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THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

#194

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O BLESSED HURRICANE!

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

“On mine arm shall they trust”—Isaiah 51:5.

IN seasons of severe trial, the Christian has nothing on earth that he can trust to and is therefore compelled to cast himself on his God alone. When his vessel is on its beam-ends¹ and no human deliverance can avail, he must simply and entirely trust himself to the providence and care of God. Happy storm that wrecks a man on such a rock as this! O blessed hurricane that drives the soul to God and God alone!

There is no getting at our God sometimes because of the multitude of our friends; but when a man is so poor, so friendless, so helpless that he has nowhere else to turn, he flies into his Father’s arms and is blessedly clasped therein! When he is burdened with troubles so pressing and so peculiar, that he cannot tell them to any but his God, he may be thankful for them; for he will learn more of his Lord than at any other time.

¹ **beam-ends** – the end of a ship’s beams, which stretch from side to side, supporting the deck; “on its beam-ends” means to have them touching the water, so that the vessel lies on its side in imminent danger of capsizing.

Oh, tempest-tossed believer, it is a happy trouble that drives thee to thy Father! Now that thou hast only thy God to trust to, see that thou puttest thy full confidence in Him. Dishonor not thy Lord and Master by unworthy doubts and fears; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Show the world that thy God is worth ten thousand worlds to thee. Show rich men how rich thou art in thy poverty when the Lord God is thy Helper. Show the strong man how strong thou art in thy weakness when underneath thee are the everlasting arms. Now is the time for feats of faith and valiant exploits. Be strong and very courageous; and the Lord thy God shall certainly, as surely as He built the heavens and the earth, glorify Himself in thy weakness and magnify His might in the midst of thy distress. The grandeur of the arch of heaven would be spoiled if the sky were supported by a single visible column, and your faith would lose its glory if it rested on anything discernible by the carnal eye. May the Holy Spirit give you to rest in Jesus...

From "Morning, August 31" in *Morning and Evening*.

COMFORT IN THE NIGHT OF WEeping

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889)

"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.

TO bring many sons unto glory was the end for which the Son of God took flesh and died. This was no common, no inferior object. So vast and worthy did Jehovah deem it that it pleased Him for the attaining of it to "make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb 2:10). It was an object worthy of the God "for whom are all things, and by whom are all things." It was an object glorious enough to render it "becoming" in Him to make Jesus pass through suffering and death and to justify the Father in not sparing His only begotten Son.

They for whom God has done all this must be very precious in His sight. He must be much in earnest indeed to bless them and to take them to be with Him forever. As He so delighted in Enoch that He could no longer bear the separation and the distance, but took him to be with Him without tasting death, and long ere he had run the common race of man, so with His saints. He is making haste to bring them to glory, for the day of absence has been long.

The glory which He has in reserve for them must be surpassing glory, for it was to bring them to it that He was willing to bruise His Son and to put Him to grief. Eye hath not seen it; ear hath not heard it; it is far beyond what we can comprehend, yet it is all reality. God is not ashamed to be called our God because He hath prepared for us a city. Were that city not worthy of Himself, He would be ashamed to have called Himself by the name of "our God." For that implies large blessings on His part, and it leads to large expectations on ours, expectations which He cannot disappoint.

He did not count this glory to be bought for us at too dear a rate, even though the price was the sufferings of His only begotten Son. If, then, God thus estimated the glory to which we were to be brought, shall not we do the same? If He thought it worth all the sufferings of His Son, shall we not think it worth our poor sufferings here? Shall we not say, "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)?

This is *consolation*.² It is that which most naturally occurs to us, and it is both scriptural and effectual. This is what is usually presented to the afflicted saint, and it is what he feels to be very precious and suitable. But though the most common and the most natural consolation, it is by no means the only one. Let us suggest a few others.

² **consolation** – to comfort in sorrow or distress of mind; the act of lightening someone's sor-row, grief, or troubled mind.

1. Jesus weeps with us. “In all [our] affliction he [is] afflicted” (Isa 63:9). He knows our sorrows, for He has passed through them all, and therefore He feels for us. He is touched with the feeling of our griefs as well as of our infirmities. Man—very man—man all over, even in His glory, He enters most fully into the fellowship of our burdens and sorrow, whatever these may be; for there is not one which He did not taste when He “dwelt among us” here. His is sympathy—deep, real, and true. It is no fiction, no fancy.³ We do not see His tears falling upon us; neither do we clasp His hand nor feel the beating of His heart against ours.

But still His communion with us in suffering is a reality. We may not understand how it can be. But He understands it; and He can make us feel it, whether we can comprehend it or not.

2. We are made partakers of Christ’s sufferings. What honor is this! We are baptized with His baptism; we drink of His cup, we are made like Him in sorrow as we shall hereafter be made like Him in joy! How soothing and sustaining! If reproach and shame and poverty are ours, let us remember that they were His also. If we have to go down to Gethsemane or up to the cross, let us think that He was there before us. It is when keeping our eye on this that we are brought somewhat to realize the feeling of the Apostle when he “rejoiced in his sufferings” for the Church, as filling “up that which is behind [literally *the leavings of Christ’s sufferings*] of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church” (Col 1:24). To be treated better than Christ is neither what a thoughtful soul could expect nor what a loving heart could desire.

3. Suffering is the family lot. This we have already dwelt upon, and we recur⁴ to it simply to present it more prominently as a consolation. The path of sorrow is no unfrequented way. All the saints have trodden it. We can trace their footprints there. It is comforting, nay, it is cheering to keep this in mind. Were we cast fettered⁵ into some low dungeon, would it not be consolation to know that many a martyr had been there before us, would it not be cheering to read their names written with their own hands all round the ancient walls? Such is the solace we may extract from all suffering, for the furnace into which we are cast has been consecrated by many a saint already.

4. All things work together for our good. Nothing is unsuitable, unseasonable, or unprofitable. Out of all evil comes good to the saints; out of all darkness comes light; out of all sorrow comes joy. Each pang, sharp or slight, is doing its work—the very work which God designs, the very work which we could not do without. The bed of sorrow is not only like Solomon’s chariot, all “paved with love”; but, like it, it moves on with mighty swiftness, bearing us most blessedly onward to the inheritance of the undefiled. The forces of earth, unless they all bear in one line or nearly so, tend to counteract each other and arrest the common impulse. But the forces which God brings to bear upon us in affliction are all directly and necessarily impulsive.⁶ Come from what quarter they may or from opposite quarters all at once, they still bear us successfully forward. “All things work together for good” (Rom 8:28). “All things are ours” (1Co 3:21, 22).

5. There is special grace for every trial. As trials bring to light the weakness that is in us, so they draw out to meet the strength of God new resources of strength and grace which we never knew before. In affliction we may be quite sure of learning something more of God than we were acquainted with before, for it is just in order to furnish an opportunity for bringing out this and showing it to us that He sends the trial. How little should we know of Him were it not for sorrow! What fullness of blessing comes out to us, what riches of love are spread out before us in the dark and cloudy day!

6. Affliction is our fullest opportunity for glorifying God. It is on earth that He expects to get glory from us, glory such as angels cannot give, glory such as we shall not be able to give hereafter. It is here that we are to preach to angels; it is here we are to show to them what a glorious God is ours. Our whole life below is given us for this. But it is especially in sorrow and under infirmity that God looks for glory from us. What a God-honoring thing to see a struggling, sorrowing child of earth cleave fast to God, calmly trusting in Him, happy and at rest in the midst of storm and of suffering! What a spectacle for the hosts of Heaven! Now then is the time for the saints to give glory to the Lord their God. Let them prize affliction as the very time and opportunity for doing so most of all. Let them use such a season well. And oh, what consolation to think that affliction is really such a season! Ah, surely it is one which an angel might covet, which an archangel would gladly stoop to were that possible! They can glorify

³ **fancy** – fantasy; delusion of the mind.

⁴ **recur** – return to; go back to.

⁵ **fettered** – bound with chains.

⁶ **impulsive** – having force or power to impel or to drive.

God much in Heaven amid its glory and blessedness, but oh, not half so much as we can on earth amid suffering and shame!

7. We are getting rid of sin. Each pain is a nail driven through some sin, another blow inflicted on the flesh, destroying the very power of sinning. As we entered on our first life, sin fastened its chain upon us, and link after link twined itself about us. When we commenced our second and better life, these began one by one to untwine themselves. Affliction untwined them faster; and though it is not till we are laid on a deathbed or till Jesus comes that the last link of earth is thoroughly untwined or broken, still it is consolation to think that each successive trial is helping on the blessed consummation. A lifetime's sufferings would not be too long or too heavy, if by means of them we got rid of sin and sinful ways and tempers and became more holy, more heavenly, more conformable to the image of the Lord. When first we believed in Jesus, we were delivered "from this present evil world" (Gal 1:4). Yet this deliverance is not complete. The world and we have not yet fully parted company with each other. And, therefore, God drives affliction like a wedge between us and the world; or He sends it like a plowshare⁷ right across our most cherished hopes and brightest prospects till He thoroughly wearies us of all below. "He hath made me weary," said Job (Job 16:7). Nor do we wonder at the complaint. Wearisome nights were His. "The plowers plowed upon [my] back" and drew many a long furrow there (Psa 129:3). He might well be weary. So with us. God makes us weary, too, weary all over—thoroughly weary. We get weary of a present evil world, weary of self, weary of sin, weary of suffering, weary of this mortal body, weary of these vile hearts, weary of earth—weary of all but Jesus! Of Him no trial can weary us. Suffering only endears Him the more. Blessed suffering—that makes Him appear more precious and the world viler; that brings Him nearer to our hearts and thrusts the world away!

8. We are preparing for usefulness while here. We have but a few years below, and it concerns us much that these should be useful years. We have but one life, and it must be laid out for God. But we need preparation for usefulness. We need a thorough breaking down, a thorough emptying, a thorough bruising. God cannot trust us with success till we are thus laid low. We are not fit to receive it; nor would He get the glory. Therefore, He sends sore and heavy trials in order to make us vessels fit for the Master's use. And oftentimes we see that the heaviest trials are forerunners of our greatest usefulness. When we are entirely prostrated⁸ and crushed, then it is safe to grant us success, for God gets all the glory. And oh, what wonders has God often done by bruised reeds! Yea, it is the bruised reed that is oftenest the instrument in His hand for working His mighty signs and wonders. What consolation is this! Suffering is stripped of half its bitterness, if it thus brings with it a double portion of the Spirit and fits for double usefulness on earth.

9. We have the Holy Spirit as our Comforter. He is mighty to comfort as well as to sanctify. His name is "the Comforter." His office is to console. And in the discharge of this office, He puts forth His power, not only mediately⁹ and indirectly through the Word, but immediately¹⁰ and directly upon the soul, sustaining and strengthening it when fainting and troubled. It is consolation unspeakable to know that there is a hand, a divine and omnipotent hand, laid upon our wounded spirit, not only upholding it, but drying up, as it were, the very springs of grief within. In the day of oppressive sorrow, when bowed down to the dust, what is it that we feel so much our need of as a hand that can come into close and direct contact with our souls to lift them up and strengthen them? For it is here that human consolation fails. Friends can say much to soothe us, but they cannot lay their finger upon the hidden seat of sorrow. They can put their arm around the fainting body, but not around the fainting spirit. To that they have only distant and indirect access. But here the heavenly aid comes in. The Spirit throws around us the everlasting arms, and we are invincibly upheld. We cannot sink, for He sustains, He comforts, He cheers. And who knows so well as He how to sustain and comfort and cheer?

10. The time is short. We have not a pilgrimage like Seth's or Noah's, or even like Abraham's to pass through. Ours is but a hand-breadth in comparison with theirs. We have not many days to suffer, nor many nights to watch, even though our whole life were filled with weary days and sleepless nights. "For our light affliction...is but for a moment" (2Co 4:17). And besides the briefness of our earthly span, we know that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. This is consolation, for it tells not only of the end of our tribulation, but of the beginning of our triumph;

⁷ **plowshare** – the large pointed blade of a plow.

⁸ **prostrated** – to reduce to extreme physical exhaustion.

⁹ **mediately** – acting through the means of.

¹⁰ **immediately** – acting without the use of means.

nay, and not only of our individual rest from trouble, but of the rest and deliverance of the whole Church together. For then the whole “body of Christ,” waking or sleeping, shall be glorified with their glorified Lord; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

In the day of bereavement, the day of mourning over those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, this consolation is especially precious. Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. And if the Lord be near, the time of reunion may not be far off. They that lie down at evening have a whole night’s slumber before them; but they who lie down toward morning have, it may be, but an hour or less till the dawn awakes them. So with the dead in Christ in these last days. They will not have long to sleep, for it is now the fourth watch of the night, and the day-star¹¹ is preparing to arise. What consolation! How it soothes the pain of parting! How it cheers the wounded spirit! “Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust” is now our watchword every day (Isa 26:19). We take our stand upon our watchtower and look out amidst the darkness of night for the first streaks of morn. We lay our ear to the ground and listen that, amid all the discord of earth, the uproar of war, the tumults of the nations, we may catch the first sound of our Lord’s chariot wheels—those chariot wheels that are to sweep in vengeance over the field of Armageddon, crushing the confederate nations leagued against the Lord and His Anointed, and also to bring to the bosom of the long betrothed Bride, the Husband of her youth, the desire of her soul, for whom, amid tears and loneliness, she has waited for many a generation, many a century in vain.

11. All is love. Affliction is the expression of paternal¹² love. It is from the deepest recess of the fountain of love that sorrow flows down to us. And love cannot wrong us. It blesses, but cannot curse. Its utterances and actions are all of peace and gladness. It wants a larger vessel into which to empty itself, and a deeper channel through which to flow. That is all. It seeks to make us more susceptible of kindness, and then to pour that kindness in. Yes, love is the true, the one origin of the sharpest stroke that ever fell upon a bleeding heart. The truth is, there is no other way of accounting for affliction but this. Anger will not account for it, forgetfulness will not account for it, chance will not account for it. No. It is simply impossible to trace it to any cause but love. Admit this as its spring, and all is harmonious, comely, perfect. Deny it, and all is confusion, cruelty, and darkness. Chastising love is the faithfulest, purest, truest, tenderest, deepest of all. Let this be our consolation.

Beloved, “It is well.” It is good to be afflicted. Our days of suffering here we call days of darkness; hereafter they will seem our brightest and fairest. In eternity we shall praise Jehovah most of all for our sorrows and tears. So blessed shall they then seem to us that we shall wonder how we could ever weep and sigh. We shall then know how utterly unworthy we were of all this grace. We did not deserve anything, but least of all to be afflicted. Our joys were all of grace—pure grace—much more our sorrows. It is out of the “exceeding riches of the grace of God” that trial comes.

From *The Night of Weeping, The Morning of Joy* by Horatius Bonar. This title is available as a paperback book published by Chapel Library.

Horatius Bonar (1808-1889): Scottish Presbyterian minister whose poems, hymns, and religious tracts were widely popular during the 19th century. Born in Edinburgh, Scotland.

God’s people are prone to be discouraged because of the difficulty of the way. In the bitterness of their spirits, they are often apt to say with desponding Zion, “The Lord has forsaken me,” or with the faithless prophet, “It is better for me to die than to live.” But the Christian has his consolations too, and they are “strong consolations.” The “still small voice” mingles with the hurricane and the storm.... “The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock; and may the God of my salvation be exalted.” Earthly consolations may help to dry one tear, but another tear is ready to flow. God dries all tears. There is no need in the aching voids of the heart that He cannot supply. Is it mercy to pardon? I can look up to the throne of the Most High, and see Holiness and Righteousness, Justice, and Truth all bending in exulting harmony over my ruined soul, exclaiming, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!”....I can look up to that same throne, and behold, seated thereon, a Great High Priest; no, a mighty Prince, having power with God and prevailing-prayer without ceasing ascending from His lips in behalf of His people. When Satan seeks “to sift” them, His upholding power protects them in heaven. When temptation assails them in their earthly conflicts, the true Moses on the Mount with hands that never “grow heavy” makes them “more than conquerors.” When trial threatens to prostrate them, He identifies Himself with the sufferers—He points to His own sorrows to show them how light the heaviest of earth’s sorrows are. Even over the gloomy portals of the grave He can write, “Blessed are the dead!” He alone felt Death’s substance....Reader, are you now weary or desponding? Is some cross heavy on you? Some trial oppressing you? Some thorn in the flesh sorely lacerating you? Be still! He will make his grace sufficient. If He has allured you into the wilderness, it is that

¹¹ **day-star** – the sun; metaphorically, the dawning of the world to come.

¹² **paternal** – characteristic of a father; fatherly.

GOD AND NATURAL DISASTERS

Jerry Bridges

*“Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not thou he, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things”
—Jeremiah 14:22.*

IN September 1985, an earthquake struck Mexico City killing some 6,000 people and leaving more than 100,000 homeless. A friend of mine wanted to use the event to teach his young children a simple science lesson, so he asked them, “Do you know what caused the earthquake?” He planned to answer his question with a simple explanation of fault lines and shifting rocks in the earth’s crust.

His seismology¹³ lesson quickly turned into a theological discussion, however, when his eight-year-old daughter replied, “I know why. God was judging those people.” Though my friend’s child had jumped to an unwarranted conclusion about God’s judgment, she was theologically correct in one sense. God was in control of that earthquake. Why He allowed it to happen is a question we cannot answer (and should not try to), but we can say, on the testimony of Scripture, that God did indeed allow it or cause it to happen.

All of us are affected by the weather and the forces of nature at various times to one degree or another. Most of the time we are merely inconvenienced by weather—a delayed airplane flight, a cancelled Fourth of July picnic, or something else on that order. Frequently some people somewhere are drastically affected by the weather or the more violent forces of nature. A prolonged drought withers the farmer’s crop, or a hailstorm destroys it within an hour. A tornado in Texas leaves hundreds homeless, and a typhoon in Bangladesh destroys thousands of acres of crops.

Whenever we are affected by the weather—whether it is merely an inconvenience or a major disaster—we tend to regard it as nothing more than the impersonal expression of certain fixed meteorological¹⁴ or geological¹⁵ laws. A low pressure system settles over my hometown, bringing a huge snowstorm and closing our airport the day I am to leave for a ministry engagement. Forces within the earth continually bend its crust until one day it snaps, causing a major earthquake. Whether it is trivial or traumatic, we tend to think of the expressions of nature as “just happening” and ourselves as the “unlucky” victims of whatever nature brings forth. In practice, even Christians tend to live and think like the deists¹⁶...who conceived of God as the One Who created the universe and then walked away to leave it running according to its own natural laws.

But God has not walked away from the day-to-day control of His creation. Certainly He has established physical laws by which He governs the forces of nature, but those laws continuously operate according to His sovereign will. A Christian TV meteorologist has determined that there are over 1,400 references to weather terminology in the Bible. Many of these references attribute the outworking of weather directly to the hand of God. Most of these passages speak of God’s control over *all* weather, not just His divine intervention on specific occasions.

Consider the following Scriptures: “He directeth it under the whole heaven, and his lightning unto the ends of the earth....For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength....By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened. Also by watering he

¹³ **seismology** – the science and study of the causes and effects of earthquakes.

¹⁴ **meteorological** – laws concerning the science that deals with the phenomena of the atmosphere, especially weather and weather conditions.

¹⁵ **geological** – laws concerning the scientific study of the origin, history, and structure of the earth.

¹⁶ **deists** – those who hold the belief that God is distant, i.e., He created the universe but then left it to run its course on its own, following certain “laws of nature” that He had built into the universe.

wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud: And it is turned round about by his counsels: that they may do whatsoever he commandeth them upon the face of the world in the earth. He causeth it to come, whether for correction, or for his land, or for mercy” (Job 37:3, 6, 10-13).

“Who covereth the heaven with clouds, who prepareth rain for the earth, who maketh grass to grow upon the mountains....He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? He sendeth out his word, and melteth them: he causeth his wind to blow, and the waters flow” (Psa 147:8, 16-18).

“When he uttereth his voice, there is a multitude of waters in the heavens, and he causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings with rain, and bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures” (Jer 10:13).

“And also I have withholden the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest: and I caused it to rain upon one city, and caused it not to rain upon another city: one piece was rained upon, and the piece whereupon it rained not withered” (Amo 4:7).

Note how all these Scriptures attribute all expressions of weather—good or bad—to the direct controlling hand of God.

The insurance companies refer to major natural disasters as “acts of God.” The truth is, all expressions of nature, all occurrences of weather, whether it be a devastating tornado or a gentle rain on a spring day, are acts of God. The Bible teaches that God controls all the forces of nature, both destructive and productive, on a continuous, moment-by-moment basis.

Whether the weather is nice or bad, we are never the victims or even the beneficiaries¹⁷ of the impersonal powers of nature. God, who is the loving heavenly Father of every true Christian, is sovereign over the weather, and He exercises that sovereignty moment by moment.

Complaining about the weather seems to be a favorite American pastime. Sadly, we Christians often get caught up in this ungodly habit of our society. But when we complain about the weather, we are actually complaining against God, Who sent us our weather. We are, in fact, sinning against God (see Num 11:1).

Not only do we sin against God when we complain about the weather, we also deprive ourselves of the peace that comes from recognizing our heavenly Father is in control of it. Alexander Carson¹⁸ said, “Scripture represent[s] all physical laws as having their effect from the immediate agency of Almighty Power. . . .Christians themselves, though they recog-nize the doctrine [of divine providence], are prone to overlook it in practice, and consequently to be deprived, in a great measure, of that advantage which a constant and deep impression of this truth is calculated to give.”¹⁹ Whether the weather merely disrupts my plans or destroys my home, I need to learn to see God’s sovereign and loving hand controlling it.

The fact is, for most of us, the weather and the effects of nature are usually favorable. The tornado, the drought, even the snowstorm that delays our flight are the exception, not the rule. We tend to remember the “bad” weather and take for granted the good. However, when Jesus spoke about the weather, He spoke about the goodness of God: “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat 5:45).

Though God sometimes uses the weather, and other expressions of nature, as an instrument of judgment (see Amos 4:7-9), He most often uses it as an expression of His gracious provision for His creation. Both saint and sinner alike benefit from God’s gracious provision of weather. And, according to Jesus, this provision is not merely the result of certain fixed, inexorable²⁰ physical laws. God controls those laws. He causes His sun to rise, He sends the rain...

¹⁷ **beneficiaries** – those who receive benefits or favors.

¹⁸ **Alexander Carson** (1776-1844) – Irish Baptist author and Greek scholar.

¹⁹ *The History of Providence*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, n.d.), page v.

²⁰ **inexorable** – unyielding; that which cannot be made to bend.

We as Christians need to stop complaining about the weather, and instead learn to give thanks for it. God, our heavenly Father, sends us each day what He deems best for all of His creation.

What about the natural disasters that occur frequently in various parts of the world? Many sensitive Christians struggle over the multitude of large-scale natural disasters around the world—an earthquake in one place, famine in another, typhoons and floods somewhere else. Thousands of people are killed, others slowly starve to death. Entire regions are devastated, crops are ruined, homes destroyed. “Why does God allow all this?” we may ask. “Why does God permit all those innocent children to starve?”

It is not wrong to wrestle with these issues, as long as we do it in a reverent and submissive attitude toward God. Indeed, to fail to wrestle with the issue of large-scale tragedy may indicate a lack of compassion toward others on our part. However, we must be careful not to, in our minds, take God off His throne of absolute sovereignty or put Him in the dock and bring Him to the bar of our judgment.

While working on this chapter, I watched the evening news on television one night. One of the top stories was about several powerful tornados that swept across central Mississippi killing seven people, injuring at least 145 more, and leaving nearly 500 families homeless. As I watched the scenes of people sifting through the rubble of what had been their homes, my heart went out to them. I thought to myself, “Some of those people are undoubtedly believers. What would I say to them about God’s sovereignty over nature? Do I really believe it myself at a time such as this?....Why bring God into chaos and suffering such as this?”

But God *brings Himself* into these events. He said in Isaiah 45:7, “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.” God Himself accepts the responsibility, so to speak, of disasters. He actually does more than accept the responsibility; He actually *claims* it. In effect, God says, “I, and I alone, have the power and authority to bring about both prosperity and disaster, both weal²¹ and woe, both good and bad.”

This is a difficult truth to accept as you watch people sift through the rubble of their homes or—more to the point—if you are the one sifting through the rubble of your home. But as the late Dr. Edward J. Young²² commented on Isaiah 45:7, “We gain nothing by seeking to minimize the force of the present verse.”²³ We must allow the Bible to say what it says, not what we think it ought to say.

We obviously do not understand why God creates disaster, or why He brings it to one town and not to another. We recognize, too, that just as God sends His sun and rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous, so He also sends the tornado, or the hurricane, or the earthquake on both....God’s sovereignty over nature does not mean that Christians never encounter the tragedies of natural disasters. Experience and observation clearly teach otherwise.

God’s sovereignty over nature does mean that, whatever we experience at the hand of the weather or other forces of nature (such as plant diseases or insect infestation of our crops), all circumstances are under the watchful eye and sovereign control of our God.

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My brother, trust this Great Sympathizer....Conquer as He conquered, by a noble submission and self-surrender to the will of your Father in heaven. While you take trial for granted as a part of His appointed discipline, hear the Lord of sorrow encouraging you from His own example and victory: “In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—*John MacDuff*

²¹ weal – happiness; prosperity.

²² Edward J. Young (1907-1968) – OT scholar at Westminster Theological Seminary.

²³ *The Book of Isaiah*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), Vol. 3, p. 201.

EARTHLY SORROWS AND FOLLOWING CHRIST

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?”—Mark 4:37-40.

ON whom must we build our souls if we would be accepted with God? We must build on the Rock, Christ. From whom must we draw that grace of the Spirit which we daily need in order to be fruitful? We must draw from the Vine, Christ. To whom must we look for sympathy when earthly friends fail us or die? We must look to our elder Brother, Christ. By whom must our prayers be presented, if they are to be heard on high? They must be presented by our Advocate, Christ. With whom do we hope to spend the thousand years of glory and the after eternity? With the King of kings, Christ. Surely we cannot know this Christ too well! Surely there is not a word, nor a deed, nor a day, nor a step, nor a thought in the record of His life, which ought not to be precious to us. We should labor to be familiar with every line that is written about Jesus.

Come now, and let us study a page in our Master’s history. Let us consider what we may learn from the verses of Scripture which stand at the head of this paper. You there see Jesus crossing the lake of Galilee in a boat with His disciples. You see a sudden storm arise while He is asleep. The waves beat into the boat and fill it. Death seems to be close at hand. The frightened disciples awake their Master and cry for help. He arises and rebukes the wind and the waves, and at once there is a calm. He mildly reproves the faithless fears of His companions, and all is over. Such is the picture. It is one full of deep instruction. Come now, and let us examine what we are meant to learn.

Let us learn...that following Christ will not prevent our having earthly sorrows and troubles. Here are the chosen disciples of the Lord Jesus in great anxiety. The faithful little flock, which believed when priests, scribes, and Pharisees were all alike unbelieving, is allowed by the Shepherd to be much disquieted.²⁴ The fear of death breaks in upon them like an armed man. The deep water seems likely to go over their souls. Peter, James, and John, the pillars of the Church about to be planted in the world, are much distressed.

Perhaps they had not reckoned on all this. Perhaps they had expected that Christ’s service would at any rate lift them above the reach of earthly trials. Perhaps they thought that He who could raise the dead, and heal the sick, and feed multitudes with a few loaves, and cast out devils with a word—He would never allow His servants to be sufferers upon earth. Perhaps they had supposed He would always grant them smooth journeys, fine weather, an easy course, and freedom from trouble and care.

If the disciples thought so, they were much mistaken. The Lord Jesus taught them that a man may be one of His chosen servants, and yet have to go through many an anxiety and endure many a pain.

It is good to understand this clearly. It is good to understand that Christ’s service never did secure a man from all the ills that flesh is heir to and never will. If you are a believer, you must reckon on having your share of sickness and pain, of sorrow and tears, of losses and crosses, of deaths and bereavements, of partings and separations, of vexations and disappointments, so long as you are in the body. *Christ never undertakes that you shall get to heaven without these.* He has undertaken that all who come to Him shall have all things pertaining to life and godliness; but He has never undertaken that He will make them prosperous, or rich, or healthy, and that death and sorrow shall never come to their family.

I have the privilege of being one of Christ’s ambassadors. In His name I can offer eternal life to any man, woman, or child who is willing to have it. In His name I do offer pardon, peace, grace, and glory, to any son or daughter of Adam who reads this paper. But I dare not offer that person worldly prosperity as a part and parcel of

²⁴ **disquieted** – disturbed; uneasy; restless.

the Gospel. I dare not offer him long life, an increased income, and freedom from pain. I dare not promise the man who takes up the cross and follows Christ, that in the following he shall never meet with a storm.

I know well that many do not like these terms. They would prefer having Christ and good health, Christ and plenty of money, Christ and no deaths in their family, Christ and no wearing cares, and Christ and a perpetual morning without clouds. But they do not like Christ and the cross, Christ and tribulation, Christ and the conflict, Christ and the howling wind, Christ and the storm.

Is this the secret thought of anyone who is reading this paper? Believe me, if it is, you are very wrong. Listen to me, and I will try to show you that you have yet much to learn.

How should you know who are true Christians, if following Christ was the way to be free from trouble? How should we discern the wheat from the chaff, if it were not for the winnowing²⁵ of trial? How should we know whether men served Christ for His own sake or from selfish motives, if His service brought health and wealth with it as a matter of course? The winds of winter soon show us which of the trees are evergreen and which are not. The storms of affliction and care are useful in the same way. They discover whose faith is real, and whose is nothing but profession and form.

How would the great work of sanctification²⁶ go on in a man if he had no trial? Trouble is often the only fire which will burn away the dross that clings to our hearts. Trouble is the pruning knife which the great Husbandman employs in order to make us fruitful in good works.

If you desire to serve Christ and be saved, I entreat you to take the Lord on His own terms. Make up your mind to meet with your share of crosses and sorrows, and then you will not be surprised. For want of understanding this, many seem to run well for a season, and then turn back in disgust and are cast away.

If you profess to be a child of God, leave to the Lord Jesus to sanctify you in His own way. Rest satisfied that He never makes any mistakes. Be sure that He does all things well. The winds may howl around you and the waters swell. But fear not, He is leading you by the right way, that He may bring you to a city of habitation (Psa 107:7).

From "Ruler of the Waves" in *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, both available from Chapel Library.

J. C. Ryle (1816-1900): Bishop of the Anglican Church. Revered author of *Holiness, Knots Untied, Old Paths, Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, and many others. Born at Macclesfield, Cheshire County, England.

THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635)

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation"—2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

ST. PAUL was a man of sorrows if ever any was, next to Christ Himself; and that [he] might prevent all scandal at his crosses and disgraceful afflicted usage, he doth show his comforts²⁷ under the cross, which he would not have wanted to have been without his cross. Therefore, he begins here with praising of God...

²⁵ **winnowing** – to separate chaff or other lighter refuse matter from grain by means of wind or a current of air; separating the good from the bad.

²⁶ **sanctification** – the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness. *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 35.

²⁷ **comforts/comfortable** – throughout this article, the author uses *comfort* in the sense of "encouragement, consolation" and *comfortable* in the sense of "encouraging, strengthening," not in the modern sense of "providing physical comfort" or "free from stress."

We must give St. Paul leave to be thus large,²⁸ for his heart was full; and a full heart, a full expression. And he speaks not out of books, but from sense and feeling. Though he knew well enough that “God was the Father of mercy and God of all comfort”...yet these be words that come from the heart, from feeling rather than from the tongue. They came not from St. Paul’s pen only. His pen was first dipped in his heart and soul when he wrote this. “God is the Father of mercy, and God of all comfort. I feel Him so; He comforts me in all tribulations.”

The God of all comfort: to explain the word a little, *comfort* is either *the thing itself*, a comfortable outward thing, a blessing of God wherein comfort is hid; or else it is *reasons*; because a man is an understanding creature, [there are] reasons from which comfort is grounded. Or it is a real comfort, inward and spiritual, by the assistance and strength of the Spirit of God, when perhaps there is no outward thing to comfort. And perhaps reasons and discourse²⁹ are not present at that time, yet there is a presence of the Spirit that comforts, as we see oftentimes³⁰ a man is comforted with the very sight of his friend, without discourse. To a man endued with reason, whose discomfords are spiritual (for the most part in the soul), the very presence of a man that he loves puts much delight into him. What is God then? “The God of comfort.” His very presence must needs comfort. Comfort is taken many other ways, but these are the principal to this purpose.

First, *comfort is the thing itself.* There is comfort in every creature of God, and God is the God of that comfort. In hunger, meat³¹ comforts; in thirst, drink comforts; in cold, garments comfort; in want of advice, friends comfort, and it is a sweet comfort. “God is the God of *all* comfort,” of the comfortable things. But besides the necessary things, every sense hath somewhat to comfort it. The *eye*, besides ordinary colors, hath delightful colors to behold. And so the *ear*, besides ordinary noise and sounds, it hath music to delight it. The *smell*, besides ordinary savors, it hath sweet flowers to refresh it. And so every part of the body, besides that which is ordinary, it hath somewhat to comfort it. Because God is nothing but comfort to His creature, if it be as it should be, He is God of these comforts, “the God of all comfort,” of the comfort of outward things, of friends, etc.

2. So He is the God of the second comfort, of *comfortable reasons and arguments.* A man, especially in inward troubles, must have grounds of comfort from strong reasons. God ministereth these. He is the God of these. For He hath given us His Scriptures, His Word; and the comforts that are fetched from thence are strong ones because they are His comforts. It is *His* Word. The word of a prince comforts, though he be not there to speak it. Though it be a letter, or by a messenger, yet he whose word it is, is one that is able to make his word good. [God] is Lord and Master of His Word. The Word of God is comfortable, and all the reasons that are in it and that are deduced³² from it upon good ground and consequence, they are comfortable because it is God’s Word. He is the God of all. And those comforts in God’s Word and reasons from thence, they are wonderful in the variety of them. There is comfort from *the liberty of a Christian* laid out there, that he hath free access to the throne of grace. [There is] comfort from *the prerogatives*³³ of a Christian, that he is the child of God, that he is justified, that he is the heir of heaven, and such like; comforts from *the promises of grace*, of the presence of God, of assistance by His presence. These things out of the Word of God are wondrous plentiful. Indeed, the word of God is a breast of comfort, as the prophet calls it: “That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations” (Isa 66:11). The books of God are breasts of comfort, wells of comfort...springs of comfort.

God’s Word is a Paradise, as it were. In Paradise, there were sweet streams that ran through; and in Paradise stirred the voice of God, not only calling, “Adam, where art thou?” terrifying him (Gen 3:9), but the voice of God promising Adam the blessed Seed.

So in the Word of God, there is God rousing out of sin, and there is God speaking peace to the soul. There is a sweet current of mercy [that] runs from the Paradise of God; and there is “the tree of life” (Rev 3:7), Christ Himself, and trees of all manner of fruit, comforts of all sorts whatsoever. And there is no angel there to keep the door and gate of paradise with a fiery, flaming sword. No! This paradise is open for all.

²⁸ **large** – abounding in matter, thoughts, or words; wordy.

²⁹ **discourse** – talk; conversation.

³⁰ **oftentimes** – frequently; often.

³¹ **meat** – food in general.

³² **deduced** – to draw a conclusion by the process of reasoning.

³³ **prerogatives** – privileges.

But this is not enough to make Him the God of comfort. We may have the Word of God, and all the reasons from thence, from privileges and prerogatives, and examples, *and yet not be comfortable, if*

3. We have not the God of comfort [and] the Word of comfort [along with] *the Spirit of God*, that must apply the comfort to the soul and be the God of comfort there. For there must be application and working of comfort out of God's Word upon the soul by the Spirit. The Spirit must set it on strongly and sweetly that the soul may be affected.

You may have a carnal man—he for fashion or custom reads the Scriptures, and he is as dead-hearted when he hath done as when he began. He never looks to the Spirit of comfort. There must be the Spirit of God, to work, and to apply comfort to the heart, and to teach us to discourse and to reason from the Word, not only to show the reasons of the Word, *but to teach us to draw reasons from the Word*, and to apply them to our particular state and condition. The Spirit teacheth this wisdom. And therefore, [He] is well called the *Comforter*: “I will send you the Comforter” (Joh 14:26). The poor disciples had many comforts from Christ; but because the Comforter was not come, they were not comfortable, but heavy. What was the reason? Because “the Comforter was not come” (Joh 16:7). When the Holy Ghost was come after the resurrection and ascension of Christ, when He had sent the Comforter, then they were so full of comfort that they rejoiced that they were thought worthy to suffer anything for Christ (Act 5:41); and the more they suffered, the more joyful and comfortable and glorious they are.

You see what a comfort is. It is the things themselves, and the Word, and reasons from it, and likewise the Spirit of God with the reasons and with presence. Sometimes without any reasons, with present strength, God doth establish the soul. Together with reasons, there is a strengthening power of the Spirit, a vigor that goes with the Spirit of God that joins with the spirit of the afflicted person. So whether it be the outward thing, as reasons and discourse, or the presence of the Spirit, God joining with our spirit, God is the God of that comfort, the “God of all comfort.”

A comfort is anything *that allays a malady*,³⁴ *that either takes it away or allays and mitigates*³⁵ *it*. A comfort is anything *that raiseth up the soul*. The comforts that we have in this life, they are not such as do altogether take away sorrow and grief, but they mitigate them. Comfort is that which is above a malady....When the soul hath [something] that it can set against the present sense of the grievance that is stronger than [that grievance]—though it do not wholly expel it, but the discomfort remains still in some degree—it may be said well to be a comfort.

The reason why I speak of this mitigation is because in this life God never so wholly comforts his children, but there will be flesh left in them; [it] will murmur, and there will be some resistance against comfort. While there are remainders of sin, there will be ground of discomfort by reason of the conflict between the flesh and spirit.

For instance, a man hath some cross on him: what saith the flesh? “God is mine enemy, and I will take such and such courses. I will not endure this.” This is the voice of the flesh, of the “old man.” What saith the Spirit? “Surely God is not mine enemy. He intends my good by these things.” So while these fight, here is the flesh against the spirit (Gal 5:17). Yet here is comfort because the Spirit is predominant.³⁶ But it is not *fully* comfort because there is the “old man” in him that withstands comfort in the whole measure of comfort....We cannot have the full comfort till we come to Heaven. There all tears shall be wiped from our eyes. In this world we must be content to have comfort with some grief. The malady is not wholly purged.

“The God of all comfort.” “All,” that is, of all comfortable things and of all divine reasons. It must be most substantial comfort. The soul in some maladies will not be comforted by philosophical reasons. Saith the heathen, “The disease is stronger than the physic,” when he considers Plato's comforts and the like. So we may say of the reasons of philosophical men....When they come to terror of conscience, when they come to inward grievances [and] inward stings that are in a man from a man's conscience (as all discomforts usually when they press hard, it is with a guilty conscience), what can all such reasons do?...They are ignorant of the root. Alas! How can they tell the remedy, when they know not the ground of the malady?

³⁴ **allays a malady** – weakens, diminishes a sickness or disease.

³⁵ **mitigates** – makes milder; lessens the violence of.

³⁶ **predominant** – that which proves to be superior in any contest; victorious.

It must be God; it must be His Word, His truth. The conscience must *know* it to be God's truth, and *then* it will comfort. God is the God of comfort, of the things and of the reasons. They must be His reasons.

And He also is the Author of that spiritual presence; He is with His children. When they are in the fire, He goes with them into the water, as it is in Isaiah 43:2. He is with them in the valley of death (Psa 23:4). They shall find God with them to comfort them. So there is a kind of presence with God's comforts and a banishing of all discomfort.

And this comfort is as large as the maladies, as large as the ills are. He is a God of comfort against every particular ill. If there be *diverse*³⁷ ills, He hath diverse comforts; if they be *long* ills, He hath long comforts; if there be *strong* ills, He hath strong comforts; if there be *new* ills, He hath new comforts. Take the ills in what extent and degree you will, God hath somewhat to set against them that is stronger than they, and that is the blessed estate of God's children. He is the "God of all comfort."

It is the wisdom of a Christian to see how God describes Himself, there being something in God answerable to whatsoever is ill in the world. The Spirit of God in the Scripture sets forth God fitting to the particular occasions. Speaking here of the misery and the disgraceful usage³⁸ of St. Paul, being taught by the Spirit of God, he considereth God as "Father of mercies" and a "God of comfort." Speaking of the vengeance on his enemies, the psalmist saith, "Thou God of vengeance, show thyself" (Psa 94:1). In God there is help for every malady.

Therefore, the wisdom of a Christian is to single out of God what is fitting his present occasion. In *crosses* and *miseries*, think of Him as a "Father of mercies"; in *discomforts*, think of Him as a "God of comfort"; in *perplexities* and *distress*, think of Him as a "God of wisdom"; and [in *oppression* by] *others* and *difficulties which we cannot wade out of*, think of Him as a God and Father Almighty, as a "God of vengeance," and so every way to think of God applicable to the present occasion. And though many of us have no great affliction upon us for the present, yet we should lay up store against the evil day; and therefore it is good to treasure up these descriptions of God, the "Father of mercies, and God of all comfort."

...if God be God of all comfort, there is this conclusion hence: whatsoever the means of comfort be, God is the spring of it. Christ is the conduit next to God, for He is close to God. God is the God of Christ, and the Holy Ghost is usually the stream. The streams of comfort come through Christ, the *conduit*; from God the Father, the *fountain*, by the graces of the Spirit. But I speak of outward comforts. "Blessed be God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." All are comforters! God the Father is the Father of comfort; the Holy Ghost is the Comforter; Christ Jesus likewise is the God of comfort. Whatsoever the outward means be, yet God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are the Comforters. Take them together. That is the conclusion hence...

Question: You will say to me, "What is the reason that Christians are no more comfortable, having the God of comfort for their God?"

Answer: I answer:

1. It is partly from ignorance. We have remainders of ignorance [so] that we know not our own comfort. Satan doth veil the eye of the soul in the time of trouble [so] that we cannot see that there is a well of comfort. Poor Hagar, when she was almost undone for thirst, yet she had a fountain of water near hand; but she saw it not, she was so overtaken with grief (Gen 21:15ff.).

2. Passion³⁹ hinders the sight of comfort. When we give way so much to the present malady, as if there were no God of comfort in heaven, as if there were no Scripture that hath breasts of comfort...as if there were no matter of comfort, they feed upon grief and delight to flatter themselves in grief....So out of a kind of ignorance, and passion, and willfulness they will not be comforted.

And again, 3. aggravating the grievance. As Bildad⁴⁰ saith, "Are the comforts of God light to thee?" (Job 15:11), [meaning], "These are good words, but my discomforts are greater, my malady is greater." So the comforts of the Holy Ghost, the comforts of God's Spirit, seem light to them. Ignorance, and passion, and dwelling [on sorrow] too

³⁷ **diverse** – different kinds.

³⁸ **disgraceful usage** – shameful treatment.

³⁹ **passion** – any kind of feeling by which the mind is powerfully affected or moved; over-powering emotion, such as grief or fear.

⁴⁰ **Bildad the Shuhite** – one of the three friends who came to comfort Job in his suffering.

much, makes us neglect comfort. It makes us to see comfort to be no comfort in a manner....So grief and passion hinder the soul so much from seeing God's comforts that we see them not when they are before us, when they are present. So men are guilty of their own discomfort. It is their own fault.

Again, 4. oftentimes⁴¹ forgetfulness. As the Apostle saith, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord" (Heb 12:5). Have ye forgotten that every son that God chastiseth not is a bastard?⁴² Have ye forgotten? Insinuating that, if they had remembered this, it would have comforted them. "Have ye forgotten?"

And then one especial cause is, that I spake of before, 5. the looking to things present, forgetting the spring, the well-head of comfort, God Himself: the looking too much to the means. "Oh," say some, if they be in distress, "if I had such a book, if I had such a man to comfort me, certainly it would be otherwise with me. I should be better than I am." Put-case⁴³ he were with thee—alas! *He* is not the spring! It is the God of comfort that must comfort thee, man, in all thy distresses whatsoever. Therefore, if thou attribute not more to God than to the creature, nay, than to an angel, if he were to comfort thee, thou shalt find no comfort. "I, even I, am he that comforteth you" (Isa 51:12). I am He that pardons thy sins, which is the cause of all discomfort. That is comfort!

From "Exposition of 2 Corinthians Chapter 1" in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, Vol 3, reprinted by Banner of Truth Trust.

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635): early Puritan preacher at Cambridge and later Gray's Inn, London. Known as the "Heavenly Dr. Sibbes" and the "Sweet Dropper" because of his Christ-centered and God-honoring sermons, which brought great joy to his hearers. His collected works in seven volumes include *The Soul's Conflict with Itself* and *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax*. Born at Tostock, Suffolk, England.

Either you have a soul or you have not. You will surely never deny that you have. Then if you have a soul, seek that soul's salvation. Of all gambling in the world, there is none so reckless as that of the man who lives unprepared to meet God, and yet puts off repentance. Either you have sins or you have none. If you have (and who will dare to deny it?), break off from those sins, cast away your transgressions, and turn away from them without delay. Either you need a Savior or you do not. If you do, flee to the only Savior this very day and cry mightily to Him to save your soul. Apply to Christ at once. Seek Him by faith. Commit your soul into His keeping. Cry mightily to Him for pardon and peace with God. Ask Him to pour down the Holy Spirit upon you and make you a thorough Christian. He will hear you. No matter what you have been, He will not refuse your prayer. He has said, "Him the cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out" (Joh 6:37).—*J. C. Ryle*

COMFORT IN ALL TRIBULATION

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892)

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God"—2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

THE Apostle was a much-tried man, and he lived in an age when all believers were peculiarly tried. The persecutions of that time were excessively severe, and every man who called himself a Christian had to carry his life in his hand. In this tribulation, the Apostle had the largest share, because he was the most prominent and indefatigable⁴⁴ teacher that the Church of Christ then possessed. We have here a little insight into his inner life. He needed comfort, and he received it. And he had it in such abundance that he became a comforter of others. Although, without Christ, he would have been "of all men most miserable," I think I may say that, with Christ and

⁴¹ **ofttimes** – oftentimes, on many occasions; often.

⁴² **bastard** – a child born out of wedlock; illegitimate child.

⁴³ **put-case** – suppose.

⁴⁴ **indefatigable** – incapable of being wearied; tireless.

the blessed hope of the resurrection, he was among all men one of the most happy.

I. First then, you, who mourn and are troubled and cast down, are invited to consider the *comforting occupation of the Apostle.* Most of Paul's fourteen epistles begin with praise to God, and he often breaks out into a doxology⁴⁵ when you are hardly expecting it. He lays down his pen, and bows his knee to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and pours out a flood of thanksgiving to the Most High. Here was a man, who never knew but what he might be dead the next day—for his enemies were many and cruel and mighty—and yet he spent a great part of his time in praising and blessing God.

This comforting occupation argues that his heart was not crushed and vanquished by his troubles. Paul was sore beset in many ways, yet he could say, and he did say, "Blessed be God." Job was greatly tried and sorely bereaved, but he still said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). And as long as we can keep the blessing of God to the front, it is a sure sign that, whatever the adversary may have been able to take away from us, he has not taken away our confidence, which hath great recompense⁴⁶ of reward; and whatever he may have crushed, he has not crushed our heart. He may have surrounded it with bitterness, but the heart itself is not made bitter: it is a fountain that sends out a stream of sweet waters, such as this utterance of the Apostle, "Blessed be God."

It is glorious to see how the grace of God will enable a man to endure all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil; how he will be laid aside by sickness, and his pains will be multiplied; how reproach may go far to break his heart; how he may be depressed in spirit and lose all temporal benefits;⁴⁷ and yet he will be able still to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord." "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13:15). "Let him do what He pleases with me, I have made no stipulation⁴⁸ with Him that I will only praise Him when He does according to *my* will; I will praise Him when He has *His own way* with me, even though it runs exactly contrary to mine." It is a brave heart that still, under all pressures, gives forth only this cry, "Blessed be God." O dear friends, if you want to keep up your hearts, if you desire to be established and sustained, if you wish to prevent the enemy from overcoming you, let this be your comfortable occupation... Nothing can keep your head above the waters of trouble better than crying, "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psa 103:1).

This occupation shows that the Apostle had not gratified⁴⁹ Satan. For the devil's purpose, so far as he has to do with our trouble, is to make us "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). After all the sorrow that Satan was permitted to bring to Job, the patriarch's heart still blessed the name of the Lord. So the devil was defeated, he could not carry out his own evil purpose, and he had to slink away like a whipped cur;⁵⁰ for Job glorified God instead of bringing dishonor upon His holy name. The tried and troubled ones who can still cry, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," are not driven to despair, for despair shuts the mouth and makes a man sit in sullen silence; or else it opens his lips in bitter complaints and in multiplied murmurings. But, when a man can truly say, "Blessed be God," then despair has not mastered him, he still holds his own, and he has on his side far greater force than the devil and the most trying circumstances can bring to bear upon him to vanquish him.

O friends, if you are afraid of being overcome, take to praising God. If you are in trouble and do not know how to bear it, divert your thoughts by praising God. Get away from the present trial by blessing and magnifying His holy name.

Next, this state of mind, which made the Apostle say, "Blessed be God," prophesied that God would speedily send him something to call forth new praises. When a man blesses God for the bitter, the Lord often sends him the sweet. If he can praise God in the night, the daylight is not far off. There never was a heart yet that waited and wanted to praise God, but the Lord soon gave it opportunities of lifting up psalms and hymns and spiritual songs unto Him. It shall never be said that we were ready to praise God, but that God was not ready to bless us. So, dear friends, praise God, and He will bless you; praise God, and exalt Him, and He will soon lift you up out of your troubles. I look upon a murmuring spirit as the forewarning of stormy weather in a rebellious soul, and I regard a

⁴⁵ **doxology** – an utterance of praise to God; thanksgiving.

⁴⁶ **recompense** – payment for performing a service.

⁴⁷ **temporal benefits** – the advantages and good things that pertain to the present material life as opposed to the future spiritual life.

⁴⁸ **stipulation** – a condition or promise in a contract.

⁴⁹ **gratified** – pleased; satisfied.

⁵⁰ **cur** – dog.

praiseful spirit as the forecast of a happy time to come to the loyal joyous soul. God has prepared the heart to receive the joy which, otherwise, it might not have been fit to accept at His hands. Be comforted, then, dear friends, if you find in your hearts the desire to praise God and belief that the Lord will find in His heart the willingness speedily to bless you.

This comforting occupation profits the believer in many ways. One advantage of blessing God is that it takes a man's thoughts off his own trials and sorrows. We make our troubles much greater than they need be by turning them over, considering them from all points of view, weighing them, and thinking and meditating upon them. You know very well that, if you swallow a pill, you do not taste it; but if you get it between your teeth, and bite and chew it, you will get all the bitter flavor of the drug. So, it is a good thing often to let our afflictions go right down into our soul, to swallow them at once, and say no more about them. God has sent them; and therefore, they are for your good. But when you keep brooding over your grief, you will probably hatch something out of it which you did not expect; it may be that you will find a young cockatrice⁵¹ come from it to annoy you. They that will be always ruminating⁵² upon their trials will soon find a sorrow within the sorrow which, haply,⁵³ they might never have perceived if they had let it go by. While we are blessing God, we are, at least for the time, taking our thoughts off our troubles; and so far, so good.

Moreover, we shall by God's gracious help while we are praising Him, be lifting our soul out of our sorrow.... Do you not think, dear friends, that sometimes, when you are very heavy of heart, it would be the best possible thing if you were to say with Martin Luther, "Come, let us sing a psalm and startle the devil"? If you sit down and groan and complain against God, your groans will be music to Satan's malevolent⁵⁴ heart; but you will vex and grieve him, if instead of doing so, you say, "No, foul fiend, thou shalt never persuade me to rob God of His glory; He shall have His full revenue of praise from me, whether I am on my bed sick or able to be up and actively engaged in the duties of my calling. Whether I stand well with my fellowmen, or my name has an ill savor to them, God's name has not an ill savor; and therefore I will praise and bless Him even though nobody will praise me." O beloved, if thy heart is sad within thee, praising God will so lift it up that thou wilt even be able to forget the trouble of the present hour! What does the eagle do when the fowler is about with his net and gun? Why, the noble bird takes to his wings and flies upwards towards the sun. And though his bright eye can see the foe, he knows that no bullet can reach him at that great height. So, if you Christians have close communion with your God and praise and magnify His holy name, the shots of the enemy shall not reach you—you will have risen far beyond their range. Hence, you see the excellence of blessing and praising the Most High.

Besides, this occupation may well tend to take away the sorrows of our mortality, since by praising God we get a taste of the joys of immortality. What are the angels doing now? I cannot tell you what men all over the world are doing; but I can tell you what the angels are doing. The holy spirits before the throne find it is their very heaven to be ever blessing their God; so if you want a sip of heaven's bliss, if on your leaf you would have a sparkling dew-drop which would tell you what the river of life that flows at the right hand of God is like, commence at once to praise and bless the Lord your God...there is no better way of anticipating the joys of being there than by beginning the praises of God while here.

You may also destroy your distresses by singing praises to God. By blessing the Lord, you may set your foot upon the neck of your adversaries; you can sing yourself right up from the deeps by God's gracious help. Out of the very depths, you may cry unto the Lord till He shall lift you up, and you shall praise Him in excelsis⁵⁵—in the very highest—and magnify His name.

I give you this as one of the shortest and surest recipes for comfort: *begin to praise God.*

II. Time would fail me if I dwelt, as I should like to dwell, upon the first point; so we must advance to the second, which is, the comforting titles which the Apostle gives to God in our text. The first title we may call *a name of affinity*:⁵⁶ "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Oh, how near that brings God to us—that He

⁵¹ **cockatrice** – a poisonous serpent.

⁵² **ruminating** – turning a matter over and over in the mind; meditating deeply.

⁵³ **haply** – perhaps.

⁵⁴ **malevolent** – desiring to do evil to others.

⁵⁵ **excelsis** – *Latin*: glory in the highest.

⁵⁶ **affinity** – relationship; kinship.

is the Father of Jesus, the Father of Christ, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”—because Jesus has espoused our nature and become a man. Though He is “Light of light” and “very God of very God,” yet is He also our Brother. “Father of Jesus”—what a delightful title that is for the good and glorious God! The great Jehovah hath become very near of kin to thee, my sorrowing brother, for His Son is thy Brother, thy Husband, thy Head. And now the Father of Jesus is the Father of *every* believer, so He is thy Father if thou art one of those who trust His Son. A child may not have a penny in his pocket; yet he feels quite rich enough if he has a wealthy father. You may be very, very poor, but, oh! *What a rich Father you have!* Jesus Christ’s Father is *your* Father! And as He has exalted His own dear Son, He will do the same for you in due time. Our Lord Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren; and the Father means to treat the other brethren even as He treats Him. Your Father has made you one of His heirs—yea, a joint heir with Jesus Christ—what more would you have? Wherefore, comfort yourself with this blessed truth. If you are distressed and troubled, this fact—that God is Christ’s Father and *your* Father—ought to be quite sufficient by the blessing of the Holy Spirit to fill you with intense joy.

In addition to this name of affinity, Paul gives to God a title which is *a name of gratitude*: “The Father of mercies.” Then every mercy I have ever had has been begotten of God, Who is “the Father of mercies.” All temporal mercies come to God’s people from their Father; it is He Who gives us bread to eat and raiment to put on. We are happy to be able to see in these common mercies a peculiar touch of the benign⁵⁷ hand; but as for the high and heavenly mercies, the everlasting mercies, the satisfying mercies, the soul-filling mercies—these all come from God. As every beam of light comes from the Father of lights, so do all mercies come from God. As all the rivers would be dried up if the sea were dry—for that is the ultimate source of the earth’s moisture—so would all our mercies be dried-up mercies, barren mercies, no mercies at all, if they did not come from that great ocean of mercies, the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Well now, beloved, as your Father is “the Father of mercies,” can you not go to Him for all the mercy you need? If your mercies seem just now to be very few, can you not go to the All merciful and ask Him to deal out to you from His abundant store, for “His mercy endureth for ever”?

The third title, which Paul applies to God, ought to afford the deepest possible consolation to your soul; I venture to call it a name of hope: “The God of all comfort.” All sorts of comforts are stored up in God. No matter what you may require to bear you up under your affliction, God hath just the kind of comfort which you need, and He is ready to bestow it upon you. Rest you sure of that. And believe also that He will bestow it upon you if you ask it at His hands. Oh, I think this is a name full of good cheer to everyone who has grown weary because of the trials of the way through this great and terrible wilderness! God is the God of all comfort—not merely of some comfort, but of *all* comfort. If you need every kind of comfort that was ever given to men, God has it in reserve, and He will give it to you. If there are any comforts to be found by God’s people in sickness, in prison, in want, in depression, the God of all comfort will deal them out to you according as you have need of them.

This title is also a name of discrimination. It applies both to the persons and to the comfort: “Who comforteth us...by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.” There are some things which are called comforts of which God is not the dispenser. Alas! Alas! How many persons there are who fly to the bottle when they are in distress! That is their comfort. They drink and for a while forget their misery; but the process only leads to still greater misery and degradation. We cannot say that God is the God of such comfort as that; indeed, we do not reckon it to be comfort. Some there are who turn to dissipation⁵⁸ that they may forget their grief. God is not the God of dissipation, and therefore that is not a comfort to a child of God. It would only increase his misery. If he were to be dragged to it, it would not relieve his pains in the least. Whatever there is in the world—and there are many such things—which men call comforts, if you cannot be sure that they are such as God sends, let them be no source of consolation to you, but rather regard them with horror. May every child of God be able to make this discrimination and say, “If God does not give me what I look upon as a comfort, it will not prove to be really a comfort.” It is not a creature who supplies the comfort, it is only the Creator. The comfort may be brought to us by a creature and brought in God’s name, but it must come from *Him*. The reason why bread feeds us is because God chooses to make it do so. When medicine heals us, it is because Jehovah makes it the means of healing; but if God does not work with the means, no cure will be wrought. You who have the Creator Himself as your Comforter are like the

⁵⁷ **benign** – gracious; kind.

⁵⁸ **dissipation** – wasting one’s moral and physical powers in a life of careless, wasteful spending of money and yielding to vices which impair or ruin both health and fortune.

man who has a well in his garden; he may not have a tap to turn off and on when he wants a supply of water to run through the pipe, but he has the well itself from which he may draw as much as he needs.

So much then, upon the comforting titles which Paul uses in relation to God. I pray you to act like the bees when they dive into the petals of the flowers and suck out their honey—dive into these titles, and extract the delicious honey which the Holy Spirit has there stored for you.

III. Now, thirdly, I am to speak of *the comforting fact* which Paul here mentions: “The God of all comfort...Who comforteth us in all our tribulation.” This was Paul’s declaration, and I also may speak in the name of many here present and say, “That is not only true of Paul and the Christians in his day, but it is true also of us.” The God of all comfort has comforted *us* in our tribulation. Look back now on the pages of your diary that bear the record of your sorrow: do they not also bear the record of the Lord’s help in the sorrow and His deliverance from the sorrow? If I cannot speak for all of you, I will speak for myself; I must do so, or else surely the very timber on which I stand might cry out against me. The Lord has been very gracious to me in many an hour of affliction; blessed be His name, He has never failed to bring the solace when He has made the smart; and if there has been the stroke with the rod, there has very soon been the caress of His love to follow the blow of His hand. It has been so with many of us.

But Paul speaks in the present tense: “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation,” and we also can declare that God is now comforting us who believe in Jesus. Did you, beloved, come into this building somewhat heavy in spirit? You are not half so heavy now as you were; and if you will take the good advice I am trying to give, you will go away quite relieved. Rutherford⁵⁹ used to say that the cross of Christ was no more a burden to the man who knew how to carry it than wings are to a bird or sails are to a ship. An affliction is a help to us, not a hindrance, when grace comes with it to sanctify it. Remember what David said long ago: “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved” (Psa 55:22). But if you cast your burden upon the Lord, do not go looking after it when I have pronounced the benediction; leave it altogether. The fault with many of us is that when we have cast our burden upon the Lord, we beg Him to let us have it back again! And if He grants our foolish request, it comes back twice as heavy as it was before. Oh, that we were wise enough to leave our troubles with our Father, Who is in heaven, as little children leave things with their father! Then we shall find that He comforts us in all our tribulation.

Ay, but our text is true of the future as well as the present. Here, if we cannot speak by experience, we can speak by faith. A little child, who loves his father, has no doubt about his father’s comforting him next year as well as this. And you must have no doubt about what God will do for you, dear friends, especially you aged ones. When the veterans begin to waver and doubt, I do not know what excuse to make for them. I remember the story of one who said she was afraid she would be starved. Someone asked her, “How old are you?” “Seventy-five,” she replied. “How long have you been a Christian?” “Fifty years.” “Your Heavenly Father has fed you these fifty years, and yet you fear that He will let you starve during the last few years you are likely to be here?” It was very wrong of the poor old soul; mind that you do not imitate her. It is due to every honest man that we should speak of him as we have found him; much more is it due to our faithful God. He has comforted, He is comforting, and He will comfort. And Paul puts it in such a way as to make us feel that He will *never* leave off comforting us even for a single moment: “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation,” not in some of it, but in *all* of it.

Our tribulations sometimes change; and a new cross is generally a very heavy one. The old crosses get at last to fit the back, and we can carry them better than we could at the first; but a new cross galls⁶⁰ the shoulders that have not yet grown used to it. But the Lord your God will help you in your new tribulations as well as in your old ones; and if they come thick and threefold—tribulation upon tribulation, trouble upon trouble—still, as your days, so shall your strength be; and He Who has comforted and is comforting will continue to comfort you even to the last.

IV. Now I must close with just a few remarks upon *the comforting design* of which our text speaks. Why does God lay trouble upon His people and comfort them in it? *It is that He may make them comforters of others:* “That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” A man who has never had any trouble is very awkward when he tries to comfort troubled hearts. Hence, the minister of Christ, if he is to be of much use in God’s service, must

⁵⁹ **Samuel Rutherford** (1600-1661) – Scottish Presbyterian preacher, author, and theologian.

⁶⁰ **galls** – makes sore by chafing or rubbing.

have great trouble. “Prayer, meditation, and affliction,” says Melancthon,⁶¹ “are the three things that make the minister of God.” There must be prayer; there must be meditation; and there must be affliction. You cannot pronounce the promise aright in the ear of the afflicted, unless you yourself have known its preciousness in your own hour of trial. It is God’s will that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, should work by men full often according to that ancient word of His, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem” (Isa 40:1, 2a). These comforting men are to be made; they are not born so; and they have to be made by passing through the furnace themselves. They cannot comfort others unless they have had trouble and have been comforted in it.

More than this, the intent of God is to make us able comforters: “That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” Some have the will to comfort the troubled, but they have not the power to do it. “Miserable comforters are ye all,” said Job to his friends (Job 16:2). And the same has been said to many of those who have really tried to comfort the sorrowing, but who in the process have put their fingers into the open wounds, and so made them worse instead of better. Brethren, the able comforter must be a man who knows both the trial and the promise that is suited to meet it.

Beside that, we are to be ready comforters, for we are “to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Experimental knowledge helps a man to speak with power to the afflicted soul. He who has taken a certain medicine and proved the benefit of it is the man to recommend it to another. Hence, the Lord often passes His ministers through trials which they would never have to endure if it were not for their people. Even as upon the Chief Shepherd of all the wanderings of the flock had to be laid, so in a very minor sense the wanderings of the flock must be borne by the under-shepherd, or else he cannot be a comforter to them.

Dear friends, the next time you get into any trouble, I would recommend you to take notes of it and to ask yourself, when it is over, “How did God comfort me?” Lay that cordial⁶² up in store because one of these days you will want that comfort again; or, if not, you will meet with somebody who is in just the same fix as you were in, and you will be able to say, “I know what will help you, for I have it down in black and white at home, how God helped me in a trouble exactly like yours.”

Welcome your trials then, beloved. Open wide your doors, and say to tribulations, “Come in, come in; this is the place where you are to lodge, for my Master said, ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation’” (Joh 16:33). Welcome even that black trouble that has a mask on its face; it is no adversary coming to kill you. When the mask is taken off, you will see that underneath it, there is a bright, smiling face. Some of us can say to affliction, “Come in, and welcome, for the costliest jewels we ever possessed were brought by you. You have done us more good than all our joys put together.” We should have had no harvest if God had left us like the hard road outside the field; but the soil has been cut up by the sharp plough, and often our very soul has been grievously tried as the harrow and the scarifier⁶³ have gone over us again and again; but all these processes have caused us to bring forth fruit to the praise and glory of God. Therefore, again I say, *welcome* your troubles. Do not be sorry if they travel with you for a while, for they are good guests...God bless you, brethren and sisters, by making you a comfort to others; and probably it will be through the very trials which greatly vex you!

Intended for reading on Lord’s-Day, September 17th, 1899, delivered by C. H. Spurgeon,
at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, on Thursday evening, June 15th, 1882.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): influential Baptist minister in England. History’s most widely read preacher (apart from those found in Scripture). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead. Born at Kelvedon, Essex, England.

Let us cleave to Christ more closely, love Him more heartily, live to Him more thoroughly, copy Him more exactly, confess Him more boldly, follow Him more fully....Worldly people may laugh at it. Weak brethren may think it extreme. But it will wear well. At even it will

⁶¹ **Philip Melancthon** (1457-1560) – German Reformer, theologian, close friend of Martin Luther, and author of *Loci Communes*, the first systematic treatment of Luther’s evangelical theology.

⁶² **cordial** – medicine, food, or beverage for invigorating the heart and lifting the spirits.

⁶³ **scarifier** – a tool for loosening the soil.

TRIED BY FIRE

A. W. Pink (1889-1952)

“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” (v. 2). Poor Job felt that his lot was unbearable. But he recovers himself. He checks his hasty outburst and revises his impetuous⁶⁴ 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 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: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see 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.” The One above is neither unmindful of nor indifferent to our lot. If He notices the fall of a sparrow, if He counts the hairs of our heads (Mat 10:29, 30), 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 grievous 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.

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” (Pro 15:3). Spurgeon said, “One of the greatest tests of experimental religion is, What is my relationship to God’s omniscience⁶⁵?” 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, harrowing⁶⁶ 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 Job took. He was grievously misunderstood, and for one with a sensitive temperament, to be misunderstood is a sore trial. His close 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 censorious⁶⁷ 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.

⁶⁴ **impetuous** – characterized by sudden, powerful, or rash emotions or energy.

⁶⁵ **omniscience** – having all knowledge.

⁶⁶ **harrowing** – acutely distressing or painful.

⁶⁷ **censorious** – severely critical.

“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 offers no solution. Nor does philosophizing help us. Human volition⁶⁸ is a strange enigma.⁶⁹ Consciousness bears witness that we are more than automatons.⁷⁰ 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 on us, both good and evil, beyond our power to resist. Both heredity and environment exercise powerful influences on us. Our surroundings and circumstances are factors that cannot be ignored. And what of providence that “shapes our destinies”? Ah, how little do we know the way 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?” (Pro 20:24).

In the narrower sense of the term, Job did know the way 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. 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 unbosom⁷¹ 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” (1Jo 1:9). Does not v. 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 that leads to life, or the Broad Road that leads 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). You need not be deceived or uncertain. The Lord declared, “I am *the way*” (Joh 14:6).

Divine Testing: *“When he hath tried me.”* “The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts” (Pro 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, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deut. 8:2). In the same way God tries, tests, proves, and humbles us.

“When he hath tried me.” If we realized this more, we would bear up better in the hour of affliction and be more patient under suffering. The daily irritations of life, the things that 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 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 works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). This is what Job did.

In the opening chapter of Job, we find Satan obtaining permission to afflict God’s servant. He used the Sabians 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

⁶⁸ **volition** – will-power.

⁶⁹ **enigma** – something puzzling; unsolved problem.

⁷⁰ **automatons** – self-operating machines or mechanisms, especially robots.

⁷¹ **unbosom** – bring out from the heart; give vent to; reveal one’s thoughts or secrets.

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 see 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; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev 2:10). Their being cast into prison was simply God “trying” them.

How much we lose by forgetting this! What a comfort for the trouble-tossed heart to know that no matter what form the testing may take, no matter what the agent that annoys, it is God who is “trying” His children. What a perfect example the Savior set us. When He was approached in the garden and Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the Savior said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 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 Savior 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 dealings. Why should God lay such an intolerable burden on 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?” (Rom 9:20)! 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 needs to cry to God, that His grace may silence our rebellious lips and still the tempest within our desperately wicked hearts!

But to the humble soul who bows in submission before the sovereign dispensations⁷² of the all-wise God, Scripture reveals some light on the problem. This light may not satisfy reason, but it will bring comfort and strength when received in childlike faith and simplicity. In 1 Peter 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 necessity for the trial of faith.* Since God says it, let us accept it. *Second, this trying of faith is precious, far more so than gold.* It is precious to God (cf. Psa 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 necessity for our “trials,” and therefore we are not to think them strange; we should expect them. And too, there is again the blessing 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 to comfort you concerning your faith: That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1Th 3:2, 3). And again it is written, “...we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Act 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.

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

⁷² **dispensations** – the ordering or arrangement of events by divine government and care.

myself" (42:6). And well he might; and well may we. As we discover that in our flesh there dwells "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, we have good reason for abhorring ourselves. Ah, Christian reader, there is much dross in 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 who has begun a good work in us "will finish it" (Phi 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" (Psa 138:8). Then be of good cheer, tried and troubled one. The process may be unpleasant and painful, but the outcome is joyous and sure.

"*I shall come forth as gold.*" This was said by one who knew affliction and sorrow as few 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 on God. There will be no credit to our account: the glory will all belong to the Divine Refiner (Jam 1:12).

For the present two things are certain: 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; "he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29)! Praise God for such a glorious prospect, such a victorious outcome, and such a marvelous goal.

From *Comfort for Christians*, available as a paperback book from Chapel Library.

A.W. Pink (1889-1952): Pastor, itinerate Bible teacher, voluminous author of *Studies in the Scriptures* and many books including his well-known *The Sovereignty of God*. Born in Great Britain, immigrated to the U.S., and later returned to his homeland in 1934.

The believer has "mourning days." The place of his sojourn is a valley of tears. Adam went weeping from his paradise, we go weeping on the way to ours. But, pilgrim of grief! Your tears are numbered. A few more aching sighs; a few more gloomy clouds; and the eternal sun shall burst on you, whose radiance shall never more be obscured! Life may be to you one long "Valley of Baca," a protracted scene of "weeping!" But soon shall you hear the sweet chimes wafted from the towers of the new Jerusalem, "Enter in to the joy of your Lord!" "The Lord God shall wipe away all tears from off all faces!" It is a consoling thought that all these days are appointed, meted out, numbered. "Unto you it is given," says the Apostle, "to suffer!" Yes! And if you are a child of the covenant, your mourning days are days of special privilege, intended to be fraught with blessing. To the unbeliever, they are pledges of everlasting woe; to the believer, they are preludes and precursors of eternal glory! Affliction to the one is the cloud without the Rainbow; to the other, it is the cloud radiant and lustrous with gospel promise and gospel hope! Reader! Are you now one of the many members of the family of sorrow? Be comforted! Soon the long night-watch will be over—pain, sickness, weakness, weariness. Soon the windows of the soul will be no more darkened. Soon you shall have nothing to be delivered from, your present losses and crosses will turn into eternal gains, the dews of the night weeping (nature's tear-drops) will come to sparkle like beautiful gems in the morning of immortality! Soon the Master's footsteps will be heard saying, "The days of your mourning are ended," and you shall take off your sackcloth and be girded with gladness.—*John MacDuff*

Child of sorrow! Mourning over the withdrawal of some beloved object of earthly affection. Dry your tears. An early death has been an early crown! The tie sundered here links you to the throne of God. You have a brother, sister, a child in heaven! You are the relatives of a ransomed saint! We are proud when we hear of our friends being "advanced" in this world. What are the world's noblest promotions in comparison with that of the believer at death, when he graduates from grace to glory?—*John MacDuff*

THE COMFORTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

John Owen (1616-1683)

FIRST, there are but three things in the whole course of our pilgrimage that the consolations of the Holy Ghost are

useful and necessary in: 1. *In our afflictions:* affliction is part of the provision that God has made in His house for His children (Heb 12:5, 6). The great variety of its causes, means, uses, and effects is generally known. There is a measure of them appointed for every one. To be wholly without them is a temptation; and so in some measure an affliction. That which I am to speak unto is *that in all our afflictions we need the consolations of the Holy Ghost*. It is the nature of man to relieve himself, when he is entangled, by all ways and means. According as men's natural spirits are, so do they manage themselves under pressures. "The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity" (Pro 18:14), at least, will struggle with it.

There are two great evils, one of which does generally seize on men under their afflictions and keep them from a due management of them. The Apostle mentions them both: "Despise not the chastisement of the Lord; neither faint when thou art reprov'd" (Heb 12:5). One of these extremes do men usually fall into; either they despise the Lord's correction or sink under it.

(1.) *Men despise it.* They account that which befalls them to be a light or common thing; they take no notice of God in it. They can shift⁷³ with it well enough: they look on instruments, second causes; provide for their own defense and vindication with little regard to God or His hand in their affliction. And the ground of this is because they take in succors⁷⁴ in their trouble that God will not mix His grace withal.⁷⁵ They fix on other remedies than what He has appointed and utterly lose all the benefits and advantage of their affliction. And so shall every man do that relieves himself from any thing but the consolations of the Holy Ghost.

(2.) *Men faint and sink under their trials and afflictions,* which the Apostle farther reproveth (v. 12). The first despise the assistance of the Holy Ghost through pride of heart; the latter refuse it through dejectedness of spirit and sink under the weight of their troubles. And who...is there that offends not on one of these hands? Had we not learned to count light of the chastisements of the Lord and to take little notice of His dealings with us, we should find the season of our afflictions to comprise no small portion of our pilgrimage.

Now there is no due management of our souls under any affliction, so that God may have the glory of it and ourselves any spiritual benefit or improvement thereby, but by the consolations of the Holy Ghost. All that our Savior promises His disciples, when He tells them of the great trials and tribulations they were to undergo, is, "I will send you the Spirit, the Comforter; he shall give you peace in me, when in the world you shall have trouble. He shall guide and direct and keep you in all your trials." And so the Apostle tells us, it came to pass (2Co 1:4-6); yea, and this, under the greatest afflictions, will carry the soul to the highest joy, peace, rest, and contentment. So the same Apostle, "We glory in tribulations" (Rom 5:3). It is a great expression. He had said before, "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (5:2). Yea, but what if manifold afflictions and tribulations befall us? "Why, even in them also we glory," says he, "we *glory* in our tribulations."

But whence is it that our spirits are so borne up to a due management of afflictions as to glory in them in the Lord? He tells us, verse 5, it is from the "shedding abroad of the love of God in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." And thence are believers said to "receive the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (1Th 1:6) and to "take joyfully the spoiling of their goods." This is that I aim at: there is no management nor improvement of any affliction, but *merely and solely by the consolations of the Holy Ghost*. Is it, then, of any esteem or value unto you that you lose not all your trials, temptations, and affliction? Learn to value that whereby alone they are rendered useful.

2. Sin is the second burden of our lives and much the greatest. Unto this is this consolation peculiarly suited. So Hebrews 6:17, 18, an allusion is taken from the manslayer under the Law, who, having killed a man unawares and brought the guilt of his blood upon himself, fled with speed for his deliverance to the city of refuge. *Our great and only refuge from the guilt of sin is the Lord Jesus Christ*. In our flying to Him does the Spirit administer consolation to us. A sense of sin fills the heart with troubles and disquietness.⁷⁶ It is the Holy Ghost which gives us peace in Christ, that gives an apprehension of wrath. The Holy Ghost sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts; from thence does Satan and the Law accuse us as objects of God's hatred; [but] the Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. There is not any one engine or instrument that sin uses or sets up against our peace, but one effect or other of the Holy Ghost towards us is suited and fitted to the casting of it down.

⁷³ **shift** – to manage *with* something inferior or *without* something desirable; get by.

⁷⁴ **succors** – help; assistance.

⁷⁵ **withal** – together with.

⁷⁶ **disquietness** – unrest; disturbance.

3. *In the whole course of our obedience are His consolations necessary also that we may go through with it cheerfully, willingly, patiently to the end.* This will afterward be more fully discovered as to particulars, when I come to give directions for our communion with this blessed Comforter. In a word, in all the concernments of this life and in our whole expectation of another, we stand in need of the consolations of the Holy Ghost.

Without them, *we shall either despise afflictions or faint under them*, and God be neglected as to His intentions in them.

Without them, *sin* will either harden us to a contempt of it or cast us down to a neglect of the remedies graciously provided against it.

Without them, *duties* will either puff us up with pride or leave us without that sweetness which is in new obedience.

Without them, *prosperity* will make us carnal, sensual, and to take up our contentment in these things and utterly weaken us for the trials of adversity.

Without them, the *comforts* of our relations will separate us from God and the loss of them make our hearts as Nabal's.⁷⁷

Without them, the *calamity of the church* will overwhelm us, and the prosperity of the church will not concern us.

Without them, *we shall have wisdom for no work*, peace in no condition, strength for no duty, success in no trial, joy in no state—no comfort in life, no light in death.

Now our afflictions, our sins, and our obedience with the attendancies⁷⁸ of them respectively, are the great concernments of our lives. What we are in reference unto God is comprised in them and the due management of them, with their contraries, which come under the same rule; through all these does there run a line of consolation from the Holy Ghost that gives us a joyful issue throughout. How sad is the condition of poor souls destitute of these consolations. What poor shifts are they forced to retake themselves unto! What giants have they to encounter in their own strength! And whether they are conquered or seem to conquer, they have nothing but the misery of their trials!

The SECOND thing considerable, to teach us to put a due valuation on the consolations of the Holy Ghost, is the matter of them or that wherewith He comforts us. Now, this may be referred to the two heads that I have formerly treated of—the love of the Father and the grace of the Son. All the consolations of the Holy Ghost consist in His acquaint-ing us with and communicating unto us the love of the Father and the grace of the Son; nor is there any thing in the one or the other but He makes it a matter of consolation to us: so that, indeed, we have our communion with the Father in His love and the Son in His grace by the operation of the Holy Ghost.

1. He communicates to us and acquaints us with the love of the Father. Having informed His disciples with that ground and foundation of their consolation which by the Comforter they should receive, our blessed Savior shuts up all in this, “For the Father himself loveth you” (Joh 16:27). This is that which the Comforter is given to acquaint us with-al⁷⁹—even that God is the Father and that He loves us. In particular, that the Father, the first Person in the Trinity, considered so distinctly, loves us. On this account is He said so often to come forth from the Father because He comes in pursuit of His love and to acquaint the hearts of believers therewith, that they may be comforted and established. By persuading us of the eternal and unchangeable love of the Father, He fills us with consolation. And indeed, all the effects of the Holy Ghost before mentioned have their tendency this way. Of this love and its transcendent excellency, you heard at large before. Whatever is desirable in it is thus communicated to us by the Holy Ghost.

A sense of this is able not only to relieve us, but to make us in every condition to rejoice with joy unspeakable and glorious. It is not with an increase of corn and wine and oil, but with the shining of the countenance of God upon us that He comforts our souls (Psa 4:6, 7). “The world hateth me,” may such a soul as has the Spirit say, “but

⁷⁷ **Nabal** – a wealthy successful farmer in Maon, whose name means “fool,” who refused to give David food while he was hiding from Saul. God struck him in judgment: “His heart died within him, and he became as a stone.” His story is found in 1 Samuel 25.

⁷⁸ **attendancies** – the things that accompany.

⁷⁹ **withal** – with.

my Father loves me. Men despise me as a hypocrite; but my Father loves me as a child. I am poor in this world; but I have a rich inheritance in the love of my Father. I am straitened⁸⁰ in all things; but there is bread enough in my Father's house. I mourn in secret under the power of my lusts and sin, where no eyes see me; but the Father sees me and is full of compassion. With a sense of His kindness, which is better than life, I rejoice in tribulation, glory in affliction, triumph as a conqueror. Though I am killed all the day long, all my sorrows have a bottom that may be fathomed—my trials, bounds that may be compassed. But the breadth, and depth, and height of the love of the Father, who can express?" I might render glorious this way of the Spirit's comforting us with the love of the Father by comparing it with all other causes and means of joy and consolation whatever and so discover their emptiness, its fullness—their nothingness, its being all.

2. Again: He does it by communicating to us and acquainting us with *the grace of Christ*—all the fruits of His purchase, all the desirableness of His Person, as we are interested in Him. The grace of Christ, as I formerly discoursed of at large, is referred to two heads—the grace of His person and of His office and work. By both these does the Holy Ghost administer consolation to us (Joh 16:14). He glorifies Christ by revealing His excellencies and desirableness to believers as the “chiefest of ten thousand—altogether lovely,” and then He shows them of the things of Christ—His love, grace, all the fruits of His death, suffering, resurrection, and intercession and with these supports their hearts and souls. And here, whatever is of refreshment in the pardon of sin, deliverance from the curse, and wrath to come, in justification and adoption, with the innumerable privileges attending them in the hope of glory given unto us, comes in on this head of account.

THIRDLY, the principle and fountain of all His actings for our consolation comes next under consideration to the same end; and this leads us a little nearer to the communion intended to be directed in.

Now, this is His own great love and infinite condescension.⁸¹ He willingly proceeds or comes forth from the Father to be our Comforter. He knew what we were, and what we could do, and what would be our dealings with Him—He knew we would grieve Him, provoke Him, quench His motions, defile His dwelling-place; and yet He would come to be our Comforter. Want of a due consideration of this great love of the Holy Ghost weakens all the principles of our obedience. Did this dwell and abide upon our hearts, what a dear valuation must we needs put upon all His operations and actings towards us! Nothing, indeed, is valuable but what comes from love and goodwill.

This is the way the Scripture takes to raise up our hearts to a right and due estimation of our redemption by Jesus Christ. It tells us that He did it freely; that of His own will He has laid down His life; that He did it out of love. “Hereby perceive we the love of God...because he laid down his life for us” (1Jo 4:9; 3:16). “He loved [us], and gave himself for [us]” (Gal 2:20). “[He] loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5). Hereunto it adds our state and condition, considered as He undertook for us—sinners, enemies, dead, alienated; then He loved us, and died for us, and washed us with His blood. May we not hence also have a valuation of the dispensation of the Spirit for our consolation? He proceeds to that end from the Father; He distributes as He will, works as He pleases. And what are we towards whom He carries on this work? Froward,⁸² perverse, unthankful; grieving, vexing, pro-voking Him. Yet in His love and tenderness does He continue to do us good. Let us by faith consider this love of the Holy Ghost....It is the head and source of all the communion we have with Him in this life. It suffices that, from what is spoken, it appears that the work in hand is among the greatest duties and most excellent privileges of the Gospel.

From “Communion with God” in *The Works of John Owen*, Vol 2,
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John Owen (1616-1683): called “The Prince of the Puritans” and committed to the Congregational way of church government. He was a chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, but most of his life he served as a minister in congregational churches. His written works span forty years and run to twenty-four volumes representing among the best resources for theology in the English language. Born to Puritan parents in the Oxfordshire village of Stadham.

⁸⁰ **straitened** – reduced to hardship or poverty.

⁸¹ **condescension** – the action of descending or stooping to things unworthy.

⁸² **froward** – difficult to deal with; not willing to yield; disobedient.

There is no book like the Bible in the time of trial. “Blessed is the man,” says the Psalmist, “whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law.” God’s truth is unchanging and eternal. Once planted in the soul, it shall bring forth fruit. One lesson truly learned from it, and that would not have been otherwise learned, is worth all our tears. It was no undue estimate of it that led one of old to say, “Unless your law had been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet your commandments are my delight.” I pity the man who, in the day of trial, is ignorant of the Bible. The bright and permanent realities of God’s truth are alone able to cheer him. In every view this book of God is a most wonderful book. To an afflicted man it occupies a place which no other can occupy. Only infinite wisdom and infinite love could have made it what it is. Human wisdom has no part in it. It shines by its own light, is hallowed by its own sanctity, embalmed in its own love. It is sorrow’s “silent comforter.” —*Gardiner Spring*

HOW DOES GOD COMFORT?

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

HOW does God comfort those who are cast down? His method is various. He adapts the comfort to the sorrow. He first writes the sentence of death upon all comfort outside of Himself. If you have been accustomed to scrutinize narrowly God’s way of dealing with you, you will often have marked this peculiar feature—that before He has unsealed the fountain, He has cut off the spring. In other words, He has suspended all human channels of comfort, preparatory to the fulfillment of His own exceeding great and precious promise, “I, even I, am he that comforts you.” It was thus He dealt with His Church of old. “Therefore, behold, I will allure⁸³ her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her” (Hos 2:14). In that wilderness, as a “woman of a sorrowful spirit,” she is brought: in that wilderness she is separated from her companions; yet in that dreary, lonely wilderness the God of all comfort speaks to her heart...

This is one way by which God comforts the disconsolate. Overlook it not. It may be painful, humiliating, and trying to faith; but the issue, like all the conduct of our Heavenly Father, will be most blessed and holy. Is He now, in your case, writing the sentence of death upon all creature comfort? Does no eye pity you, no heart feel for you, no tongue address you, and is no hand outstretched to rescue you? Look now for God! For He is on the way, in the time of the creature’s failure, Himself to comfort you.

By sealing a sense of pardon upon the conscience, God comforts the disconsolate. There is no comfort equal to this. As our deepest sorrow flows from a sense of sin, so our deepest joy springs from a sense of its forgiveness. What comfort can there be where this is lacking? What sorrow where this is felt? “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” (Job 34:29). This was the comfort which God commanded the prophet to speak to His spiritual Jerusalem: “Say unto her, that her sins are forgiven.” And this is the message which the Lord sends to His whole Church. This comfort have all His saints. Your sins, O believer, *are forgiven*. “I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins,” says God (Isa 44:22). You are not called upon to believe that God *will* pardon, but that He *has* pardoned you. Forgiveness is a past act; the sense of it written upon the conscience is a present one. “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb 10:14), has forever put away their sins.

Faith in the blood of Jesus brings the soul into the possession of a present forgiveness. And when God the Holy Spirit thus imprints a sense of pardoned sin upon the troubled conscience, all other sorrows in comparison dwindle into insignificance. In all kinds of trouble, it is not the ingredients that God puts into the cup that so much afflict us, as the ingredients of our distempered⁸⁴ passions mingled with them. The sting and the core of them all is sin: when that is not only pardoned, but in a measure healed, and the proud flesh eaten out, then a healthy soul will bear anything. After repentance, that trouble which before was a correction, becomes now a trial and exercise of grace....We should not be cast down so much about outward troubles, as about that sin that both procures them

⁸³ **allure** – to draw to oneself; to attract.

⁸⁴ **distempered** – disordered; diseased.

and envenoms⁸⁵ them. We see by experience, where conscience is once set at liberty, how cheerfully men will go under any burden: therefore labor to keep out sin, and then let come what will come.

Thus, beloved, God comforts His conscience-troubled people. He loves so to speak to their hearts! Is it any delight to Him to see you carrying your burden of conscious sin day after day and week after week? Ah, no! He has procured the means of your pardon at a great price—nothing less than the sacrifice of His beloved Son—and will not the same love which procured your forgiveness, speak it to your heart? Oh yes, the sun in the heavens pours not forth its light more freely, light itself speeds not more rapidly...than the pardon of sin flows from the heart of God to the humble and the contrite mourner. Is sin your trouble? Does conscious guilt cast you down? Look up, disconsolate soul! There is forgiveness with God. It is in His heart to pardon you. Repair to His feet, go to God's confessional, and over the head of the atoning sacrifice acknowledge your transgression, and He will forgive the iniquity of your sin.

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Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): one of the most valued ministers of the nineteenth century. Preached at the opening of C. H. Spurgeon's Metropolitan Tabernacle in 1861. Author of more than forty books, in which he promoted an experimental knowledge of the precious truths of God. Buried in Abbey Cemetery, Bath, England.



⁸⁵ **envenoms** – imparts bitterness to.