

# Free Grace Broadcaster

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## SUFFERING

#158

### Contents

The Road to True Health, Wealth and Prosperity.....	1
The Problem of A Suffering Christian.....	4
Suffering and Consolation .....	6
Affliction Sanctified.....	7
Sufferings Compensated .....	9
The Sweet Uses of Adversity.....	11
Glorifying God in the Fire .....	16

## THE ROAD TO TRUE HEALTH, WEALTH AND PROSPERITY

L.R. Shelton, Jr.

*"Wherefore let them that **suffer** according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator."*—1 Peter 4:19

*"For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."*—1 Peter 2:20, 21

*"For unto you it is given in **the behalf of Christ**, not only to believe on him, but also to **suffer** for his sake."* —Philippians 1:29

*"I sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, 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. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know."*—1 Thessalonians 3:2-4

*"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."*—John 15:18-20

*"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*—Matthew 5:10-12

*"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."*—Hebrews 12: 5-8; 10-11

You might ask the question why preface this article.. *The Road to True Health, Wealth, and Prosperity* with all these scriptures and the order they are in? Well, it is to give you **proof** that the scripture teaches that God's children will *in this life suffer, be afflicted, be persecuted, suffer reproach, be misunderstood "and through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"* Acts 14:22.

Yes, the road to heaven..the road toward true health, wealth and prosperity for the children of God, those saved by His grace, justified by the imputed righteousness of Christ, washed from all their sins in the blood of Christ by faith is through suffering, affliction, persecution, reproach, tribulation, misunderstanding and chastening. Dear friend, **God had only one Son without sin, but He has no sons without suffering** as described by the above scriptures. Listen to Hebrews 5:8: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by *the things which he suffered.*" He was tempted, tested, in all points as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15). "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself *hath suffered being tempted,* he is able to succour them that are tempted" Heb 2:17-18.

You see, dear friend, this false gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity which says that it is not God's will that we should suffer, that we should be healed of all sickness and disease is quite the opposite of what the scriptures teach (1Pet. 4:9). The scriptures teach that all of God's children come under His chastening rod and it is by these things noted above that He trains us to be like Christ in holiness (Heb. 12:10).

I would like to ask you a few questions: How does the Holy Spirit work patience in us? *By tribulation!* "...we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom. 5:3). How does He teach us that His grace is sufficient for our every need? *By bringing into our lives infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, and distresses!* (2 Cor. 12:9-10). How does He show us our faith is genuine? Listen to 1 Peter 1:6, 7: "...though now for a season, if need be, ye are in *heaviness through manifold temptations:* 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." Also 1 Peter 4:12, 13, "*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."

Let us continue. How does He break our pride? Listen! "...the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me" Luke

22:31-34. "Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly" Matt. 26:74, 75. **Seemingly God has no better way to break the pride of our hearts, than to withdraw His constraining grace in a trial and let us fall flat on our face to let us know and acknowledge that all our grace, wisdom, and strength to hold out and have the ability to do anything comes from Him.**

Then the question is asked what should my attitude be in all of this? James 1:2-4 gives me the answer. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials and testings]; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

Now let me go further...*the battle in our mind and spirit against the devil and indwelling sin is no small thing*; then what do we do? Brethren and sisters in the Lord, this battle ground is the worst, for we "...wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand... that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" Eph. 6:12-13, 11a.

When indwelling sin is stirred up in the mind by the fiery darts of the wicked one in temptations the Lord allows us to be tested in these fiery trials (1 Pet. 4:12), and we cry "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24). What do we do? I know what I do. I begin to call upon the blessed Name of my Redeemer and plead His precious blood for cleansing and cry, "Lord your promise is that sin shall not have dominion over me (Rom. 6:14) for I am no longer under its reign, dominion or power, but under your grace." Brethren I do not want sin or the world but holiness and the presence of God.

Brethren, this does not sound like a health, wealth, and prosperity gospel does it? No! This false gospel won't hold in a time like this as you wrestle with sin, Satan and the world. Only the blessed Holy Spirit can undertake for you and show you the blood of Christ has overcome sin, Satan and the world (Rev. 12:11). How sweet are the words of Hebrews 12:3, 4 in a time like this. "For consider him that **endured such contradiction** of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet **resisted unto blood**, striving against sin"; or the promise of Romans 8:18, "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"; or 1 Corinthians 4:17, 18, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen [are] eternal."

Now I know someone is waiting to ask the question: **Is this all there is to the Christian life?** No! No! A thousand times no! The believing child of God has the whole Bible and the witness of the Holy Spirit that God has done great things for him in Christ and has in store in Christ at the end, true health, wealth, and prosperity in heaven on the new earth in eternity. The Holy Spirit reveals to the heart of the poor sinner whom He has regenerated by His power that He has worked in Him true faith and repentance, made him a new creature in Christ, adopted him into the family of God, given him a new heart, a new spirit and has given him the very moral nature of God.

The saved sinner in Christ by faith, believes and knows that the precious blood of Christ has cleansed him from all sin. He knows that he has been justified before God by the imputed righteousness of Christ. He is assured that God loved him in Christ before the foundation of the world and chose him in Christ and wrote his name in the Lamb's book of life. He lives on the promises of God, delights in the law of God after the inward man and holds fellowship and communion with his risen Lord day by day. He prays, he sings, he makes melody in his heart to the Lord and by the grace of God counts it all joy to suffer for Christ and desires to say like the apostle Paul, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10). *To him this is all the health, wealth, and prosperity he desires for he knows that in this way he is being made in the image and likeness of Christ*, for he is a "stranger and pilgrim on the earth" (Heb. 11:13); a citizen of heaven, a little colony of heaven on earth and is looking and waiting for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change his vile body and fashion it like unto the glorious body of Christ, the body of His glory, and he shall forever be with the Lord (Php. 3:20, 21).

Let me go further and look at another phase of our subject and that is bodily suffering: No one is immune from it, neither the wicked nor the righteous (Eccl. 9:2). In the sufferings of the righteous, the mysterious purposes of God are worked out

perfectly. Just study the life of Job and see this in operation. One suffers in the body more than another but in the case of the righteous children of God it is **used to our sanctification** to make us more into the image and likeness of Christ.

The health, wealth, and prosperity people would tell us that if we had enough faith we would not have all this bodily suffering for there is healing in the atonement. Well I would like to ask them a question..why did the great apostle Paul suffer as he did if it was just a matter of faith in the atonement. He had this faith in the atonement for his never dying soul but not to keep him from suffering for it was God's will that he suffer to the glory of God and to fill up that which was behind of the suffering of Christ (Acts :16). "Whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:23b, 24).

I ask the same question about the greatest preacher between the apostle Paul and our time..C.H. Spurgeon. Did God spare him bodily suffering? No, because out of it God got great glory and because of it brother Spurgeon was kept low at the feet of Christ.

Brethren I speak from experience for my life has been lived with much suffering and I would not ask my heavenly Father to take back one day or one drop of suffering that He has in His providence allowed into my life because it has all been used to keep me humble and broken at His feet. The Psalmist puts into words my feelings.. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Psa. 119:67, 71).

I want to close this article by giving you my most quoted promise to my Lord, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). My Lord's faithfulness to me stands out in all His dealings with my soul. To meditate upon Christ and His sufferings for me in bearing my sins in His own body upon the tree is my stay in all he allows by His providence into my life and He is faithful in all his dealings with me, for "in all my afflictions He is afflicted" (Isa. 63:9) and will be true to His word when He says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psa 34:19).

I would like to close with a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 10:13..I pray you will meditate upon it and let it sink down deep into your understanding and affections and cause you to praise Him who loved you and gave Himself for you.

"For no temptation no trial regarded as enticing to sin no matter how it comes or where it leads has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear. But God is faithful to His word and to His compassionate nature, and He can be trusted not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will always also provide the way out..the means of escape to a landing place..that you may be capable and strong and powerful patiently to bear up under it." Amen.

With this introduction to the theme of this Quarterly Broadcaster.. "Suffering and Affliction," my prayer is that you will read the following articles with much profit praying the Holy Spirit will use them to bring comfort to those of you who are at this time in the fire of affliction, under the rod of chastening, passing through the hour of suffering or under the attack of sin, Satan, and the world. Remember those whom God loves He chastens.

## **THE PROBLEM OF A SUFFERING CHRISTIAN**

A.W. Pink

A child of God oppressed, suffering sorely, often driven to his wit's end..what a strange thing! A joint-heir with Christ

financially embarrassed, poor in this world's goods, wondering where his next meal is coming from..what an anomaly! An object of the Father's everlasting love, and distinguishing favor tossed up and down upon a sea of trouble, with every *apparent* prospect of his frail barque capsizing..what a perplexity!

One who has been regenerated and is now indwelt by the Holy Spirit daily harassed by Satan, and frequently overcome by indwelling sin..what an enigma! Loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, his body made the temple of the Holy Spirit, yet left in this world year after year to suffer affliction and persecution, to mourn and groan over innumerable failures, to encounter one trial after another, often to be placed in far less favorable circumstances than the wicked; to sigh and cry for relief, yet for sorrow and suffering to *increase*..what a mystery! What Christian has not felt the force of it, and been baffled by its inscrutability.

Now it was to cast light upon this pressing problem of the sorely tried believer that Romans 8 was written. There the apostle was moved to show that "*the sufferings of this present time*" (v. 18) are *not inconsistent* with the special favor and infinite love which God bears unto His people.

**First**, because by those sufferings the Christian is brought into personal and experimental fellowship with the sufferings of Christ (Rom 8:17; cf. Phil 3:10).

**Second**, severe and protracted as our afflictions may be, yet there is an immeasurable disproportion between our present sufferings and the future Glory (Rom 8:18-23).

**Third**, our very sufferings provide occasion for the exercise of hope and the development of patience (Rom 8:24,25).

**Fourth**, Divine aids and supports are furnished us under our afflictions (Rom 8:26,27) and it is *these* we would now consider.

"*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities*" (Rom 8:26). Not only does "hope" (a sure expectation of God's making good His promises) support and cheer the suffering saint, leading him to patiently wait for deliverance from his afflictions, but the blessed Comforter has also been given to him in order to supply help to this very end. By His *gracious aid* the believer is preserved from being totally submerged by his doubts and fears. By His *renewing operations* the spark of faith is maintained, despite all the fierce winds of Satan which assail. By His *mighty enabling* the sorely harassed and groaning Christian is kept from sinking into complete skepticism, abject despair, and infidelity. By His *quickenings power* hope is still kept alive, and the voice of prayer is still faintly heard.

And how is the gracious help of the Spirit *manifested*? Thus: seeing the Christian bowed down by oppression and depression, His compassion is called forth, and He strengthens with His might in the inner man. Every Christian is a living witness to the truth of this, though he may not be conscious of the Divine process. Why is it, my afflicted brother, my distressed sister, that you have not made shipwreck of your profession long ere this? What has kept you from heeding that repeated temptation of Satan's to totally abandon the good fight of faith? Why has not your manifold "infirmities" annihilated your faith, extinguished your hope, and cast a pall of unrelieved gloom upon the future?

The answer is, because the blessed Spirit silently, invisibly, yet sympathetically and effectually *helped* you. Some precious promise was sealed to your heart, some comforting view of Christ was presented to your soul, some whisper of love was breathed into your ear, and the pressure upon your spirit was reduced, your grief was assuaged, and fresh courage possessed you.

Here, then, is real light cast upon the problem of a suffering Christian, the most perplexing feature of that problem being how to harmonize sore sufferings with the love of God. But if God had ceased to care for His child, then He had deserted him, left him to himself. Very far from this, though, is the actual case: the Divine Comforter is given to help his infirmities.

Here, too, is the sufficient answer to an objection which the carnal mind is ready to make against the inspired reasoning of the apostle in the context: How can we who are so weak in ourselves, so inferior in power to the enemies confronting us, bear up under our trials which are so numerous, so protracted, so crushing? We could not, and therefore Divine grace has provided for us an all-sufficient Helper. Without His aid we had long since succumbed, mastered by our trials. Hope looks forward to the Glory to come; in the weary interval of waiting, the Spirit supports our poor hearts and keeps grace alive within us.

(This article is available in tract form.)

## SUFFERING AND CONSOLATION

Charles H. Spurgeon

AS the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so the consolations of Christ abound. Here is a blessed proportion. God always keeps a pair of scales..in this side he puts his people's trials and in that he puts their consolations. When the scale of trial is nearly empty, you will always find the scale of consolation in nearly the same condition; and when the scale of trials is full, you will find the scale of consolation just as heavy; for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, even so shall consolation abound by Christ. This is a matter of pure experience. Oh, it is mysterious that, when the black clouds gather most, the light within us is always the brightest! When the night lowers and the tempest is coming on, the heavenly captain is always closest to his crew. It is a blessed thing, when we are most cast down, then it is that we are most lifted up by the consolations of Christ.

Trials make more room for consolation. There is nothing that makes a man have a big heart like a great trial. I always find that little, miserable people, whose hearts are about the size of a grain of mustard-seed, never have had much to try them. I have found that those people who have no sympathy for their fellows..who never weep for the sorrows of others..very seldom have had any woes of their own. Great hearts can only be made by great troubles. The spade of trouble digs the reservoir of comfort deeper, and makes more room for consolation. God comes into our heart..he finds it full..he begins to break our comforts and to make it empty; then there is more room for grace. The humbler a man lies, the more comfort he will always have.

I recollect walking with a ploughman, one day, a man who was deeply taught, although he was a ploughman, and really ploughmen would make a great deal better preachers than many college gentlemen,.and he said to me, "Depend upon it, if you or I ever get one inch above the ground we shall get just that inch too high." I believe it is true; for the lower we lie, the nearer to the ground we are,.the more our troubles humble us,.the more fit we are to receive comfort; and God always gives us comfort when we are most fit for it. That is one reason why consolations increase in the same ratio as our trials.

Then trouble exercises our graces, and the very exercise of our graces tends to make us more comfortable and happy. Where showers fall most, there the grass is greenest. I suppose the fogs and mists of Ireland make it "the Emerald Isle"; and wherever you find great fogs of trouble, and mists of sorrow, you always find emerald green hearts; full of the beautiful verdure of the comfort and love of God. O Christian, do not thou be saying, "Where are the swallows gone? they are gone they are dead." They are not dead; they have skimmed the purple sea, and gone to a far-off land; but they will be back again by-and-by. Child of God, say not the flowers are dead; say not the winter has killed them, and they are gone. Ah! no; though winter hath coated them with the ermine of its snow; they will put up their heads again, and will be alive very soon. Say not, child of God, that the sun is quenched, because the cloud hath hidden it. Ah! no; he is behind there, brewing summer for thee; for when he cometh out again, he will have made the clouds fit to drop in April showers, all of them mothers of the sweet May flowers. And oh! above all, when thy God hides His face, say not that He has forgotten thee. He is but tarrying a little while to make thee love Him better; and when He cometh, thou shalt have joy in the Lord, and shalt rejoice with joy unspeakable. Waiting exercises our grace; waiting tries our faith; therefore, wait on in hope: for though the promise tarry, it can never come too late.

Another reason why we are often most happy in our troubles is this..then we have the closest dealings with God. I speak from heart knowledge and real experience. We never have such close dealings with God, as when we are in tribulation. When the barn is full, man can live without God; when the purse is bursting with gold, we somehow can do without so much prayer. But once take your *gourds* away, you want your *God*; once cleanse away the idols out of the house, then you must go and honour Jehovah.

Some of you do not pray half as much as you ought. If you are the children of God, you will have the whip; and when you

have that whip, you will run to your Father. It is a fine day, and the child walks before its father; but there is a lion in the road, now he comes and takes his father's hand. He could run half-a-mile before him when all was fine and fair; but once bring the lion, and it is "father! father!" as close as he can be. It is even so with the Christian. Let all be well, and he forgets God. Jeshurun waxes fat, and he begins to kick against God; but take away his hopes, blast his joys, let the infant lie in the coffin, let the crops be blasted, let the herd be cut off from the stall, let the husband's broad shoulder lie in the grave, let the children be fatherless..then it is that God is a God indeed. Oh, strip me naked; take from me all I have; make me poor, a beggar, penniless, helpless; dash that cistern in pieces; crush that hope; quench the stars; put out the sun; shroud the moon in darkness, and place me all alone in space, without a friend, without a helper; still, "Out of the depths will I cry unto thee, O God." There is no cry so good as that which comes from the bottom of the mountains; no prayer half so hearty as that which comes up from the depths of the soul, through deep trials and afflictions. Hence they bring us to God, and we are happier; for that is the way to be happy..to live near God. So that while troubles abound, they drive us to God, and then consolations abound.

Some people call troubles weights. Verily they are so. A ship that has large sails and a fair wind, needs ballast. Troubles are the ballast of a believer. The eyes are the pumps which fetch out the bilge-water of his soul, and keep him from sinking. But if trials be weights, I will tell you of a happy secret. There is such a thing as making a weight lift you. If I have a weight chained to me, it keeps me down; but give me pulleys and certain appliances, and I can make it lift me up. Yes, there is such a thing as making troubles raise me towards heaven. A gentleman once asked a friend, concerning a beautiful horse of his, feeding about in the pasture with a clog on its foot, "Why do you clog such a noble animal?" "Sir," said he, "I would a great deal sooner clog him than lose him: he is given to leap hedges." That is why God clogs his people. He would rather clog them than lose them; for if he did not clog them, they would leap the hedges and be gone. They want a tether to prevent their straying, and their God binds them with afflictions, to keep them near to him, to preserve them, and have them near to him, to preserve them, and have them in his presence. Blessed fact..as our troubles abound, our consolations also abound.

*(The above article is available in tract form.)*

## **AFFLICTION SANCTIFIED**

### **Quotations from Richard Sibbes**

1. Whatsoever is good for God's children they shall have it, for all is theirs to further them to heaven; therefore, if poverty be good, they shall have it; if disgrace be good, they shall have it; if crosses be good, they shall have them; if misery be good, they shall have it; for all is ours, to serve for our greatest good.
2. God's children have these outward things with God Himself; they are as conduits to convey His favour to us, and the same love that moved God to give us heaven and happiness, moves Him to give us our daily bread.
3. God pities our weakness in all our troubles and afflictions; He will not stay too long, lest we put forth our hands to evil; He will not suffer the rod of the wicked to rest upon the lot of the righteous (Psalm 125.3).
4. Is it not an unreasonable speech for a man at midnight to say, "It will never be day"? So it is an unreasonable thing for a man that is in trouble to say, "O Lord, I shall never get free of this; it will always be thus with me."
5. God takes a safe course with His children, that they may not be condemned with the world. He permits the world to condemn them, that they may not love the world. The world hates them, that they may not love the world; that they may be crucified to it, the world is to be crucified to them. Therefore they meet with such crosses and abuses and wrongs in the world. Because He will not suffer them to perish with the world, He sends them afflictions in and by the world.
6. Glory follows afflictions, not as the day follows the night but as the spring follows the winter; for the winter prepares

the earth for the spring, so do afflictions sanctified prepare the soul for glory.

7. When God visits with sickness, we should think (in the use of means) our work is more in heaven with God than with men or with medicine. When David dealt directly and plainly with God and confessed his sins, then God forgave them and healed his body too.

8. Christ chiefly manifests Himself to the Christian in times of affliction because then the soul unites itself most closely by faith to Christ. The soul in time of prosperity, scatters its affections and loses itself in the creature, but there is a uniting power in sanctified afflictions by which the soul (as in rain the hen collects her brood) gathers his best affections unto his Father and his God.

9. Though God deliver us not out of trouble yet He delivers us from the evil of trouble, from despair in trouble, by supporting the spirit. Nay, He delivers by trouble, for He sanctifies the trouble to cure the soul, and by little troubles He delivers us from greater.

10. There are in the world many of the poor who yet are exceeding proud, but God sanctifies outward poverty to His children so that it promotes true poverty of spirit. As they are poor, so they have a mean esteem of themselves; it makes them inwardly more humble and more tractable to God's government. Therefore when we are under any cross let us observe how it works, see whether we join with God or not. When He afflicts us outwardly, whether inwardly we be more humble. When He humbles us and makes us poor, whether we become also poor in spirit. When God designs to humble us we should labour through grace to abase ourselves and mortify pride.

11. Whatsoever God takes away from His children, He either supplies it with a much greater favour or else with strength to bear it; God gives charge to others to take care of the fatherless and widow and will He neglect them Himself?

12. It is a true rule in divinity that God never takes away any blessing from His people but He gives them a better; when Elijah was taken from Elisha into heaven, God doubled His Spirit upon Elisha; if God take away wife or children, He gives better things for them. The disciples parted with Christ's bodily presence, but He sent them the Holy Ghost.

13. The reason why the world sees not the happy condition of God's children is because their bodies are subject to the same infirmities with the worst of men, nor are they exempted from troubles; they are also subject to fall into gross sins, and therefore worldly men think, "Are these the men that are happier than we?" They see their crosses but not their crowns; they see their infirmities but not their graces; they see their miseries but not their inward joy and peace of conscience in the Holy Ghost.

14. It were a thousand times better for many persons to be cast on a bed of sickness and to be God's prisoners, than so scandalously to abuse the health that they have had continued so long.

15. God takes it unkindly if we weep too much and over-grieve for the loss of a wife, child or friend, or for any cross in the things of this life, for it is a sign we fetch not that comfort from Him which we should and may do. Nay, though our weeping be for our sins, we must keep a moderation in that: we must with one eye look upon our sins and with the other look upon God's mercy in Christ, and therefore if the best grief must be moderated, much more must the other.

16. He to whom this pilgrimage is over-sweet loves not heaven as he should; yet the pleasures of this life are so suitable to our nature that we would sit by them, only that God follows us with several crosses, therefore let us take in good part any cross, because it is out of heavenly love that we are exercised, lest we should surfeit upon things here below.

17. There is no condition but a Christian picks good matter of it, as a good artist sometimes will make a good piece of work out of bad materials to show his skill. A gracious man is not dejected over-much with abasement, nor lifted up over-much with abundance, but by faith carries himself in a uniform manner becoming a Christian in all conditions. Whereas those that have not been brought up in Christ's school nor trained up in a variety of conditions, they learn to do nothing. If they abound, they are proud; if they be cast down, they murmur and fret and are dejected, as if there were no divine providence that ruled the world.

18. A Christian will not do even common things but first he sanctifies them, he dedicates himself, his person and his



actions to God, and so sees God in all things, whereas a carnal man sees reason only in all that he himself does. But a Christian sees God in crosses to humble him, and everything he makes spiritual; yet because there is a double principle in him, there will be some stirring of the flesh in his actions, and sometimes evil will appear most; but here is the excellency of a Christian's state, that the Spirit will work it out at the last; He will never let his heart and conscience alone till it be wrought out by little and little.

19. There is not only a mystery but a depth in the mystery, as of election and reprobation, so of providence. There is no reason can be given why some of God's children are in quiet and others are vexed, why one should be poor and another rich. "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Psalm 97.2); you cannot see Him; He is hid in a cloud, but "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne." Howsoever He may wrap Himself up in a thick cloud that none can see Him, yet He is just and righteous; therefore when anything befalls us for which we can see no reason, yet we must reverence the Lord and adore His counsels and submit to Him who is infinitely wiser than we.

20. Gracious persons in times of peace and quiet often underprize themselves and the graces of God in them, thinking that they lack faith, patience and love, who yet when God calls them out to suffer crosses, eminently by His grace shine forth in the eyes of others in the example of meek and quiet subjection.

Taken from *Divine Meditations*

## SUFFERINGS COMPENSATED

A.W. Pink

*"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"—Romans 8:18*

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

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

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

**Second, the apostle looked forward with the eye of faith to "the glory."** To Paul "the glory" was something more than a beautiful dream. It was a practical reality, exerting a powerful influence upon him, consoling him in the warmest and

most trying hours of adversity. This is one of the real tests of faith. The Christian has a solid support in the time of affliction, when the unbeliever has not. The child of God knows that in his Father's presence there is "fullness of joy," and that at His right hand there are "pleasures forever more." And faith lays hold of them, appropriates them, and lives in the comforting cheer of them even now. Just as Israel in the wilderness were encouraged by a sight of what awaited them in the promised land (Num. 13:23,26), so, the one who today walks by faith, and not by sight, contemplates that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, but which God by His Holy Spirit hath revealed unto us (1 Cor. 2:9,10).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Taken from *Comfort for Christians*

# THE SWEET USES OF ADVERSITY

Charles H. Spurgeon

*"Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me."—Job 10:2*

AND will God contend with man? If God be angry, can he not take away the breath of his nostrils, and lay him low in the dust of earth? If the heart of the Almighty be moved unto hot displeasure, can he not speak in his anger, and will not the soul of man sink into the lowest hell? Will God contend will he set himself in battle array against his creature? and such a creature?..the creature of an hour..a thing that is not, that is here today and gone tomorrow? Will the Almighty contend with the nothingness of man? Will the everlasting God take up the weapons of war, and go out to fight against the insect of a day? Well might we cry out to him, "After whom is my Lord the King gone forth? After a dead dog: after a flea?" Wilt thou hunt the partridge on the mountains with an army, and wilt thou go forth against a gnat with shield and spear? Shall the everlasting God who fainteth not, neither is weary, at whose reproof the pillars of heaven's starry roof tremble and start..will he become combatant with a creature? Yet our text saith so. It speaks of God's contending with man. Ah, surely, my brethren, it needs but little logic to understand that this is not a contention of anger, but a contention of love. It needs, methinks, but a short sight for us to discover that, if God contendeth with man, it must be a contention of mercy. There must be a design of love in this. If he were angry he would not condescend to reason with his creature, and to have a strife of words with him; much less would he put on his buckler, and lay hold on his sword, to stand up in battle and contend with such a creature as man. You will all perceive at once that there must be love even in this apparently angry word; that this *contention* must, after all, have something to do with *contentment*, and that this battle must be, after all, but a disguised mercy, but another shape of an embrace from the God of love. Carry this consoling reflection in your thoughts while I am preaching to you; and if any of you are saying today, "Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me," the very fact of God contending with you at all, the fact that he has not consumed you, that he has not smitten you to the lowest hell, may thus, at the very outset, afford consolation and hope.

Now, I propose to address myself to the two classes of persons who are making use of this question. First, I shall speak to *the tried saint*; and then I shall speak to *the seeking sinner*, who has been seeking peace and pardon through Christ, but who has not as yet found it, but, on the contrary, has been buffeted by the law and driven away from the mercy-seat in despair.

I. First, then, to THE CHILD OF GOD. I have..I know I have..in this great assembly, some who have come to Job's position. They are saying, "My soul is weary of my life; I will leave my complaint upon myself; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me." Sometimes to question God is wicked. As the men of Bethshemesh were smitten with death when they dared to lift up the lid of the ark and look into its sacred mysteries, so is it often death to our faith to question God. It often happens that the sorest plagues come upon us on account of an impudent curiosity which longs to pry between the folded leaves of God's great council-book, and find out the reason for his mysterious providences. But, methinks *this* is a question that may be asked. Inquiring here will not be merely curious: for there will be a practical effect following therefrom. Tried saint! follow me while I seek to look into this mystery and answer your question, and I pray you, select that one of several answers which I shall propound, which shall, to your judgment, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, seem to be the right one. You have been tried by trouble after trouble: business runs cross against you; sickness is never out of your house; while in your own person you are the continual subject of a sad depression of spirit. It seems as if God were contending with you, and you are asking, "Why is this? 'Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me.'"

1. *My first answer on God's part, my brother, is this..it may be that God is contending with thee that he may show his own power in upholding thee.* God delighteth in his saints; and when a man delights in his child, if it be a child noted for its brightness of intellect, he delights to see it put through hard questions, because he knows that it will be able to answer them all. So God glories in his children. He loves to hear them tried, that the whole world may see that there is none like them on the face of the earth, and even Satan may be compelled before he can find an accusation against them, to resort to his inexhaustible fund of lies. Sometimes God on purpose puts his children in the midst of this world's trials. On the right,

left, before, behind, they are surrounded. Within and without the battle rages. But there stands the child of God, calm amidst the bewildering cry, confident of victory. And then the Lord pointeth joyously to his saint, and he saith, "See, Satan, he is more than a match for thee. Weak though he is, yet through my power, he all things can perform." And sometimes God permits Satan himself to come against one of his children; and the black fiend of hell in dragon's wings, meets a poor Christian just when he is faint and weary from stumblings in the valley of humiliation. The fight is long and terrible, and, well it may be, for it is *a worm combating with the dragon*. But see what that worm can do. It is trodden under foot, and yet it destroys the heel that treads upon it, When the Christian is cast down he utters a cry, "Rejoice not over me, O mine enemy, for though I fall yet shall I rise again." And so God pointeth to his child and saith, "See there! see what I can do: I can make flesh and blood more mighty than the most cunning spirit; I can make poor feeble foolish man, more than a match for all the craft and might of Satan." And what will you say to this third proof that God puts us through? Sometimes God doth as it were, *himself* enter into the lists; oh, let us wonder to tell it. God to prove the strength of faith, sometimes himself makes war on faith. Think not that this is a stretch of the imagination. It is plain simple fact. Have ye never heard of the brook Jabbok, and of that angel-clothed God who fought with Jacob there, and permitted Jacob to prevail? What was this for? It was this: thus had God determined, "I will strengthen the creature so much, that I will permit it to overcome its Creator." Oh, what noble work is this, that while God is casting down his child with one hand, he should be holding him up with the other: letting a measure of omnipotence fall on him to crush him, while the like omnipotence supports him under the tremendous load. The Lord shows the world.. "See what faith can do!" Well does Hart sing of faith..

*"It treads on the world and on hell;  
It vanquishes death and despair;  
And, O! let us wonder to tell,  
It overcomes heaven by prayer."*

This is why God contends with thee: to glorify himself, by showing to angels, to men, to devils, how he can put such strength into poor puny man, that he can contend with his Maker, and become a prevailing prince like Israel, who as a prince had power of God, and prevailed. This, then, may be the first reason.

2. *Let me give you a second answer. Perhaps, O tried soul! the Lord is doing this to develope thy graces.* There are some of thy graces that would never be discovered if it were not for thy trials. Dost thou not know that thy faith never looks so grand in summer weather, as it does in winter? Hast thou not heard that love is too often like a glow-worm, that showeth but little light except it be in the midst of surrounding darkness? And dost thou not know that hope itself is like a star..not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, and only to be discovered in the night of adversity? *Dost thou not understand that afflictions are often the black foils in which God doth set the jewels of his children's graces, to make them shine the better.* It was but a little while ago that on thy knees thou wast saying, "Lord, I fear I have no faith: let me know that I have faith." But dost thou know thou wast praying for trials, for thou canst not know that thou hast faith, until thy faith be exercised. Our trials, so to speak, are like wayfarers in a wood. When there is no intruder in the silent glades of the forest, the hare and the partridge lie; and there they rest, and no eye sees them. But when the intruding footstep is heard, then you see them start and run along the green lane, and you hear the whir of the pheasant as it seeks to hide itself. Now, our trials are intruders upon our heart's rest; our graces start up and we discover them. They had lain in their lair, they had slept in their forms, they had rested in their nests, unless these intruding trials had startled them from their places. I remember a simple rural metaphor used by a departed divine. He says he was never very skillful at birds' nesting in the summer time, but he could always find bird's nests in the winter.

*Now, it often happens that when a man has but little grace, you can scarcely see it when the leaves of his prosperity are on him; but let the winter's blast come and sweep away his withered leaves, and then you discover his graces.* Depend upon it God often sends us trials that our graces may be discovered, and that we may be certified of their existence. Besides it is not merely discovery it is real growth that is the result of these trials. There is a little plant small and stunted, growing under the shade of a broad spreading oak and this little plant values the shade which covers it, and greatly does it esteem the quiet rest which its noble friend affords. But a blessing is designed for this little plant. Once upon a time there comes along the woodman, and with his sharp axe he fells the oak. The plant weeps, and cries, "My shelter is departed: every rough wind will blow upon me, and every storm will seek to uproot me." "No, no," saith the angel of that flower, "now will the sun get at thee; now will the shower fall on thee in more copious abundance than before; now thy stunted form shall spring up into loveliness, and thy flower, which could never have expanded itself to perfection, shall now laugh in the sunshine, and men shall say, 'How greatly hath that plant increased! how glorious hath become its beauty through the removal of that which was its shade and its delight!'" *See you not, then, that God may take away your comforts and*

*your privileges to make you the better Christians?* Why, the Lord always trains his soldiers, not by letting them lie on feather beds, but by turning them out and using them to forced marches and hard service. He makes them ford through streams, and swim through rivers, and climb mountains, and walk many a long march with heavy knapsacks of sorrow on their backs. This is the way in which he makes soldiers..not by dressing them up in fine uniforms, to swagger at the barrack gates, and to be fine gentlemen in the eyes of the loungers in the park. God knows that soldiers are only to be made in battle: they are not to be grown in peaceful times, We may grow the stuff of which soldiers are made, but warriors are really educated by the smell of powder, in the midst of whizzing bullets, and roaring cannonades..not in soft and peaceful times. Well, Christian, may not this account for it all? Is not thy Lord bringing out thy graces and making them grow? This is the reason why he is contending with you.

3. *Another reason may be found in this. It may be the Lord contends with thee because thou hast some secret sin which is doing thee sore damage.* Dost thou remember the story of Moses? Never a man better beloved than he of the Lord his God, for he was faithful in all his house as a servant. But dost thou remember how the Lord met him on the way as he was going to Egypt, and strove with him? And why? Because he had in his house an uncircumcised child. This child was, so long as it had not God's seal upon it, a sin in Moses; therefore God strove with him till the thing was done. Now, too often we have some uncircumcised thing in our house, some joy that is evil, some amusement that is sinful, some pursuit that is not agreeable to his will. And the Lord meets us often as he did Moses, of whom it is written.. "The Lord met him by the way in the inn, and sought to kill him" ..Exodus 4:24. Now search and look, for if the consolations of God be small with thee, there is some secret sin within. Put it away, lest God smite thee still more sorely, and vex thee in his hot displeasure. *Trials often discover sins..sins we should never have found out if it had not been for them.*

We know that the houses in Russia are very greatly infested with rats and mice. Perhaps a stranger would scarcely notice them at first, but the time when you discover them is when the house is on fire; then they pour out in multitudes. And so doth God sometimes burn up our comforts to make our hidden sins run out; and then he enables us to knock them on the head and get rid of them. *That may be the reason of your trial, to put an end to some long-fostered sin.* It may be, too, that in this way God would prevent some future sin, some sin hidden from thine own eyes into which thou wouldst soon fall if it were not for his troubling thee by his providence. There was a fair ship which belonged to the great Master of the seas; it was about to sail from the port of grace to the haven of glory. Ere it left the shore the great Master said, "Mariners, be brave! Captain, be thou bold! for not a hair of your head shall perish; I will bring you safely to your desired haven. The angel of the winds is commissioned to take care of you on your way." The ship sailed right merrily with its streamers flying in the air. It floated along at a swift rate with a fair wind for many and many a day. But once upon a time there came a hurricane which drove them from the course, strained their mast until it bent as if it must snap in twain. The sail was gone to ribbons; the sailors were alarmed and the captain himself trembled. They had lost their course. "They were out of the right track," they said; and they mourned exceedingly. When the day dawned the waves were quiet, and the angel of the winds appeared; and they spake unto him, and said, "Oh angel, wast thou not bidden to take charge of us, and preserve us on our journey?" He answered, "It was even so, and I have done it. You were steering on right confidently, and you knew not that a little ahead of your vessel lay a quicksand upon which she would be wrecked and swallowed up quick. I saw that there was no way for your escape but to drive you from your course. See, I have done as it was commanded me: go on your way." Ah, this is a parable of our Lord's dealings with us. He often drives us from our smooth course which we thought was the right track to heaven. But there is a secret reason for it; there is a quicksand ahead that is not marked in the chart. We know nothing about it; but God seeth it, and he will not permit this fair vessel, which he has himself insured, to be stranded anywhere; he will bring it safely to its desired haven.

4. *I have now another reason to give, but it is one which some of you will not understand; some however will. Beloved, ye remember that it is written, that we "must bear the image of the heavenly," namely, the image of Christ.* As he was in this world even so must we be. We must have fellowship with him in his sufferings, that we may be conformable unto his death. Hast thou never thought that none can be like the Man of Sorrow unless they have sorrows too? How can you be like unto him, who sweat as it were great drops of blood, if you do not sometimes cry, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Think not, O well beloved, that thou canst be like the thorn-crowned head, and yet never feel the thorn. Canst thou be like thy dying Lord, and yet be uncrucified? Must thy hand be without a nail, and thy foot without a wound? Canst thou be like him, unless like him thou art compelled to say, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God is chiselling you..you are but a rough block..he is making you into the image of Christ; and that sharp chisel is taking away much which prevents your being like him. Must he who is our head be marred in his visage by reason of grief, and must we for ever rejoice and sing? It cannot be.

*"The heirs of salvation, I know from his word,*

*Through much tribulation must follow their Lord."*

Sweet is the affliction which gives us fellowship with Christ. Blessed is the plough that ploughs deep furrows, if the furrows be like his. Blessed is the mouth that spits upon us, if the spittle be from the same cause as that which defiled his face. Blessed are the nails and thorns, and vinegar and spear, if they but make us somewhat like to him, in whose glory we shall be partakers when we shall see him as he is. This is a matter which all cannot understand, for it is a path which no unhallowed foot hath trodden, and no careless eye hath so much as seen it. But the true believer can rejoice therein, for he has had fellowship with Christ in his sufferings.

*5. To the child of God I shall give only one more reason. The Lord, it may be, contendeth with thee, my brother, to humble thee.* We are all too proud; the humblest of us do but approach to the door of true humility. We are too proud; for pride, I suppose, runs in our very veins, and is not to be gotten out of us any more than the marrow from our bones. We shall have many blows before we are brought down to the right mark; and it is because we are so continually getting up that God is so continually putting us down again. Besides, don't you feel, in looking back on your past troubles, that you have after all been best when you have had troubles? I can truly say, there is a mournfulness in joy, and there is a sweet joy in sorrow. I do not know how it is, but that bitter wine of sorrow, when you once get it down gives such a warmth to the inner man as even the wine of Lebanon can scarce afford. It acts with such a tonic influence upon the whole system, that the very veins begin to thrill as the blood leaps therein. Strange influence! I am no physician, but yet I know that my sweet cup often leaves bitterness on the palate, and my bitter cup always leaves a sweet flavour in the mouth. There is a sweet joy in sorrow I cannot understand. There is music in this harp with its strings all unstrung and broken. There are a few notes I hear from this mournful lute that I never get from the loud-sounding trumpet. Softness and melody we get from the wail of sorrow, which we never get from the song of joy. Must we not account for this by the fact that in our troubles we live nearer to God? Our joy is like the wave as it dashes upon the shore..it throws us on the earth. But our sorrows are like that receding wave which sucks us back again into the great depth of Godhead. We should have been stranded and left high and dry upon the shore if it had not been for that receding wave, that ebbing of our prosperity, which carried us back to our Father and to our God again. Blessed affliction! it has brought us to the mercy seat; given life to prayer; enkindled love; strengthened faith; brought Christ into the furnace with us, and then brought us out of the furnace to live with Christ more joyously than before.

Surely, I cannot answer this question better. If I have not hit upon the right reason, search and look my dearly beloved; for the reason is not far off if ye but look for it..the reason why he contendeth with you.

II. I have thus done with the saints; I shall now turn myself to address THE SEEKING SINNER, who is wondering that he has found no peace and comfort. By the way..running a little apart from the subject..I heard a brother saying the other evening in describing his experience, that before he was converted he was never sick, never had an affliction at all, but from the very hour when he became converted, he found that trials and troubles came upon him very thick. I have been thinking of that ever since, and I think I have found a reason for it. When we are converted, it is the time of the singing of birds; but do you know the time of the singing of birds is the time of the pruning of vines, and as sure as the time of the singing of birds is come the time of the pruning of vines is come also. God begins to try us as soon as he begins to make our soul sing. This is not running away from the subject. I thought it was. It has just brought me to address the sinner. You have come here this morning saying to yourself, "Sir, not long ago I was awakened to a sense of my lost estate. As I was directed I went home and sought mercy in prayer. From that day till now I have never ceased to pray. But, alas! I get no comfort, sir; I grow worse than ever I was before..I mean I grow more desponding, more sad. If you had asked me before conviction, sir, whether the path to heaven was easy, I should have said 'yes.' But now it seems to me to be strewn with flints. That I would not mind; but, alas! methinks the gate is shut which lies at the end of the road; for I have knocked, and it has never opened; I have asked, and I have not received; I have sought, and I have not found. In fact, instead of getting peace I receive terror. God is contending with me. Can you tell me, sir, why it is?" I will try to answer the question, God helping me.

*1. My first answer shall be this. Perhaps, my dear hearer, God is contending with you for awhile, because as yet you are not thoroughly awakened.* Remember, Christ will not heal your wound till he has probed it to its very core. Christ is no un-qualified physician, no foolish surgeon, who would close up a wound with proud flesh in it; but he will take the lancet, and cut, and cut, and cut again crossways, and he will lay the sore open, expose it, look into it, make it smart; and then after that, he will close up its mouth and make it whole. Perhaps thou hast not as yet known thine own vileness, thine own lost state. Now, Christ will have thee know thy poverty before he will make thee rich. His Holy Spirit will convince thee

of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. He will strip thee, and though the pulling off of thy own righteousness be like flaying thee and tearing off the skin from thy breast, yet he will do it; for he will not clothe thee with the robe of his own righteousness till every rag of thy own self-sufficiency is pulled away. This is why God is contending with thee. Thou hast been on thy knees. Go lower, man..go lower; fall flat on thy face. Thou hast said, "Lord, I am nothing." Go lower, man; say, "Lord, I am less than nothing and the very chief of sinners." Thou hast felt somewhat; go ask that thou mayest feel more; may be yet more fully convinced of sin..may learn to hate it with a more perfect hatred, and to bewail thy lost estate with a wailing like that of Ramah, when Rachel wept for her children and would not be comforted because they were not. Seek to know the bottom of your case. Make it a matter of conscience to look thy sins in the face, and let hell also blaze before thee: realize the fact that thou deservest to be lost for ever. Sit down often and take counsel with the Lord thy God, whom thou hast grievously offended. Think of thy privileges, and how thou hast despised them; recollect the invitations thou hast heard, and how often thou hast rejected them; get a proper sense of sin, and it may be that God will cease to contend with thee, because the good is all obtained which he sought to give thee by this long and painful contention.

2. *Another answer I will give you is this: perhaps God contends with thee in order to try thy earnestness.* There are many Mr. Pliables, who set out on the road to heaven for a little time, and the first boggy piece of road they come to, they creep out on that side which is nearest to their own house, and go back again. Now, God meets every pilgrim on the road to heaven and contends with him. If you can hold your own, and say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him;" if you can dare to do it, and be importunate with God, and say, "Though he never hear me, if I perish I will pray, and perish only there;" then you have got the mastery and you shall succeed. God's Spirit is teaching you how to wrestle and agonize in prayer. I have seen a man, when he has become solemnly in earnest about his soul, pray as though he was a very Samson, with the two gates of mercy in his hand, rocking them to and fro as though he would sooner pull them up..gates, and bar, and all..than he would go away without obtaining a blessing. God loves to see a man mighty in prayer, intent upon getting the blessing, resolved that he will have Christ, or he will perish seeking him. Now, be in earnest. Cry aloud! spare not! Rise in the night-watches! pour out your heart like water before the Lord, for he will answer thee when he hath heard the voice of thy crying; he will hearken to thy supplication and give thee the desire of thy heart.

3. *Yet, again, another matter. May it not be, my dear hearers, that the reason why God contends with you and does not give you peace is, because you are harbouring some one sin?* Now, I will not say what it is; I have known a man solemnly under conviction of sin, but the company which he kept on market-day was of such a caste, that until he was separated entirely from his companions, it was not possible he should have peace. I do not know what your peculiar besetting sin may be. It may be a love for frivolity; it may be the desire to associate with those who amuse you; it may be worse. But remember, Christ and thy soul will never be *one* till thou and thy sins are *two*. Thy desires and longings must make a clean sweep of the devil and all his crew, or else Christ will not come and dwell with thee. "Well," says one, "but I cannot be perfect." No, but you cannot find peace till you desire to be. Wherever you harbour a sin, there you harbour misery. One sin wilfully indulged in, and not forsaken by true repentance, will destroy the soul. Sins given up are like goods cast out at sea by the mariners in days of storm; they lighten the ship, and the ship will never float till you have thrown all your sins overboard. There is no hope whatever for you till you can truly say,

*"Whate'er consists not with thy love,  
O help me to resign."  
"The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate'er that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from its throne,  
And worship only thee."*

4. *Then drawing near to a conclusion let me have your most solemn attention while I give one more hint as to the reason why you have not yet found peace. My dear hearers, perhaps it is because you do not thoroughly understand the plan of salvation.* I do feel that all ministers,..and here perhaps, I am as great a sinner as any other, and I condemn myself while I chastise others..we all of us do in some way or other, I fear, help to dim the lustre of God's grace, as manifested in the cross of Christ. Often am I afraid lest I should prefer Calvinism to Calvary, lest I should put the sinner's sense of need like a quickset hedge round the cross, and keep the poor sinner from getting as near as he would to the bleeding Lamb of God. Ah, my dear hearers, remember if you would be saved, your salvation comes wholly and entirely from Jesus Christ, the dying Son of God. View him yonder, sinner, sweating in the garden. I see the red drops of blood as they fall from that dear face! Oh, see him sinner, see him in Pilate's hall. View the streams of gore as they gush from those lacerated shoulders. See him, sinner, see him on his cross! View that head still marked with the wounds with which the thorns

pierced his temples! Oh, view that face emaciated and marred! See the spittle still hanging there..the spittle of cruel mockers! See the eyes floating in tears with languid pity! Look, too, at those hands, and view them as they stream like founts of blood! Oh, stand and listen while he cries, "*Lama Sabacthani!*" Sinner, thy life is in him that died; thy healing is in yonder wounds; thy salvation is in his destruction. "Oh," says one, "but I cannot believe." Ah, brother, that was once my mournful cry. But I will tell you how I came to believe. Once upon a time, I was trying to make myself believe, and a voice whispered, "Vain man, vain man, if thou wouldst believe, come and see!" Then the Holy Spirit led me by the hand to a solitary place. And while I stood there, suddenly there appeared before me One upon his cross. I looked up, I had then no faith. I saw his eyes suffused with tears, and the blood still flowing; I saw his enemies about him hunting him to his grave; I marked his miseries unutterable; I heard the groaning which cannot be described; and as I looked up, he opened his eyes and said to me, "The Son of Man is come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost." I clapped my hands, and I said, "Jesus, I do believe, I must believe what thou hast said. I could not believe before, but the sight of thee has breathed faith into my soul. I dare not doubt..it were treason, it were high treason to doubt thy power to save." Dissolved by his agonies, I fell on the ground, and embraced his feet, and when I fell, my sin fell also! And I rejoiced in love divine, that blots out sin and saves from death.

Oh my friend, you will never get faith by trying to make yourself have it. Faith is the gift of Christ; go and find it in his veins. There is a secret spot where faith is treasured up; it is in the heart of Christ; go and catch it sinner as it flows therefrom. Go to your chamber, and sit down and picture Christ in holy vision, dying on the tree, and as your eye sees, your heart shall melt, your soul shall believe, and you shall rise from your knees and cry, "I know whom I may believe, and I am persuaded he is able to save that which I have committed to him until that day."

And now, may the love of Christ Jesus, and the grace of his Father, and the fellowship of his Spirit, be with you for ever and ever. Amen and Amen.

Taken from the New Park Street Pulpit Vol. 5, page 465.

## GLORIFYING GOD IN THE FIRE

George Whitefield

Fire my brethren, not only burns and purges but you know it separates one thing from another, and is made use of in chemistry and mechanical business. What could we do without fire? It tries metal to purge it: God Almighty knows, we are often purged more in one hour by a good sound trial, than by a thousand manifestations of his love. It is a fine thing to come purified, to come pardoned out of the furnace of affliction; it is intended to purge us *to separate the precious from the vile, the chaff from the wheat:* and God, in order to do this, is pleased to put us into one fire after another, which makes me love to see a good man under afflictions, because it teaches something of the work of God in the heart. I remember some years ago, when I first preached in the north of England, at Shields near Newcastle, I went into a glass house, and standing very attentive, I saw several masses of burning glass of various forms: the workmen took one piece of glass and put it into one furnace, then he put it into a second, and then into a third: when I asked him, why do you put this into so many fires? he answered, O, sir, the first was not hot enough, nor the second, and therefore we put it into the third, and that will make it transparent. Taking leave of him in a proper manner, it occurred to me, this would make a good sermon: O, thought I, does this man put this glass into one furnace after another, that we may see through it; O may God put me into one furnace after another, that my soul may be transparent; that I may see God as he is. My brethren, we need to be purged; how apt are we to want to go to heaven upon a featherbed; many go lying upon beds of pain and languishing, which is the King's highway thither. You know there are some ways in London called the King's road, and they are finely graveled, but the King's road to heaven is strowed with crosses and afflictions. We are all apt to think well of being Christians; it is very pretty talking of being Christians, till we are put into one furnace after another; *think it not strange,* saith the apostle, *concerning the fiery trial which is to try you.* What must I do? why, since I must be in the fire, I must thank my corruptions for it; God will not put you or me into the fire if there was not something to be purged away; the grand thing is to learn to glorify God in the fire. *Wherefore glorify ye the Lord in the fires.*



When do we glorify him? when we endeavor to get such grace from the Lord, that we may not dishonor him when we are under the cross, and therefore we glorify God in the fire when we quietly endure it as a chastisement.

We glorify God in the fire when we bear it patiently. It is a dreadful thing when we are saying with Cain, *My punishment is greater than I can bear*; but the language of a soul that glorifies God in the fire is this, shall I, Lord, shall I a sinful man, complain for the punishment of my sins? It is a glorious thing when we can say with a good man, one of whose particular friends told me more than once, that when he was racked with pain, and groaning all night with trouble, he would often say, Lord, I groan; Lord, I groan; Lord I groan; but Lord Jesus, I appeal to thee, thou knowest I do not grumble. Then we glorify God in the fire, when, though we feel pain and anguish, we at the same time say, Lord, we deserve this and ten thousands times more.

We glorify God in the fire also, when we are really and fully persuaded, God will not put us in the fire but for our good, and his own glory.

We glorify God in the fire when we say, Lord don't let the fire go out till it has purged away all my dross. Then we glorify God when we wish for the good of the fire, and not to have it extinguished; when the soul can say, *Here I am, my God, do with me as seemeth good in thy sight*: I know I shall not have one stroke but thou wilt give me a plaister and let me know wherefore thou contendest with me.

We glorify God in the fire when we are content to say, *I know not what God does with me now, but I shall know hereafter*. Do you tell your children that are five years old the reason of things, no; and do you think God will tell us? *What shall this man do?* saith the disciples, *what is that to thee?* saith Christ, *follow thou me*. You glorify God in the fire, when you are content to walk by faith and not by sight.

You glorify God in the fire when you are not grumbling, but humbly submitting to his will; a humble spirit walks not in sulkiness and stubbornness: there are some spirits too stout, they will not speak. When that awful message was brought to Eli, what does he say? *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good*; let my children be killed, whatever be done it is the Lord's doing; only, Lord, save my soul at last.

We glorify God in the fire, when in the midst of the fire we can sing God's high praises. Thus the children of Israel glorified the Lord; the song of the three children in the fiery furnace is a sweet song! as are all that are made in the fire. *O all the works of the Lord, praise and magnify him forever!* Then we glorify God in the fire when we rejoice in him, when we not only think but know it best, and can thank God for striking us; can thank God for whipping us; can bless God for not letting us alone; thank God for not saying, *let him alone*: this is to glorify God in the fire. *Not only so*, saith the apostle, *but we glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience*.

In a word, we glorify the Lord in the fire when we have in exercise, patience, meekness, humility; learning more to distrust ourselves, having a deeper knowledge of our own weakness, and of God's omnipotence and grace. Happy when we can look back and say, thus have I been enabled to glorify God in the fire.

Happy you that have got into Christ's fire! happy you that have found his fires in your souls! I believe many souls have: O Lord Jesus Christ help you to glorify him in whatever fires he shall be pleased to send you, and into what furnaces he shall be pleased to put you: we shall then sing "*the church triumphant*," much better than we sing tonight; we shall see Jesus Christ ready to help us when we are in the furnace: O that this thought may make every poor sinner say, by the help of God I will be a Christian; by the help of God, if I must burn, it shall be burning with the love of Christ. I will say then, O Lord, glorify thyself by snatching me as a brand from the devil's fire. O that this might be the cry of every heart!

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