himself up to God. The secret language of the soul is this, "Lord, here am I; do with me what You please, I give up myself to be at Your disposal."

There was a good woman, who, when she was sick, being asked whether she were willing to live or die, answered, "Whichever God pleases."

But, said one who stood by, "If God would refer it to you, which would you choose?" "Truly," said she, "if God would refer it to me, I would even refer it right back to Him again." This was a soul worth gold.

"Well," says a gracious soul,

"The ambitious man gives himself up to his honors, but I give up myself unto God. The voluptuous³⁷ man gives himself up to his pleasures, but I give up myself to God. The covetous man gives himself up to his bags of money, but I give up myself to God. The wanton man gives himself up to his lust, but I give up myself to God. The drunkard gives himself up to his cups, but I give up myself to God. The papist gives up himself to his idols, but I give myself to God. The Turk gives up himself to his Mahomet, but I give up myself to God.

The heretic gives up himself to his heretical opinions, but I give up myself to God. Lord! Lay what burden You will upon me, only let Your everlasting arms be under me!"

Strike, Lord, strike, and spare not; for I submit to Your will. *You have a greater interest in me, than I have in myself*; and therefore I give up myself unto You, and am willing to be at Your disposal, and am ready to receive whatever impression You shall stamp upon me. O blessed Lord! Have You not again and again said unto me, as once the king of Israel said to the king of Syria, "I am yours, and all that I have is yours" (1Ki 20:4).

God says, "I am yours, O soul, to save you!

- My mercy is yours to pardon you!

- My blood is yours to cleanse you!

- My merits are yours to justify you!

- My righteousness is yours to clothe you!

- My Spirit is yours to lead you!

- My grace is yours to enrich you!

- My glory is yours to reward you!"

"And therefore," says a gracious soul, "I cannot but make a resignation of myself unto You. Lord! Here I am, do with me as seems good in Your own eyes. I resign up myself to Your will."

Whatever weather pleases God, pleases me!

I have read of a gentleman, who, meeting with a shepherd in a misty morning, asked him what weather it would be. "It will be," said the shepherd, "that weather which pleases me." And being courteously requested to express his meaning, replied, "Sir, it shall be whatever weather pleases God; and *whatever weather pleases God, pleases me!*"

Lay your hand upon your mouth, and be silent

"Rest in the LORD [Be silent before the Lord]; and wait patiently for him..."—Psalm 37:7

I charge you, O my soul, not to mutter, nor to murmur. I command you, O my soul, to be silent under the afflicting hand of God. Peace, O my soul! be still, leave your muttering, leave your murmuring, leave your complaining, leave your chafing, and vexing, and *lay your hand upon your mouth, and be silent*. O my soul! be quiet, be silent, else you will one day

³⁷ **voluptuous** – inclined to a sensual life.

be called in question for all those inward mutterings, uproars, and passions that are in you, seeing no sufficient cause can be produced why you should murmur, quarrel, or wrangle under the righteous hand of God.

The meritorious cause of all our sorrows and sufferings

“Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.”—Lamentations 3:39-40

“I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him.”—Micah 7:9

Sins are *the meritorious cause of all our sorrows and sufferings*. In all our sorrows, we should read our sins! When God’s hand is upon our backs, our hands should be upon our sins.

When a Christian is under the afflicting hand of God, he may well say, “I may thank...

- this proud heart of mine,*
- this worldly heart of mine,*
- this froward heart of mine,*
- this formal heart of mine,*
- this dull heart of mine,*
- this backsliding heart of mine,*
 - this self-seeking heart of mine, for...*

- this cup so bitter,*
- this pain so grievous,*
- this loss so great,*
- this disease so desperate,*
 - this wound so incurable!*

It is my own self, my own sin, which has caused these floods of sorrows to break in upon me!”

Diseases, aches, sicknesses, pains

Diseases, aches, sicknesses, pains—they are all the daughters of sin, and he who is not sensible of them as the births and products of sin does but add to his sin and provokes the Lord to add to his sufferings (Isa 26:9-11). No man shall ever be charged by God for feeling his burden if he neither frets nor faints under it. Grace does not destroy nature, but rather perfects it. Grace is of a noble offspring; it neither turns men into stocks³⁸ nor to stoics.³⁹ The more grace, the more sensible [one is] of the tokens, frowns, blows, and lashes of a displeased Father.

Though Calvin,⁴⁰ under his greatest pains, was never heard to mutter nor murmur, yet he was heard often to say, “How long, Lord, how long?”

A pious commander being shot in battle, when the wound was searched and the bullet cut out, some standing by pitying his pain, he replied, “Though I groan, yet I bless God I do not grumble.” God allows His people to groan, though not to grumble. It is a God-provoking sin to lie stupid and senseless under the afflicting hand of God. God will heat that man’s furnace of affliction sevenfold hotter who is in the furnace but feels it not.

Every twig has a voice!

“The LORD’S voice crieth unto the city, and the man of wisdom shall see thy name: hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it.”—Micah 6:9

Christians should hear the rod, and kiss the rod, and sit mute and silent under God’s rod.

Christians should be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences, and sharpest trials which they meet with in this world, that they may the better hear and understand the voice of God’s rod.

As the word has a voice, the Spirit a voice, and conscience a voice, so God’s rod has a voice. Afflictions are the rod of God’s anger, the rod of His displeasure, and His rod of revenge. God’s rods are not mutes. They are all vocal, they are all

³⁸ **stocks** – figures of what is lifeless, motionless, or void of sensation; hence, senseless or stupid people.

³⁹ **stoics** – people who seemingly are unaffected by joy, grief, pleasure, or pain.

⁴⁰ **John Calvin** (1509-1564) – Reformer, father of Reformed and Presbyterian theology, author of numerous works including the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

speaking as well as *smiting*. *Every twig has a voice!* “Ah! Soul,” says one twig, “you say it smarts. Well! Tell me; is it good to provoke a jealous God?” (Jer 4:18).

“Ah! Soul,” says another twig, “you say it is bitter; it reaches to your heart; but have not your own doings procured these things?” (Rom 6:20-21).

“Ah! Soul,” says another twig, “where is the profit, the pleasure, the sweet that you have found in wandering from God?” (Hos 2:7).

“Ah! Soul,” says another twig, “was it not best with you, when you were high in your communion with God, and when you were humble and close in your walking with God?” (Mic 6:8).

“Ah! Christian,” says another twig, “will you search your heart, and try your ways, and turn to the Lord your God?” (Lam 3:40).

“Ah! Soul,” says another twig, “will you die to sin more than ever, and to the world more than ever, and to relations more than ever, and to yourself more than ever?” (Rom 14:6-8; Gal 6:18).

“Ah! Soul,” says another twig, “will you live more to Christ than ever, and cleave closer to Christ than ever, and prize Christ more than ever, and venture further for Christ than ever?”

“Ah! Soul,” says another twig, “will you love Christ with a more inflamed love, and hope in Christ with a more raised hope, and depend upon Christ with a greater confidence, and wait upon Christ with more invincible patience?”

Now, if the soul is not mute and silent under the rod, how is it possible that it should ever hear the voice of God’s rod, or that it should ever hearken to the voice of every twig of God’s rod?

The rod that is in the hands of earthly fathers has a voice, but children hear it not, they understand it not, until they are hushed and quiet, and brought to kiss it, and sit silently under it. No more shall we hear or understand the voice of the rod that is in our heavenly Father’s hand, until we come to kiss it, and sit silently under it.

Living by faith

“We walk by faith, not by sight.”—2 Corinthians 5:7

Living by faith brings the soul to sit down satisfied in the naked enjoyments of God.

Living by faith dries up the springs of pride, self-love, impatience, murmuring, unbelief, and the carnal delights of this world.

Living by faith presents to the soul greater, sweeter, and better things in Christ than anything this world can afford.

Living by faith lessens the soul’s esteem of all outward vanities.

All your former troubles and afflictions

“In the day of adversity, consider...”—Ecclesiastes 7:14

If you would be quiet and silent under your present troubles and trials, then dwell much upon the benefit, the profit, the advantage that has redounded⁴¹ to your souls by *all your former troubles and afflictions*.

Oh! Consider, how by former afflictions the Lord has revealed sin, prevented sin, and mortified sin! Consider how the Lord by former afflictions has revealed to you the impotency, the mutability,⁴² the insufficiency, and the vanity of the world and all worldly concerns!

Consider how the Lord by former afflictions has melted your heart, and broken your heart, and humbled your heart, and prepared your heart for clearer, fuller, and sweeter enjoyments of Himself!

Consider what pity, what compassion, what affections, what tenderness, and what sweetness former afflictions have wrought in you towards others in misery!

Consider what room former afflictions have made in your soul for God, for His word, for good counsel, and for divine comfort!

Consider how by former afflictions the Lord has made you more [a] partaker of His Christ, His Spirit, His holiness, His goodness, etc.

Consider how by former afflictions the Lord has made you to look towards heaven more, to mind heaven more, to prize heaven more, and to long for heaven more, etc.

Now, who can seriously consider all the good that he has gotten by former afflictions and not be silent under present afflictions? Who can remember those choice, those great, and those precious profits that his soul has made of former afflictions, and not reason himself into a holy silence under present afflictions thusly, “O my soul! Has not God done you

⁴¹ **redounded** – overflowed.

⁴² **mutability** – the tendency to frequent change; inconstancy.

much good, great good, special good by former afflictions? Yes! O my soul! Has not God done that for you by former afflictions, which you would not undo for ten thousand worlds? Yes! And is not God—O my soul!—as powerful as ever, as faithful as ever, as gracious as ever, and as ready and willing as ever to do you good by present afflictions as He has been to do you good by former afflictions?

Yes! Yes! Why, why then do you not sit silent and mute before Him, under your present troubles, O my soul?"

A fool to his schoolmaster

He who goes to school to his own carnal reason, has a *fool to his schoolmaster*; and he who allows his faith to be overruled by his reason, shall never lack woe.

No man lives so free a life, so holy a life, so heavenly a life, so happy a life as he who lives a life of faith. Now the soul is put upon the highest and the purest acts of faith, that is, to cleave to God, to hang upon God, and to carry it sweetly and obediently towards God, though He frowns, though He chides,⁴³ though He strikes, yes, though He kills! "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2Co 5:7).

The sharpest dealings of God with you

"Wherefore doth a living man complain...for the punishment of his sins?"—Lamentations 3:39

To move you to silence under your sorest and your sharpest trials, consider, that you have deserved greater and heavier afflictions than those you are under.

Has God taken away one mercy? You have deserved to be stripped of all.

Has he taken away the delight of your eyes? He might have taken away the delight of your soul.

Are you under outward wants? You have deserved to be under outward and inward wants together.

Are you cast upon a sick bed? You have deserved a bed in hell.

Are you under that ache and that pain? You have deserved to be under all aches and pains at once.

Has God chastised you with whips? You have deserved to be chastised with scorpions (1Ki 12:14).

Have you fallen from the highest pinnacle⁴⁴ of honor to be the scorn and contempt of men? You have deserved to be scorned and condemned by God and angels.

Are you under a severe whipping? You have deserved an utter damning.

Ah, Christian! Let but your eyes be fixed upon your demerits, and your hands will be quickly upon your mouths! Whatever is less than a final separation from God, whatever is less than hell is mercy! Therefore, you have cause to be silent under *the sharpest dealings of God with you*.

Sweet honey out of the bitterest herbs

"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

Consider that all your afflictions, troubles, and trials shall work for your good. Why then should you fret, fling, fume⁴⁵ considering God intends you good in all?

The bee sucks *sweet honey out of the bitterest herbs*; so God will by afflictions teach His children to suck sweet knowledge, sweet obedience, sweet experiences, and sweet humility out of all the bitter afflictions and trials He exercises them with.

That scouring and rubbing, which frets others, shall make them shine the brighter; and that weight, which keeps others crushed, shall but make them, like the palm tree, grow better and higher; and that hammer, which knocks others all into pieces, shall but knock them the nearer to Christ, the Corner Stone.

Stars shine brightest in the darkest night; torches give the best light when beaten; grapes yield most wine when most pressed; spices smell sweetest when pounded; vines are the better for bleeding; gold looks the brighter for scouring; juniper

⁴³ **chides** – scolds by reproof or rebuke; expresses disapproval.

⁴⁴ **pinnacle** – the highest point of something.

⁴⁵ **fume** – to show vexation or irritation.

smells sweetest in the fire; chamomile,⁴⁶ the more you tread it the more you spread it; the salamander lives best in the fire; the Jews were best when most afflicted.

Afflictions are the saints' best benefactors to heavenly affections. Where afflictions hang heaviest, corruptions hang loosest. And grace that is hidden in nature, as sweet water in rose leaves, is then most fragrant when the fire of affliction is put under to distill it out.

Grace shines the brighter for scouring and is most glorious when it is most clouded.

Why is my pain unending?

"Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable?"—Jeremiah 15:18

Though God has always reason for what He does, yet He is not bound to show us the reasons of His doings. It is an evil and a dangerous thing to cavil⁴⁷ at, or to question God's proceedings, who may do with His own what He pleases. He is unaccountable and uncontrollable; and therefore none has a right to question Him.

As no man may question God's right to afflict him nor His righteousness in afflicting him, so no man may question the reasons why He afflicts him. As no man can compel God to give a reason for His doings, so no man may dare to ask Him the particular reasons of His doings.

Kings are not bound to give their subjects a reason of their doings; and shall we bind God to give us a reason of His doings, who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and whose will is the true and only rule of justice?

The *general grounds and reasons* which God has laid down in His word [as to] why He afflicts His people [are as follows:] for their profit, for the purging away of their sins, for the purifying of their lives, and for the saving of their souls. [These] should work them to be silent and satisfied under all their afflictions, though God should never satisfy their curiosity in giving them an account of some more hidden causes that may lie secret in the abysses of His eternal knowledge and infallible will.

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

He dares spit in the very face of God Himself!

Many, when they feel the rod to smart—ah, how they do fret and fume! "And they shall pass through [the land], hardly bestead⁴⁸ and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God" (Isa 8:21). "The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD" (Pro 19:3). The heart may be fretful and froward when the tongue does not blaspheme. Folly brings man into misery, and misery makes man to fret. Man in misery is more apt to fret and chafe against the Lord, than to fret and chafe against his sin which has brought him into sufferings (2Ki 6:33; Psa 37:1, 7-8).

A fretful soul dares fly at God Himself! When Pharaoh is troubled with the frets, *he dares spit in the very face of God Himself*, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?" (Exo 5:2). And when Jonah is in a fretting humor,⁴⁹ he dares tell God to His face, "I do well to be angry!" (Jon 4:9). Jonah had done well if he had been angry with his sin, but he did very ill to be angry with his God! God will vex every vein in that man's heart before He has done with him, who fumes and frets because he cannot snap in sunder⁵⁰ the cords with which he is bound (Eze 16:43). Sometimes good men are sick of the frets; but when they are, it costs them dear, as Job and Jonah found by experience. No man has ever got anything by his fretting and flinging, except it has been harder blows or heavier chains. Therefore, fret not when God strikes!

When Satan is most busy

Whilst Satan is tempting of thee, Christ in the court of glory is interceding for thee: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luk 22:31, 32). Satan would fain⁵¹ have shaking of him up and down, as wheat is shaken in a fan. But Christ's intercession frustrates Satan's designed temptations. Whenever Satan stands at our elbow to tempt us, Christ stands at His Father's to intercede for us: "...he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

⁴⁶ **chamomile** – an aromatic creeping herb, found on dry sandy grounds in England, with downy leaves and flowers white in the ray and yellow in the disk, but in cultivation often all white like a double daisy. The flowers are used in medicine for their bitter and tonic properties.

⁴⁷ **cavil** – to find fault without good reason.

⁴⁸ **hardly bestead** – distressed; hard-pressed.

⁴⁹ **fretting humor** – agitated, distressed state of mind.

⁵⁰ **snap in sunder** – break in pieces suddenly.

⁵¹ **fain** – gladly.

Christ is a person of highest honor. He is the greatest favorite in the court of heaven. He always stands between us and danger....When Satan puts in his pleas and commences suit upon suit against us, Christ still undertakes our cause. He answers all his pleas, and [He] non-suits Satan at every turn; and in despite of hell, He keeps us up in divine favor.

When Satan pleads, "Lord! Here are such and such sins that Thy children have committed! And here are such and such duties that they have omitted! And here are such and such mercies that they have not improved! And here are such and such ordinances that they have slighted! And here are such and such motions of the Spirit which they have quenched!"; Divine justice answers, "All this is true. But Christ hath appeared on their behalf; He hath pleaded their cause; He hath fully and fairly answered whatever hath been objected and given complete satisfaction to the utmost farthing; so that here is no accusation nor condemnation that can stand in force against them—upon which account the Apostle triumphs: "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom 8:34).

Christ's intercession should be the soul's anchor-hold in time of temptation. In the day of thy temptation, thou needest not be disturbed nor disquieted, but in peace and patience possess thine own soul, considering what a Friend thou hast in the court of glory *and how He is most active for thee* when Satan is most busy in tempting of thee.

