



HEARING GOD'S ROD

THOMAS BROOKS
1608 - 1680

HEARING GOD'S ROD

Contents

I. Afflictions Like a Rod.....	7
1. Used When Milder Means Will Not Prevail	7
2. Chosen by the Father.....	7
3. Not the Delight of Parents	8
4. Smarting, Grievous, and Troublesome	9
5. Not Laid Down until We Submit	9
6. In a Father's Hand	10
7. Meant to Cure, Not Kill	11
II. Lessons from the Rod	18
1. Learn the Message of the Rod.	18
2. Judge Yourselves.....	25
3. View the Rod on Every Side.....	26
4. Look at the Rod in the Hand of the Father.....	26
5. Cling Close to God under the Rod.....	27
6. Prepare to Meet the Lord.....	28
7. Acknowledge God's Sovereign Power.....	28
8. Get More Weaned from the World.....	30
9. Get Assurance of Better Things.....	30
10. Do Not Despise the Rod.	31
11. Do Not Be Discouraged under the Rod.	32
12. Kiss the Rod.	32
13. Speak Well of the Lord.....	33
14. Turn from Evil.	33
15. Make God Your Habitation.....	33
16. Make God Your Fear.	34
17. Expect God's Presence.	34
18. Live Daily in an Exercise of Grace.....	34
19. Seek the Lord by Fasting and Prayer.	35
20. Prepare for Death.	35

© Copyright 2022 Chapel Library: annotations. This was originally an epistolary preface to Brooks's book *The Priety Key of Heaven*, in the public domain, also available . Printed in the USA. All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal positions of the authors it publishes. Permission is expressly granted to reproduce this material by any means, provided

1. you do not charge beyond a nominal sum for cost of duplication;
2. this copyright notice and all the text on this page are included.

Chapel Library is a faith ministry that relies entirely upon God's faithfulness. We therefore do not solicit donations, but we gratefully receive support from those who freely desire to give.

Worldwide, please download material without charge from our website, or contact the international distributor as listed there for your country. Hundreds of books, booklets, tracts, and eBooks are available at www.ChapelLibrary.org.

In **North America**, for copies of this booklet or other Christ-centered materials from prior centuries, please contact

CHAPEL LIBRARY

2603 West Wright Street • Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

Phone: (850) 438-6666 • Fax: (850) 438-0227

chapel@mountzion.org • www.ChapelLibrary.org

Please see also the following titles from Chapel Library:

Call to Prayer by J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

Free Grace Broadcaster 221, *Vital Prayer*

The *FGB* is a quarterly digest of six to ten messages from prior centuries, all on one theme, with a different theme each issue. Request a subscription

- worldwide, free eBook sent via email: www.ChapelLibrary.org/subscriptions/
- in North America, free printed copy sent via mail: write Chapel Library
- in a country with an international distributor, printed copy sent via mail; write to them directly: www.ChapelLibrary.org/about/distributors/

HEARING GOD'S ROD

Preface

*Twenty special lessons that we are to learn by that severe rod,
the pestilence, that now rageth in the midst of us.¹*

To my worthy and esteemed friends, Mrs. Elizabeth Drinkwater, Mrs. Susan Bell, Mrs. Hannah Bourne, Mrs. Mary Taylor, Mrs. Anne White, Mrs. Elizabeth Juxon, Mrs. Rebecca Juxon, Mrs. Mary Baxter, Mrs. Deborah Shepherd, Mrs. Anne Clemens, Mrs. Mary Stonior, Mrs. Anne Snell, Mrs. Anne Ellis, Mrs. Margaret Cutler, Mrs. Patience Cartwright, Mrs. Mary Shaw, Mrs. Philip Garret, Mrs. Margaret Winfield, Mrs. Hannah Pippet, Mrs. Mary Chanlor, Mrs. Mary Scot, Mrs. Katherine Usher, with their husbands, etc., all happiness both here and hereafter.

Honored and beloved in our dear Lord Jesus,

I have crowded your names together in one epistle, not from any want² of respect unto you, for I owe to each of you more than an epistle, nor because you are in one particular fellowship, for so you are not; but partly because the Lord hath made you one with Himself, in the Son of His love; and partly because the Lord at several times, and in several ways, hath exercised you all in the furnace of affliction; and partly because this epistle may reach you all, and speak to you all, when I cannot, or when I may not, or which is more, when I am not.

Dear friends, many and great have been the breaches³ that the Lord hath made upon your persons, upon your near and dear relations, and upon your sweetest comforts and contentments. There is not one of you but may truly say with Job, "He breaketh me with breach upon breach" (Job 16:14). God hath chastised you all round with various

¹ Published during the awful Plague of London in 1665, the last major epidemic of the bubonic plague to occur in England; an estimated 100,000 people died of the plague in 18 months.

² **want** – lack.

³ **breaches** – disruptions of peace and comfort; sufferings.

rods; and, oh, that the Lord would help you all to “hear...the rod, and who hath appointed it” (Mic 6:9).

Now that you may give me leave a little to open and apply [the following passage] to your particulars:

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

The matter that I shall offer to your consideration from this scripture will be not only of special concernment to yourselves, but also of high concernment to all sorts and ranks of men and women in this sad day, when the sword devours on the one hand and the pestilence rageth on the other hand.

“The LORD’s voice crieth unto the city.” Tremellius⁴ turns it thus, “The voice of the Lord doth preach unto this city, for what the matter is, thy name seeth: hear ye the rod.” “This city” [refers to] Jerusalem, and so consequently to all the Israelites; for in this city all offices and duties of godliness and humanity were more religiously performed, or to be performed, than in any other place, because of the presence and majesty of God that was amongst them. “But thy Majesty seeth what wickedness is practiced amongst them,” as is evident in the verses following.

“Crieth.” The word is from *kara*, which signifies:

First, to “cry aloud,” or to make a noise (Isa 58:1); “cry aloud” there is *kara*. The word signifies to cry so loud as that all may hear that have ears to hear.

Secondly, the word signifies “openly to proclaim, preach, or publish a thing.” “I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee” (Exo 33:19). Here is the word *kara*.

Thirdly, the word signifies, “to cry out.” “I lifted up my voice and cried” (Gen 39:15). Here is *kara*. The Hebrew word קָרָא hath nine other significations⁵ in Scripture, but because they are not pertinent to what is in my eye, I shall pass them by at this time.

“And the man of wisdom shall see thy name.” *Vethushiia* properly signifies *essence*; and, therefore, according to the Hebrew, the words

⁴ **John Immanuel Tremellius** (1510-1580) – Italian Jewish convert to Christianity; Hebrew scholar.

⁵ **significations** – meanings.

should be read thus, “And the man of essence shall see thy name.” That is, he that is a man indeed, he that is not a sot,⁶ a stock,⁷ a stone.

Most men are men of folly, and so not worthy of the name of men; but as for such as are truly wise, they “shall see thy name.” There is a great measure of spiritual art, of holy and heavenly wisdom required, both to enable a man to hear the voice of the rod and to understand the language of the rod. This “wisdom is too high for a fool” (Pro 24:7).

“Shall see thy name.” Now the Hebrew word here used רָאָה (ra-ah) may be better derived from *jare*, which signifies to *fear*, than from *ra-ah*, that signifies to *see*, and so the words will run smoothly thus, “The man of wisdom, or of essence, shall fear thy name,” considering that it is majesty itself that crieth, and that he is immediately to deal with God Himself, and not with a poor, weak, mortal worm.

“Hear ye the rod.” The word *hear* is from שָׁמַע *shamang*, which signifies:

First, “to mark, observe, and attend to what is said.” “The LORD hath heard that I was hated”; that is, He hath marked it, He hath observed it (Gen 29:33). So here. Oh, mark the rod! Oh, observe the rod! Oh, attend to what is spoken by the rod!

Secondly, the word signifies, “to understand what is spoken.” “They knew not that Joseph understood them” (Gen 42:23). In the Hebrew it is “that Joseph *heard* them.” Now to hear the rod is to understand what is spoken to us by the rod.

Thirdly, the word signifies, “to believe a thing reported to be true.” “They hearkened not unto Moses” (Exo 6:9); that is, “they did not believe the report that Moses made.” “Hear the rod,” that is, “believe the report the rod makes.” The rod reports that, of all evils, sin is the greatest evil; and that, of all bitters, sin is the greatest bitter. Oh, believe the report of the rod! The rod reports that God is angry, that God is displeased. Oh, believe its report! The rod reports the creatures to be mere vanity and vexation of spirit. Oh, believe its report! The rod reports our nearest and dearest comforts, contentments, and enjoyments to be mixed, mutable,⁸ and momentary. Oh, believe its report! The rod reports sin to be vile, and the world to be vain, and heaven to be glorious,

⁶ **sot** – foolish, stupid person.

⁷ **stock** – figure of what is lifeless, motionless, or void of sensation; hence, a senseless or stupid person.

⁸ **mutable** – changeable.

and Christ to be most precious. Oh, believe its report! The Hebrew word hath three other significations, but being that they are not proper to our purpose, I shall pass them by.

“The rod.” The Hebrew word *matte*, that is here rendered *rod*, hath three significations:

First, it denotes “power and strength.” “A rod of iron” (Psa 2:9).

Secondly, it denotes “rigid and harsh government.” “The LORD hath broken the staff,” or rod, “of the wicked,” that is, “their rigorous and cruel government” (Isa 14:5). Nebuchadnezzar had sorely afflicted the children of Judah; he was a rod that brake them in pieces and ruled over them with much rigor in Babylon.

Thirdly, it denotes “sore afflictions and heavy judgments.” “I will visit their transgression with the rod” (Psa 89:32). And thus, you are to understand the word *rod* in the text.

“And who hath appointed it.” It is God that appoints the rod and ordains it for the revenge of the quarrel of His covenant. The Hebrew word *jegnadah* signifies properly “to appoint” or “constitute.”

It is God Who appoints the rod and Who constitutes it to do what service He pleaseth. It is God that hath not only a permissive but also an active hand in all the afflictions that come upon His people.

And let thus much suffice for the opening of the words.

Now, though this choice garden affords many sweet flowers, yet I shall only present you with one, which is this:

That all the afflictions, troubles, trials, etc., that God lays upon His people, are His rod; and that it is their highest and greatest concernment to hear the voice of the rod, and to take out those lessons that God would have them learn by the rod.

For the opening and clearing up of this important point, I shall endeavor these two things:

First, to show you in what respects afflictions are like unto a rod.

Secondly, to show you what those special lessons are that you are to learn by the rod.

I. Afflictions Like a Rod

For the first, in what respects are afflictions like unto a rod? I answer, afflictions are like unto a rod in these seven respects.

1. Used When Milder Means Will Not Prevail

The rod is never made use of but *when no fair¹ means will prevail* with the child. It is so here. God never takes up the rod, He never afflicts His people, until He hath tried all fair ways and means to humble them and reform them (2Ch 36:15ff; Mat 23:37-38).

And when none of the offers of grace, the tenders of mercy, the wooings of Christ, the strivings of the Spirit, nor the smart² debates of conscience will awaken them, nor work upon them, then God takes up the rod, and sometimes whips them until the blood comes.

2. Chosen by the Father

Parents *choose what rods they please* to correct their children with. The child shall not choose what rod he pleaseth to be corrected with. Oh, no! It is the prerogative of the father to choose the rod. The father may choose and use either a great rod or a little rod, a long rod or a short rod, a rod made of rosemary branches or a rod made up of a green birch. It is so here. God chooseth what rod, what affliction, He pleaseth to exercise His people with (Lev 26; Deu 28; Lam 3:9-18). You read in the Scriptures of very many rods, but they are all of God's choosing. "Shall there be evil³ in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" (Amo 3:6). Though there be many rods to be found in the city, yet there is not one of them but is of God's choosing. "It grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me...I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" (Rut 1:13, 21). "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things" (Isa 45:7). "For the inhabitant of Maroth waited carefully for

¹ **fair** – milder.

² **smart** – painful.

³ **evil** – trouble; calamity.

good: but evil came down from the LORD unto the gate of Jerusalem” (Mic 1:12). David was whipped with many rods, but they were all of God’s own choosing (Psa 39:9-10); and Job was whipped with many rods, but they were all of God’s own choosing (Job 1).

3. Not the Delight of Parents

Parents *take no pleasure*, they take no delight, to use the rod. Every lash the father gives the child fetches blood from his own heart. The father corrects the child and sighs over the child; he whips the child and at the same time weeps over the child. Nothing goes more against the parent’s heart, nor against their hair, than the bringing of their children under the rod of correction.

It is so here. “For he doth not afflict willingly,” or, as the Hebrew runs, “he doth not afflict,” *millibbo*, “from his heart, nor grieve the children of men” (Lam 3:33). You often read that He delights in mercy (Mic 7:18); but where do you once read that He delights in severity, or in dealing roughly with His people? God very rarely takes up the rod but when our sins have put a force upon Him (2Ch 36:16; Jer 5:19). It is grievous to God to be grieving His people; it is a pain unto Him to be punishing of them. “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together” (Hos 11:8). My justice, saith God, calls upon Me to rain hell out of heaven upon thee, as once I did upon Sodom and Gomorrah; but then mercy interposeth her four several hows: How? How? How? How? “How shall I give thee up?” God puts these four pathetic⁴ interrogations to Himself because none else in heaven or earth could answer them. The prophet brings in God speaking after the manner of men, who, being provoked a thousand ways by the vanities and follies of their children, think to give them up to take their own courses, and to look no more after them; but then their bowels begin to work, and their hearts begin to melt, and they begin to interrogate themselves thus: “How shall we give up these children? For though they be disobedient children, yet they are children. How can we turn them out of doors? How can we disown them? How can we disinherit them? For though they are rebellious children, yet they are children, etc.” Afflictions are called “God’s work,” yea, “his strange work,” “His act,” yea,

⁴ **pathetical** – earnest; passionate.

“his strange act,” as if God were out of His element when He is afflicting or chastising His people (Isa 28:21).

4. Smarting, Grievous, and Troublesome

The rod is *smarting, grievous, and troublesome*; and so are afflictions to our natures. “Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous” (Heb 12:11). Flesh and blood startles and is troubled at the least trouble. Affliction is a sort of physic⁵ that makes most sick. Some write that tigers will grow mad, tear their own flesh, and rend themselves in pieces, if they do but hear drums or tabors⁶ sound about them.⁷ Were not Job and Jeremiah such tigers, who, in the day of their afflictions did more than curse the day of their birth? (Job 3; Jer 20). Oh, what a bitter cup, what a heavy burden was affliction to them! “My soul is weary of my life...My soul chooseth strangling, and death rather than my life” (Job 10:1; 7:15). “I am weary with my groaning” (Psa 6:6). “Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying; my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God” (Psa 69:1-3). Doubtless many good men have sat under Elijah’s juniper (1Ki 19:4), wishing themselves out of the world, if it might stand with divine pleasure, that they might rest from their sins and sorrows, and be rid of their many burdens and bondages, looking upon life [as] little better than a hell, were it not for the hopes of a heaven hereafter.

5. Not Laid Down until We Submit

When parents take up the rod into their hands, *they will not lay it down until they have subdued the spirits of their children* and brought them to submit and to kiss the rod and to sit still and quiet before them.⁸ It is so here: when God takes up the rod, He will not lay it down until He hath brought us to lie quietly at His feet. “If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they have trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and

⁵ **physic** – medicine; medical treatment.

⁶ **tabors** – small drums.

⁷ **Plutarch** (AD 46?-120) – Greek philosopher, *De Superstitione*.

⁸ Rodolphus the emperor’s motto was, “*Omnia ex voluntate Dei*” (All must be as God will have it). And this should be every Christian’s motto under the rod.

have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land” (Lev 26:40-42). When God takes up the rod, His children must either bow or break. They must say, “The Lord is righteous”; they must kiss the rod of correction, or else destruction will come like a whirlwind upon them (Isa 5:3, 6).

It is reported of the lion that he spares those creatures that fall down before him and submit unto him; but as for those that endeavor to run from him, or to contend with him, those he tears in pieces. It is just so with the Lion of the tribe of Judah, as you may see in Hosea 5:14-15.

King Edward, riding furiously after a servant of his that had highly displeased him, with a drawn sword in his hand as purposing to kill him, seeing him submit, and on bended knee suing⁹ for his life, did not only put up his sword, but also spared him, and received him into his favor.¹⁰ The King of kings will never put up His sword when once He hath drawn it until His people fall on their knees and submit unto Him.

God never left chastising of Ephraim until He had brought him to His bow,¹¹ until He had made him submit and kiss the rod (Jer 31:18-20).

6. In a Father’s Hand

Afflictions are called a rod, in respect of the hand that lays them on. Though affliction be a rod, it is a rod in a Father’s hand. The sword is in the judge’s hand (Joh 18:11), and the cudgel¹² is in the master’s hand, but the rod is in the father’s hand (Heb 12:6-9). When Balaam’s ass offended him, he wished for a sword to slay him (Num 22:29); but so doth not God. When we do most highly provoke Him, He doth not take up a sword to slay us, but only a rod to scourge us and chastise us, as indulgent fathers do their dearest children.

⁹ **suing** – entreating; petitioning.

¹⁰ Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, in Edward I.

¹¹ **to His bow** – to submit to His control.

¹² **cudgel** – club used as a weapon.

7. Meant to Cure, Not Kill

Afflictions are called a rod, in regard of the ends to which they serve. A rod is not to kill, but to cure; it is not for destruction, but for correction. When David gave a full commission to his soldiers against Absalom, it was not to slay him, but to restrain him; it was not to ruin him, but to reduce him to his former obedience. The application is easy. We can as well live without our daily bread as without our daily rod.

Now, the ends¹³ of taking up the rod are these:

a. For the good of the child

First and more generally, it is *for the good of the child, and not for his hurt*. It is so here. God takes up the rod, but it is for the good of His people. “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20). Divine goodness did so over-master the plotted malignity of Joseph’s brethren as that it made a blessed medicine of a most deadly poison. “Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good” (Jer 24:5). When Israel was dismissed out of Egypt, it was with gold and earrings (Exo 11:2); and when Judah was dismissed out of Babylon, it was with great gifts, jewels, and all necessary utensils (Ezr 1:6-11). “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). This text, like Moses’s tree cast into the bitter waters of affliction, may make them sweet and wholesome to drink of.

b. To make the child sensible of his folly

More particularly, the rod is *to make the child sensible of his folly and vanity*. “In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding” (Pro 10:13). So it is here. God takes up the rod, but it is to make His people sensible of their folly and vanity. It is to make them look up to Him, and to look into conscience, and to look out to their conversations.¹⁴ *Schola crucis* is *schola lucis*. [The school of the cross is the school of light]. God’s house of correction is His school of instruction.

¹³ **ends** – goals; purposes.

¹⁴ **conversations** – behavior; lifestyle.

His lashers are our lessons, His scourges are our schoolmasters, and His chastisements are our advertisements.¹⁵ Hence both the Hebrews and Greeks express chastening and teaching by one and the same word, *musar* (Hebrew), *paideia* (Greek), because the latter is the true end of the former, according to that in the proverb, “Smart makes wit, and vexation gives understanding” (see Isa 26:9; Ps 94:12; Pro 3:12-13; Job 36:3-10). Afflictions are a Christian’s looking glass,¹⁶ by which he may see how to dress his own soul, and to mend whatsoever is amiss. They are pills made up by a heavenly hand on purpose to clear our eyesight. “And she said unto Elijah, What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?” (1Ki 17:18). If God had not taken away her son, her sin had not been brought to remembrance. It was the speech of a holy man in his sickness: “In this disease,” said he, “I have learned how great God is, and what the evil of sin is. I never knew to purpose what God was before, nor what sin was before.” The cross opens men’s eyes, as the tasting of honey did Jonathan’s. “Here,” as that martyr phrased it, “we are still learning our A, B, C; our lesson is never past Christ’s cross; and our walking is still home by weeping-cross.”¹⁷

c. To prevent further folly, mischief, and misery

The rod is used *to prevent further folly, mischief, and misery*. “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell” (Pro 23:13-14). It is said of the ape that she huggeth her young ones to death; so many fond parents, by not correcting their children, they come to slay their children. The best way to prevent their being scourged with scorpions in hell is to chastise them with the rod here. So God takes up the rod. He afflicts and chastiseth His dearest children, but it is to prevent soul mischief and misery; it is to prevent pride, self-love, worldliness, etc. Paul was one of the holiest men that ever lived on earth; he was called by some an earthly angel, and yet he needed the rod. He needed a thorn in the flesh to prevent pride. Witness the doubling of those words in one verse: “Lest I should be exalted above measure...lest I should be exalted above

¹⁵ **advertisements** – instructions.

¹⁶ The eye that sin shuts, afflictions open.—*Gregory*

¹⁷ **weeping cross** – cross erected on or by the highway, especially for the devotions of penitents; symbol of humiliation or penitence.

measure” (2Co 12:7). If Paul had not been buffeted, who knows how highly he might have been exalted in his own conceit? Prudent physicians do often give their patients physic¹⁸ to prevent diseases; and so doth the Physician of souls by His dearest servants (Job 40:4-5; Hos 2:6-7). “He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain...that he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man” (Job 33:17, 19). Afflictions are the Lord’s drawing-plasters, by which he draws out the core of pride, earthliness, self-love, covetousness, etc. Pride was one of man’s first sins and is still the root and source of all other sins. Now, to prevent it, God many times chastens man with pain, yea, with strong pain, upon his bed. “Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more” (Job 34:31-32). The burnt child dreads the fire. Sin is but a bitter sweet; it is an evil worse than hell itself. Look, as salt brine¹⁹ preserves things from putrefying, and as salt marshes keep the sheep from rotting, so sanctified rods, sanctified afflictions, preserve and keep the people of God from sinning.

d. To purge out vanity and folly

The rod is to *purge out that vanity and folly that is bound up in the heart of the child*. “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him” (Pro 22:15). The rod is an ordinance as well as the Word; and such parents that use it as an ordinance, praying and weeping over it, shall find it effectual for the chasing away of evil out of their children’s heart. Eli and David were two very choice men; and yet, by their fondness on one hand, and neglect of this ordinance on the other hand, they ruined their sons; and whether they did not undo their souls, I shall not at this time stand to inquire. When Moses cast away his rod, it became a serpent (Exo 4:3); and so, when parents cast away the rod of correction, it is ten to one but that their children become the brood of the serpent. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Pro 13:24). Not only the care, but also the cure of the child, so far as the rod will reach, lies upon the hands of the parent.

Now afflictions are like a rod in this respect also, for, as they are sanctified, they cleanse and purge away the dross, the filth, and the

¹⁸ **physic** – medicine; medical treatment.

¹⁹ **salt brine** – water saturated with salt.

scum of the daughter of Zion. “And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin” (Isa 1:25). “By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit, to take away his sin” (Isa 27:9). “And some of them of understanding shall fall [that is, into great afflictions], to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end” (Dan 11:35). All the harm the fire did the three children, or rather the three champions, was to burn off their cords (Dan 3:23-25). Our lusts are cords of vanity, but the fire of affliction shall burn them up. “And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God” (Zec 13:9). Sharp afflictions are a fire to purge out our dross and to make our graces shine; they are a potion to carry away ill humors.²⁰ They are cold frosts to destroy the vermin;²¹ they are a tempestuous sea to purge the wine from its lees.²² They are like the north wind that drieth up the vapors, that purgeth the blood, and quickens the spirits; they are a sharp corrosive²³ to eat out the dead flesh. Afflictions are compared to baptizing and washing that takes away the filth of the soul, as water doth the filth of the body (Mar 10:38-39). God would not rub so hard, were it not to fetch out the dirt and spots that be in His people’s hearts.

e. To improve good in the child

The rod serves *to improve that good that is in the child*. “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Pro 29:15). So afflictions, they serve to improve our graces. “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 [that is, that we might more and more 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” (Heb 12:10-11). Hence it is that the saints glory in tribulation. “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh

²⁰ **ill humors** – bodily fluid thought to cause sickness.

²¹ **vermin** – loathsome small animals, reptiles, or insects that are pests.

²² **lees** – sediment of wine in the barrel.

²³ **corrosive** – acid-like remedy that eats away infected flesh.

patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom 5:3-4). Grace always thrives most when saints are under the rod. When Christians are under the rod, then their graces do not only bud, but blossom and bring forth fruit, as Aaron’s rod did (Num 17:8). The snuffing of the candle makes it burn the brighter. God beats and bruises His links²⁴ to make them burn the brighter; He bruises His spices to make them send forth the greater aromatical savor.

Bernard²⁵ compares afflictions to the teasel,²⁶ which, though it be sharp and scratching, is to make the cloth more pure and fine. The Jews were always best when they were in an afflicted condition. Well waters arising from deep springs are hotter in the winter than they are in the summer. Stars shine brightest in the darkest nights. Vines grow the better for bleeding, and gold looks the better for scouring. Juniper smells sweetest when in the fire; chamomile, the more you tread it, the more you spread it. O sirs! This is a real and a rare truth, but seldom thought on, viz.,²⁷ that God will sometimes more carry on the growth and improvement of grace by a cross, by an affliction, than by an ordinance (Jam 1:3-4; 4:8-9). Afflictions ripen the saint’s graces (2Co 1:5). First or last, God will make every rod, yea, every twig in every rod, to be an ordinance to every afflicted saint. By afflictions, God many times revives, quickens, and recovers the decayed graces of His people. By afflictions, God many times inflames that love that is cold, and He strengthens that faith that is failing, and He puts life into those hopes that are languishing, and new spirits into those joys and comforts that are withering and dying. Musk,²⁸ say some, when it hath lost its sweetness, if it be put into the sink²⁹ amongst filth, it recovers its sweetness again. So do smart³⁰ afflictions recover and revive our decayed graces.

I have read a story of a sexton³¹ that went into the church at night to rob a woman who had been buried the day before with a gold ring

²⁴ **links** – torches; which recalls the axiom, “Truth, like a torch, the more it’s shook it shines.”

²⁵ **Bernard of Clairvaux** (1090-1153) – French monastic reformer and theologian known for his devotion.

²⁶ **teasel** – large burr or thistle used in raising a nap on woolen cloth.

²⁷ **viz.** – from Latin *videlicet*: that is to say; namely.

²⁸ **musk** – a strong scented substance obtained from a male musk deer.

²⁹ **sink** – refuse or dung heap.

³⁰ **smart** – painful.

³¹ **sexton** – one who looks after a church building or churchyard.

upon her finger, according to her desire. Now, when he had opened the grave and coffin, and loosed the sheet, he fell rubbing and chafing her finger to get off the gold ring; and with rubbing and chafing of it, her spirits returned, she having been but in a swoon before, and she revived, and lived many years after.³² Smart afflictions are but the rubbing and chafing of our graces. The smarting rod abaseth the loveliness of the world that might entice us. It abates the lustiness³³ of the flesh within that might incite us to vanity and folly; and it abets³⁴ the spirit in his quarrel to the two former, all which tend much to the recovering and reviving of decayed graces.

f. To try³⁵ the child

The sixth end to which the rod serves is *to try the child, to make a discovery of the spirit of the child*. Some parents never see so much of the badness of the spirits of their children as they do when they bring them under the rod; and other parents never see so much of the goodness of the spirits of their children as they do when they chastise them with the rod. It is so here. When God afflicts some, oh, the pride, the stoutness, the crossness, the hardness, the peevishness, and stubbornness of spirit that they discover! (Isa 1:5; Jer 5:3; Exo 5:2; Jer 44:15-19). When He afflicts others, oh, the murmuring, the roaring, the complaining, the howling, the fretting, the vexing, and the quarrelling spirit that they discover! (Amo 4:6-13; Num 14:27, 29, 36; Deu 1:27; Isa 58:3-4; 59:11; Hos 7:14-15; Jon 4:1-5, 8-9). Sometimes when God afflicts His dearest people, oh, what a spirit of faith, what a spirit of prayer, what a spirit of love, what a spirit of patience, what a spirit of meekness, what a spirit of humbleness, what a spirit of submissiveness do they discover! (Job 13:15; 2Ch 12:1-6, 12; Isa 26:16-17; Hos 5:14-15; Job 1:20-22; Lev 10:1-3; 1Sa 3:18; 2Ki 20:16-19). And at other times, when God afflicts His poor people, oh, what a spirit of unbelief, what a spirit of slavish fear, what a spirit of impatience, what a spirit of displeasedness, do they discover! (Gen 15:2-3; 12:13, 19; 20:2, 5; 26:7-11; Psalms 31:22; 116:11; 1Sa 21:10-15; Job 3:3-13; Jer 20:14-18). By smart afflictions, God tries the graces of His people, and discovers what

³² This actually occurred with Mrs. Henry Erskine, who afterwards gave birth to the Erskines, so famous in Scotch ecclesiastical history. See *Lives of Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine* by Fraser, 2 volumes.

³³ **abates the lustiness** – lessens the strength.

³⁴ **abets** – aids.

³⁵ **try** – test; prove.

is in the spirits of His people (Deu 8:2; Psa 66:10-11; Rev 3:18; 1Pe 1:6-7). The fire tries the gold as well as the touchstone.³⁶

Diseases try³⁷ the art of the physician, and tempests try the skill of the pilot. Every smarting rod is a touchstone, both to try our graces and to discover our spirits. Prudent fathers will sometimes cross their children, to try to discover the dispositions of their children (Heb 12:5-21). And so doth the Father of spirits deal sometimes with His children.

The manner of the *Psylli*,³⁸ which are a kind of people of that temper and constitution that no venom will hurt them, is this: if they suspect any child to be none of their own, they set an adder upon it to sting it; and if it cry, and the flesh swell, they cast it away as a spurious issue;³⁹ but if it do not quatch⁴⁰ nor cry, nor is never the worse for it, then they account it for their own, and make very much of it.⁴¹ The application is easy.

g. To fit for greater service, favors, and mercies

The seventh and last end of the rod is *to prepare and fit the chastised for greater services, favors, and mercies*. Many a child and many a servant had never been so fit for eminent services as they are, had they not been under a smarting rod. It is very usual with God to cast them into very great afflictions, and to lay them under grievous smarting rods, that so He may prepare and fit them for some high and eminent services in this world. Joseph had never been so fit to be governor of Egypt and to preserve the visible church of God alive in the world if he had not been sold into Egypt, if his feet had not been hurt in the stocks, and if the irons had not entered his soul (Gen 41:40-44; 45:7-8). Nor Moses had never been so fit to be a leader and a deliverer of Israel as he was if he had not been banished forty years in the wilderness before (Exo 2:15). Nor David's crown had never sat so well, nor so close, nor so long on his head as it did, had he not for some years before

³⁶ **touchstone** – stone used to test the quality of a metal by the streak it makes on the stone.

³⁷ **try** – test.

³⁸ **Psylli** – tribe in Libya, Africa, famous as snake charmers.

³⁹ **spurious issue** – illegitimate child.

⁴⁰ **quatch** – wince; shrink back with pain.

⁴¹ Pliny the Elder (AD 23/24-79), *The Natural History*, ed. John Bostock (Medford, MA: Taylor and Francis, Red Lion Court, Fleet Street, 1855), 2125–2126; M. Annaeus Lucanus, *Pharsalia*, ed. Edward Ridley (Medford, MA: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905).

been hunted as a partridge in the wilderness (1Sa 26:20). Nor the three children, or rather the three champions, would never have been fit for so high a rule, had they not been first cast into the fiery furnace (Dan 3:29-30). Nor Daniel, for that exceeding high honor and glory and greatness to which he was exalted, had he not been first cast among the lions (Dan 6:25ff). And so had Esther never been a poor captive maid, she had never been a queen, and so had never been instrumental in the preservation of the church of God in her day. Heman was one of the best and wisest men in the world in his day (1Ki 4:31); and this God brought him to by training of him up in the school of affliction, as you may evidently see in that 88th psalm. That of the apostle in 2 Corinthians 1:4 deserves to be written in letters of gold: “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.” Mark that word *able*. Oh, it is one of the hardest and noblest works in all Christianity to be able divinely to comfort others that are in troubles; and yet by sufferings God fits and prepares His people for this noble and difficult service.

Luther⁴² was of opinion that to comfort a distressed conscience was a greater work than to raise the dead to life. And yet by inward and outward sufferings, God fits His people for this great work.

And thus, you see in what respects afflictions are compared to a rod.

II. Lessons from the Rod

The second thing I am to do is to show you those special lessons that you are to learn by the rod, or if you please, by the raging pestilence. Now they are these:

1. Learn the Message of the Rod.

The first lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is to *know what the particular message or errand is* which the rod hath to deliver to you in the day of your distress and trouble.

Your first work is to do as David did in 2 Samuel 21:1. He humbly inquires of the Lord to know the particular reason why He sent a

⁴² **Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German monk, priest, professor of theology, and a leader during the Protestant Reformation—restoring to the church the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

famine amongst them. You must do as Job doth: “Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2). Job would fain¹ know the reason of the controversy between God and him. One well observes on the text “that Job was very desirous to know whether God did afflict him for sin or for trial, not to satisfy his curiosity, but his conscience.”² Elihu’s counsel to Job must here take place: “Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: That which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more” (Job 34:31-32). Job, it seems, was yet in the dark as to the particular cause or reason why the Lord had so grievously afflicted him; and therefore, he is very importunate³ with God that He would graciously point out the sin for which He had so sorely smitten him. Thy proceedings, saith Job, to my understanding seem to be very strange and severe. I am more afflicted than others, and yet I do not know wherein I have sinned more than others. Why I should be condemned and cast⁴ without a trial, why Thou art so hot against me, and why Thou hast multiplied so many unheard-of miseries against me, and why Thou hast so greatly subjected me to the saddest and sourest censures⁵ of others, as if I were the worst of sinners and the basest of hypocrites, I know not; and therefore, O Lord, I humbly desire that Thou wouldst not deal with me according to Thy absolute power, but let me know the true grounds and causes of all my heavy sorrows and miseries. And so, he is at it again in Job 13:23: “How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin.” My plagues, Lord, are unparalleled; if my sins are such, let me know it, saith Job. My calamities transcend the calamities of all others; if my sins do so, let them not be hid from mine eyes, Lord! My load, O Lord, is heavier than others; and therefore, if my sins are greater than others, let me see them; let me understand them. Infirmities and weaknesses, I confess, do hang upon me; they are inherent in me, and they do too often issue and flow from me; but as for enormities or wickednesses, neither my censorious⁶ friends, nor yet my worst enemies, no, nor yet my own conscience, will ever be able to make any just or clear proof against me. O Lord, I have

¹ **fain** – gladly.

² John Trapp (1601-1669), *A Commentary on the Old Testament*.

³ **importunate** – persistent.

⁴ **cast** – sentenced to punishment.

⁵ **censures** – expressions of several disapproval.

⁶ **censorious** – fault finding; severely critical.

many spots upon me, but if there be any upon me that are not the spots of Thy people, let me see them, let me know them, that I may abhor myself, and justify Thee, and that I may say my friends are righteous in their censures, and I have done wickedly before the Lord. Sometimes afflictions are sent only for trial and instruction, and not at all for sin. This is evident in the case of Job, and in the case of the blind man, whose afflictions, though they were very great and grievous, yet were they not for sin but for trial (Joh 9:1ff).

Now, though this be true, yet it must be granted that commonly sin is the meritorious cause, the procuring⁷ cause, of all afflictions (Mic 1:5-10; Amo 2:4-6). Sin ordinarily is the original foundation of all our troubles and chastisements: “If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes...Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts...You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Psa 89:30-32; Jer 2:19; Amo 3:2).

Question. *But what course must we take? What means must we use to find out that particular sin for which God corrects us, or which hath brought the rod upon us?*

Answer 1. Observe *what that sin is that thy conscience doth most upbraid thee with and check thee for*. Conscience is God’s preacher in the bosom (Gen 42:21; 50:15-17). Now, observe what that particular sin is that conscience doth most smartly and roundly correct and chastise thee for; for it is ten to one but that is the sin that hath brought the rod upon thee. The voice of conscience and the voice of the rod do usually echo one to another. It is very rare to find a difference between the language of conscience and the language of the rod.

Conscience is God’s deputy, God’s spy, God’s notary,⁸ God’s vice-roy.⁹ And therefore do not despise the voice of conscience. Do not turn off conscience as Felix turned off Paul (Act 24:25). If the secret cry of

⁷ **procuring** – that which brings about.

⁸ **notary** – secretary who keeps records for God.

⁹ **viceroys** – governor of a domain, ruling in the authority of the supreme ruler.

conscience be: Oh, this is for thy pride, or, this is for thy passion, or, this is for thy self-love, or, this is for thy earthliness, or, this is for thy carnalness,¹⁰ or, this is for thy hypocrisy, or, this is for thy formality, etc., it will be thy wisdom to subscribe to the secret cry of conscience.

Answer 2. Secondly, seriously observe *what that sin is that thy soul would have spared above all*, that thy soul is most unwilling to leave and bid an everlasting farewell to. Observe what thy right hand sin, thy bosom sin, thy constitution¹¹ sin, thy complexion¹² sin, is; for it is a hundred to one but that God hath sent the rod for the subduing of that very sin (Mic 6:6-7; Est 5:13). Commonly by the rod God points at the mortifying of that particular sin to which the heart stands most strongly inclined.

Answer 3. Thirdly, observe *what that sin is that doth most maim and mar thy confidence and boldness in all thy addresses and approaches to God* (1Jo 3:20-21); for doubtless that is the sin that God would subdue and bring under by the rod.

Answer 4. Fourthly, observe *what the affliction, what the pain, what the disease, what the punishment is, that you are under*, for sometimes a person may run and read his sin in his very punishment. "Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table: as I have done, so God hath requited me" (Jdg 1:7). Now shall Adonibezek, a heathen prince, run and read his sin in his punishment; and shall not a Christian much more? Shall not grace do as much as blind nature? Look, as a man may sometimes guess at the disease of the patient by the prudent observing of the physician's bill, so may he sometimes guess at the particular sin that God would have destroyed by the punishment that is inflicted. God usually, first or last,¹³ meets with men, and pays them home in their own coin. Is the judgment shame? Then the sin was pride (Hos 2:8-9). Is the judgment want,¹⁴ famine? Then the sin was abuse of abundance. Is the judgment oppression? Then the sin was unmercifulness. Is the judgment loss of children? Then the sin was inordinate love to them. Eli and David were too indulgent to their children; and therefore, they were punished in them and by them. Is the judgment sickness or want

¹⁰ **carnalness** – unspirituality; sensuality.

¹¹ **constitution** – frame or temper of body, mind, affections, or passions.

¹² **complexion** – temperament or natural disposition of the body.

¹³ **first or last** – sooner or later.

¹⁴ **want** – lack of necessities.

of health? Then the sin was either the abuse of health, or the non-improvement of health. Is the judgment a famine of the Word? Then the sin was slighting and loathing of the Word. Is the judgment war? Then the sin was abuse of peace. Is the judgment a blind, carnal, profane, formal, drunken, superstitious clergy? Then the sin hath been slighting, neglecting, undervaluing, and despising an able, knowing, zealous, spiritual, and powerful ministry. Is the judgment a worshipping of God in a lazy, dry, dull, dead, formal, customary way, according to the inventions and traditions of the elders? Then the sin hath been men's not worshipping of God in spirit and in truth, and with that zeal, spirit, life, warmth, and fervency as He requires (Joh 4:23-24; Rom 12:11). Is the judgment the breaking of the communion of God's people, and scattering of them into holes and corners, as it was in Ahab's, and Jezebel's, and Gideon's days? (Jdg 6:1-5). Then doubtless the sin hath been a slighting, undervaluing, neglecting, or forsaking of Christian communion, or else a non-improvement of Christian communion.

Answer 5. Fifthly, observe *whether you have not been very faulty towards others in the very things you now suffer yourselves*. Do others wrong you in your names, estates, relations, callings, dealings, etc.? Lay your hands upon your hearts and ask them whether you have never wronged others as others now wrong you (Isa 33:1; Rev 13:10; Jam 2:10; Gen 50:15-17). Do others rashly judge you, and bitterly censure you, and falsely accuse you, and unjustly condemn you? If they do, reflect upon your former carriages towards others; and if you must plead guilty, throw the first stone at yourselves, and say with Adonibezek, "As I have done, so God hath requited me" (Jdg 1:7). Let every lash of God upon you put you in mind of your deportment¹⁵ towards others when God hath given them gall and wormwood¹⁶ to drink (Mat 7:1-2).

Answer 6. Sixthly, observe *what that sin is that thou canst not endure should be touched, or reprov'd, or spoken against* (Pro 1:25, 30; 12:1; 17:10; 9:8; 15:12). Ah, how proud, how impatient, how passionate, how mad are many, when you come to touch their right-eye sin. When you come to touch them in the tender part, oh, then they fume, and swell, and rage, and take on like men and women out of their wits, as you may see in the scribes and Pharisees, who were so angry and

¹⁵ **deportment** – behavior or manners.

¹⁶ **gall and wormwood** – bitter, poisonous substances; metaphorically, very painful experiences.

mad with Christ that they sought His death; and all because He was still pointing at the toads¹⁷ in their bosoms, viz., pride, vain-glory, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness. Oh, they could not endure that the sharp razor of reproof should come near their sorest part. Certainly, that Christian must be under a very high distemper¹⁸ that cannot but smite a righteous man with reproach for smiting him with a reproof. Though gracious reproofs are choice physic,¹⁹ yet few stomachs can tell how to bear them. Most Christians are for lenitives,²⁰ few are for corrosives.²¹ David was glad of a healing reproof, but there are but few Davids alive (Psa 141:5). Who is angry with the physician for prescribing a bitter potion? And yet, ah, how angry are many Christians when they come to fall under holy reproofs, especially if there be any of that sharpness and cuttingness in them that the apostle exhorts to in Titus 1:13. Now, doubtless, the voice of the rod is this: Soul, take heed of that sin that thou canst not endure should be touched. Labor mightily with God to get that particular sin mortified that thou canst not endure should be reproofed.

Answer 7. Seventhly, observe *what sin that is that doth most hinder thee from closing with the precious promises*, and from living upon precious promises, and from improving of precious promises, and from treasuring up of precious promises, and from appropriating of precious promises to thine own soul (Psa 50:16-17). And it is very probable that, for the subduing of that sin, the Lord hath visited thee with His fatherly rod.

Answer 8. Eighthly, observe *what sin that is that did most sting and terrify thee in an evil day*, as when thou hast been under some loathsome disease or tormenting pain (Gen 42:21), be it stone,²² gout,²³ or burning fever, or when thou hast been in some imminent danger, or when thou hast had a sentence of death upon thee, and there hath been but a short step between thee and eternity. Doubtless, that sin which hath lain as a heavy load upon thy conscience in the days of thy

¹⁷ **toads** – some toads are poisonous, therefore, things that are hateful or loathsome

¹⁸ **distemper** – bad spiritual condition.

¹⁹ **physic** – medicine.

²⁰ **lenitives** – medicines that mitigate pain.

²¹ **corrosives** – caustic medicines that sear flesh.

²² **stone** – kidney stone or gallstone.

²³ **gout** – form of arthritis characterized by severe pain and tenderness in joints.

former distress, that is the sin that God would have conquered and brought under by His present rod.

Answer 9. Ninthly, observe *what particular sin that is that doth most hinder thee in holy duties and services*, and that doth most interrupt thee in thy communion with God. Inquire what particular sin that is that thy heart is most apt to run after when thou art on the mount of holy duties (Eze 33:31). Whilst the disciples were healing diseases and casting devils out of other men's bodies, the proud white devil²⁴ was stirring in their own souls, as is evident by that gentle rebuke that our Savior gives them: "In this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luk 10:20). There is no duty that a Christian performs but one white devil or another, one lust or another, will be still dogging and following of him to that duty. There is no public duty, there is no family duty, there is no private duty that a Christian performs, but either that white devil pride, or that white devil hypocrisy, or that white devil vainglory,²⁵ or else some one or another white devil will follow the soul, hard at heel to it. Now, mark what that particular sin is that most haunts thy soul when thou art in religious duties and services; and it may be that is the very sin that God would have subdued by the rod.

Answer 10. Tenthly, observe *what sin that is that the rest of your corruptions are most serviceable to, and that they most attend upon*. Mark what sin that is that all other sins do most bow the knee to. Mark that sin that hath a commanding power over all other sins, that saith to one, "Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh" (Mat 8:9). Mark what sin that is that is still uppermost, and that all other sins do most minister to. You know when a man hath a great wound in his body, all the ill humors will run thither. Observe what sin that is that all the ill humors of the soul do most run after; for it is very

²⁴ **white devil** – Martin Luther used this term to mean that the devil often deceives the world under the external appearance of goodness: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2Co 11:14): *Lectures on Galatians*, Luther's Works, Vol. 26: ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 41. In 1612, John Webster (c.1580-c.1625) wrote a play entitled *The White Devil* (1612), using a similar theme about people who are "pure" (white) on the outside but devils on the inside; Brooks seems to use it here for Christians discovering sins in themselves when they would do good.

²⁵ **vainglory** – unwarranted pride in one's accomplishments or character.

likely that that is the very sin that God would have brought under by the rod.

Answer 11. Eleventhly, observe *what that sin is that your hearts are most apt to hide and cloak, and cover over with the most specious²⁶ and fair pretenses*. Saul had a covetous desire, and he covers it over with fair pretenses, as that the people would have it so, and that what was spared was for sacrifice (1Sa 15:20-21). Caesar's favor was the great darling in Pilate's eyes, but he covers all over with washing his hands (Mat 27:24). The scribes and Pharisees were exceeding covetous; but their long prayers, as a cloak, must cover all (Mat 23). Judas also was a man of the same mind and mettle²⁷ with them: "To what purpose is this waste?...Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (Mat 26:8-9; Joh 12:5-6). Judas, as Tertullian thinks, was pretty honest until he carried the bag; but no sooner was he in office, but he puts conscience out of office, but all must be covered over with a cloak of charity.²⁸ Observe what sin that is that you are most apt to cast the silk or the satin mantle over; and it is ten to one but that is the sin that God would have brought under by the rod.

Answer 12. Twelfthly and lastly, observe *what that sin is that thou art most easily overcome by*. Delilah could easily overcome Samson when all the world besides could make no conquest upon him. The apostle bids us "lay aside...the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb 12:1). There are some sins that find more easy approaches to us and more easy acceptance with us, and accordingly they do more easily captivate us. Observe what that sin is that you do most readily and easily open the door to; and doubtless that is the sin that God would have mortified and subdued by the rod.

2. Judge Yourselfs.

The second lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *deeply to judge yourselves* and greatly to humble your souls for that sin or sins that hath brought the rod upon you. Thus

²⁶ **specious** – appearing to be right or just, but not so in fact.

²⁷ **mettle** – character.

²⁸ **Tertullian** (A.D. ca. 160-225) – early Christian theologian and author, *Opera, sub nomine* Judas.

David did in 2 Samuel 24:10-17.²⁹ When you have found out the Achan that hath brought the rod upon you, stone him to death and lie humble and low under the rod, and then the Almighty will be graciously pacified and sweetly reconciled unto you.

3. View the Rod on Every Side.

The third lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is to *view the rod on every side*. If there be briars on one side of the rod, there is rosemary on the other side of the rod. If there be wormwood and gall at one end of the rod, there is sweet honey at the other end of the rod, as there was at the top of Jonathan's rod (1Sa 14:43).

If we should come into a painter's or a limner's³⁰ shop, and see a picture half drawn, it might trouble us and startle us if it did not fright us and amaze us; but, when the picture is perfected, completed, and finished, it may prove a very beauteous, lovely, taking³¹ piece. The application is easy. Look, as every judgment, every affliction, every rod, hath its black, dark side, so every judgment, every affliction, hath its bright side too. Now, it is the wisdom of a Christian to look on the bright side of the rod, the cloud, as well as it is his work to look on the dark side of the rod, the cloud. When a Christian looks upon the dark side of the cloud, he should be humbled and abased; but when he looks upon the bright side of the cloud, he should be comforted and cheered (Jam 5:11). He that is still looking on the briary side of the rod will be very apt to fret and faint under the rod; but he that looks on the rosemary side of the rod as well as the briary side of the rod, he will bear up patiently, gallantly, and cheerfully under the rod.

The voice of the rod is: Look on both sides, look on both sides.

4. Look at the Rod in the Hand of the Father.

The fourth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is to *look on the rod, not abstractly from the hand that holds it, but conjunctively with the hand that holds it*. Thus Hezekiah did (2Ki 20:16-19); thus Aaron did (Lev 10:1-3); thus Eli did (1Sa 3:11-19); thus David did (Psa 39:9); thus Job did (Job 1:20-22); yea, and thus

²⁹ Pray turn to these scriptures: 2Ch 28:10; Jer 8:6; Eze 7:15-16.

³⁰ **limner** – portrait artist.

³¹ **taking** – attractive.

Jesus did: “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (Joh 18:11). Though the cup was a bitter cup, a bloody cup, yet seeing it was put into His hand by His Father, He drinks it off with a “Father, I thank thee.” The rod in itself sounds nothing but smart³² and blood to the child; but the rod in the hand of a Father sounds nothing but love, kindness, and sweetness. Whom He loves, He chastens (Rev 3:19). You should never look upon the rod but as it is in the hand of your heavenly Father, and then you will rather kiss it than murmur under it.

5. Cling Close to God under the Rod.

The fifth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to cleave and cling close to God under the rod*. Oh, how doth the child cling and hang upon his father when he takes up the rod. Let such a childlike spirit be found in you when the Father of spirits takes up the rod. When the rod was upon David’s back, oh, how doth he cleave to God, even as the wife cleaves to her husband; for so much the Hebrew word *dabak* in that Psalm 63:8 imports.³³ So when Job was under the rod, oh how doth he cling about God! “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15). Job will hang upon a killing God; so the church in Psalm 80:15-18; so those hundred forty and four thousand that had their Father’s name written in their foreheads (Rev 14:1-6). O friends! You never show so much childlike love, nor so much childlike ingenuity,³⁴ nor so much childlike integrity, as you do show when, under the smarting rod, you are found clinging about the Lord, and hanging upon the Lord by an exercise of grace. When Antisthenes held up his staff, as if he intended to beat one of his scholars out of his school, the scholar told him “that he might strike him if he pleased, but he should never find a staff of so hard wood as should ever be able to beat him from him.”³⁵ When no staff, no rod, no affliction can drive us from Christ, it is a sure argument that we have profited much in the school of Christ.

³² **smart** – pain.

³³ **imports** – means; signifies.

³⁴ **ingenuity** – sincerity.

³⁵ The scholar was Diogenes. Cf. Atisthenes’ *Fragmenta*, by Winckelmann.

6. Prepare to Meet the Lord.

The sixth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to prepare to meet the Lord whilst the rod is in His hand*. “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amo 4:12). Now there is a twofold preparation.

The first is a negative preparation: and this lies in taking heed of sinning against light and conscience; for those sins that are against a clear light and an awakened conscience are most wounding, wasting, terrifying, and damning.

Secondly, there is a positive preparation: and that consists in repentance and returning to the Lord, and in abasing and humbling yourselves before the Almighty (2Ch 7:14). As there is no running from God, so there is no contending with God; for what is the chaff to the whirlwind, or the stubble to a consuming fire? And therefore, the voice of the rod is: Prepare to meet the Lord in a way of faith and repentance; prepare to meet the Lord in an exercise of grace; prepare to meet the Lord with prayers, and tears, and strong cries.

7. Acknowledge God’s Sovereign Power.

The seventh lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to acknowledge God’s sovereign power and authority over the rod*, to bow³⁶ it, or break it, or burn it, or take it off, or lay it more or less on as He pleaseth (Mic 6:13; Deu 28:58-61). All diseases and sicknesses are under the command of God; they are all His sergeants, His servants, to execute His pleasure. Matthew 8:5 is an observable text. Christ tells the centurion that He would come and heal his servant; the centurion tells Him that he was not worthy that He should come under his roof; only, if He would but speak the word, his servant should be healed. “For,” saith he, “I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (vv. 9-10). But wherein did the greatness of the centurion’s faith appear? Why, in this very acknowledgment, that all diseases were to Christ as servants, and that they were as much under the command of

³⁶ bow – bend.

Jesus Christ as any servant under heaven is under the command of his master. When Christ bids them go and afflict such a man, they go; and torment such a man, they go; and kill such a man, they go; and so, when He calls them off, they come off at His call. Dear friends, it is a very great point of faith to believe these [following] five things:

First, that *God is the author of all the diseases, maladies, and sicknesses that be in the world*, and that He sets them on and calls them off at His own good will and pleasure. “Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amo 3:6). He speaks of the evil of punishment, and not of the evil of sin. It was a mad³⁷ principle among the Manichees,³⁸ who referred all calamities to the devil for their author, as if there could be evil in the city, and the Lord have no hand in it.

Secondly, it is a great point of faith to believe that *all diseases and sicknesses are limited by God in respect of places*. God sent diseases of all sorts into Egypt, but He forbade them Goshen (Exo 8:20-23; 9:23-26). Ponder seriously upon these scriptures. God’s shooting His arrows into one town and not into another, into one city and not into another, into one kingdom and not into another, into one family and not into another, doth sufficiently evidence that all diseases and sicknesses are limited by the Holy One of Israel in respect of places.

Thirdly, it is a very great point of faith to believe that *all sicknesses and diseases are limited by God in respect of persons*. That they are so is evident in Psalm 91:3-8 and Isaiah 65:12. But who lives in the faith of this truth? Sometimes in the same house one is infected, and the other is not; sometimes in the same bed the one is smitten, and the other is not; sometimes at the same table the one is taken away, and the other is left. And this doth roundly evidence and witness that all sicknesses and diseases are limited by God in respect of persons as well as in respect of places.

Fourthly, it is a great point of faith to believe that *all diseases and sicknesses are limited by God in respect of the degrees to which they shall arise*. The God Who sets bounds to the raging sea and Who saith unto it, “Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther” (see Job 38:11), that God sets bounds to all raging diseases and sicknesses, and saith unto them, “Thus far you shall go, and no farther.” He sets bounds to the

³⁷ **mad** – absurd; insane.

³⁸ **Manichees** – disciples of Mani (A.D. 216-277), an Iranian philosopher who synthesized Persian, Christian, and Buddhist ideas to form Manichaeism. Augustine was a Manichaean before his conversion to Jesus Christ.

fever; He saith to it, Go and scorch and burn up such a body so much, and no more; and to the dropsy,³⁹ Go and drown such a body so much, and no more; and to the raging pestilence, Go and weaken such a body so much, and no more; and to the stone,⁴⁰ Go and torment such a body so much, and no more.

Fifthly, it is a very great point of faith to believe that *all diseases and sicknesses are limited by God as to their continuance*. God saith to one disease, Go, hang upon such a man so many years; to another, Go, hang upon such a man but a few years; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but a year; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but a few months; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but a few weeks; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but a few days; and to another, Go, hang upon such a man but a few hours, etc.; and accordingly it cometh to pass.

8. Get More Weaned from the World.

The eighth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to get more weaned and more mortified affections to all worldly comforts, contentments, and enjoyments* (Gal 5:24; 1Co 7:29-31; Ecc 1:2; Pro 23:5; Jer 45:4-5). A man never comes to experience so much of the emptiness, the nothingness, the uselessness, the vanity, the mutability, the impotency, the insufficiency, and the uncertainty of all worldly comforts and enjoyments, as when he comes to fall under the rod. The constant cry of the rod is, Be dead to the profits, pleasures, honors, and applauses of the world; be dead to relations, be dead to friends, be dead to everything below a living Jesus.

9. Get Assurance of Better Things.

The ninth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to get assurance of greater and better things* than any this world doth afford (Heb 10:33-34). That saying is as true as it is old, viz., that the assurance of an eternal life is the life of this temporal life. But having spoken so much of this particular in my treatise on

³⁹ **dropsy** – unnatural collection of water in a part of the body.

⁴⁰ **stone** – kidney stone or gallstone.

assurance, which is now in your hands, I shall satisfy myself with this hint at present.⁴¹

10. Do Not Despise the Rod.

The tenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *not to despise the rod*. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord” (Heb 12:5). The Greek word *ολιγοῖται* that is translated *despise* signifies the littling⁴² of a thing. Oh, do not little the rod, do not lessen it, do not slight it, do not make a tush at it, do not set light by it; do not say, I will not regard it. He that doth, shows himself rather to be a Roman⁴³ than a Christian. Now, because there is such a desperate aptness and proneness in many to make light of the rod, it will be your wisdom seriously to lay to heart these four particulars:

First, *that it is an immediate⁴⁴ hand of God*, and therefore not to be despised (Amo 3:6; Deu 28:58-61). It is a sad and sinful thing to despise the mediate hand of God; but it is more sad and sinful to despise the immediate hand of God.

Secondly, *it is a mighty hand of God*. “Humble yourselves...under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1Pe 5:6). Certainly, that heart must be mightily wicked that dares despise the mighty hand of God (Amo 4:10; Eze 38:22-23).

Thirdly, *it is an angry hand of God*, and therefore do not despise it. “For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled...Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath” (Psa 90:7, 11). Shall devils tremble under His angry hand? Yea, shall they roar as the sea under His wrathful hand, as that Greek word *φριττουσι* in James 2:19, and will you presume to despise His angry hand? The Lord forbid (Num 16:46; Eze 33:27-29; Deu 29:22-25).

Fourthly and lastly, consider that *it is a holy hand, it is a just and righteous hand, it is a faithful hand of God*; and therefore, do not despise it (Jer 29:17-19; Lev 26:25; Jer 14:12-16). “I know, O LORD, that

⁴¹ Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, available as a paperback from Banner of Truth Trust, www.banneroftruth.org.

⁴² **littling** – belittling; disdain.

⁴³ **Roman** – probably a Roman Catholic.

⁴⁴ **immediate...mediate** – *immediate*: directly performed by the one acting without using other means; *mediate*: indirect, using other means as the instrument of action.

thy judgments are right [or righteousness], and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me...Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments” (Psa 119:75, 137). Certainly, none but unholy persons will be so impudent as to despise God’s holy hand.

11. Do Not Be Discouraged under the Rod.

The eleventh lesson that you are to learn by the rod, or by the raging pestilence, is *not to be discouraged under the rod* (Jer 27:13; 2Sa 24:10, 17). “Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (Heb 12:5).

First, *it is a rod in a Father’s hand*; and therefore, do not faint under it.

Secondly, *God will do much good by the rod*, and therefore do not faint under the rod.

Thirdly, *you could not have been without the rod*; and therefore, do not faint under the rod.

Fourthly, The rod that is now upon [you] is *not according to the greatness of God’s anger*, nor according to the greatness of His power, nor according to the strictness of His justice, nor according to the demerits of your sins, nor according to the malicious desires of Satan, nor according to the designs, plots, and contrivances⁴⁵ of wicked and unreasonable men, nor according to the extensiveness of your fears—for you have feared worse things than you feel—nor according to that rod that hath been upon the primitive saints, nor according to that rod that many thousands of the precious sons and daughters of Zion are under in other parts of the world; and therefore do not faint under the rod, do not be discouraged under the rod.

Fifthly, *by fainting under the rod, you will gratify Satan*, reproach religion, render yourselves unserviceable, and make work for future repentance; and therefore, do not faint under the rod.

12. Kiss the Rod.

The twelfth lesson that you are to learn under the rod or by the raging pestilence is *humbly to kiss the rod* and patiently and quietly to lie under the rod, until the Lord shall either give you a gracious or a glorious deliverance from it (2Ch 32:25-26; Lev 26:40-42; Mic 7:9; Lam 3:30). What is the rod, and what is the raging pestilence, to the horrors

⁴⁵ **contrivances** – deceitful practices.

of conscience, and to the flames of hell, or to an everlasting separation “from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”? (2Th 1:8-9). And therefore, put your mouths in the dust and be silent before the Lord. He who has deserved a hanging, if he escapes with a whipping, has no cause to murmur or complain; and we that have deserved a damning have little cause to murmur or complain of a whipping, yea, though it should be with a pestilential rod.

13. Speak Well of the Lord.

The thirteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is highly, fully, freely, and signally⁴⁶ *to justify the Lord, and to think well of the Lord, and to speak well of the Lord* under the rod. To that purpose, consult these scriptures: Psa 119:75, 137; Neh 9:33; Ezr 9:13; Lam 1:3, 5, 7, 8, 10; 4:15, 18; Dan 9:12, 14; 2Ki 20:16-19; Jer 12:1-2; Psa 119:17-22; 22:1-3; 97:2.

14. Turn from Evil.

The fourteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *personal reformation*. When the rod smarts and the pestilence rageth, God expects that every man should smite upon his thigh and turn from the evil of his doings. “If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2Ch 7:13-14); that is, I will remove the judgments that are upon the land, and I will confer upon My reforming people all those favors and blessings that they stand in need of. Consult these scriptures: Ezra 10:14, 19; 2 Chronicles 30:8-9; 29:8, 10, 15, 16.

15. Make God Your Habitation.

The fifteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is to *make God your habitation*, your shelter, your refuge. Ponder seriously upon those scriptures: Psalm 91:2, 9, 10; 90:1; 71:3; 57:1. They dwell most safely, most securely, most nobly, who dwell in

⁴⁶ **signally** – eminently.

God, who live under the shadow of the Almighty, and who every day lodge their souls in the bosom of eternal loves.

16. Make God Your Fear.

The sixteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or the raging pestilence is *to set up God as the great object of your fear* (Psa 119:119-120; Isa 8:7-8, 13-14, compared). When the judgments of God are either threatened or executed, feared or felt, it highly concerns us to lift up God as the main object of our fear. We should fear the hand that lays on the rod more than the rod itself (Job 13:11; Jer 36:24). When God takes up the rod, when He draws His sword, and when He shoots His pestilential arrows amongst us, oh, how highly doth it concern us to fear before Him with a childlike fear, with a reverential fear, with a fear that fortifies the heart against sin, and with a fear that fits the soul for duty, and that draws, yea, drives the soul to duty.

17. Expect God's Presence.

The seventeenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to expect God's singular presence with you and His admirable protection over you*. Consult these scriptures: Isaiah 43:2; Daniel 3:24-25; Psalm 23:4-5; Psalm 91; Isaiah 63:9; Isaiah 26:20-21; Ezekiel 9:4, 6. God is above His people and beneath them (Deu 33:25-27). He is under them and over them (Song 2:6). He is before them and behind them (Isa 52:12; 58:8). He is on the right hand of His people, and He is on the left hand of His people (Psa 16:8; 121:5; 118:15-16; Exo 14:22, 29). God is round about His people (Psa 34:7; 125:2). And God is in the midst of His people (Zec 2:5; Psa 46:5; Isa 12:6). Oh, the safety, the security, of the poor people of God! For God is above His people and beneath them. He is under them and over them, He is before them and behind them, He is in the front and in the rear, and He is round about them and in the midst of them.

18. Live Daily in an Exercise of Grace.

The eighteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to live every day in a fresh, choice, and frequent exercise of grace*. Consult these scriptures: Psalm 91:2-4; Jeremiah 39:17-18; Micah 7:7-9; Psalm 40:1-2; Habakkuk 2:1-4; Jeremiah 30:21. The man who lives daily in an exercise of grace, lives every day in

heaven on this side heaven, whatever affliction or judgment he is under.

19. Seek the Lord by Fasting and Prayer.

The nineteenth lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to quicken up your hearts to seek the Lord by extraordinary ways and means, viz., by fasting and prayer*. Consult these scriptures: Numbers 16:46ff; Psalm 106:23, 29-30; Isaiah 22:2-5, 12-13; Jonah 3:5ff; 2 Chronicles 12:2-7; 1 Kings 21:21ff; Joel 2:12-17.

20. Prepare for Death.

The twentieth, and so the last, lesson that you are to learn by the rod or by the raging pestilence is *to prepare for death*; it is to be in actual readiness to die. Ah, friends! Every ache, every pain, every disease, is one of death's warning pieces.⁴⁷ There is not a headache, not a toothache, not a gripe,⁴⁸ not a grief, not a fall, not a wrench,⁴⁹ not a plague-sore, but is a divine warning to man to prepare to die. It is a solemn work to die; and therefore, we had need prepare to die. It is a work that is to be done but once; and therefore, we had need prepare to do that work well that is to be done but once. In this world, we hear often, and pray often, and read often, and meditate often, and eat often, and drink often, and that which is worst, we sin often; but we must die but once (Job 14:14; Heb 9:27). Death will try all our graces, and all our experiences, and all our evidences, and all our comforts, and all our attainments, and all our enjoyments; and therefore we had need to prepare to die.⁵⁰ Though there is nothing more certain than death, yet there is nothing more uncertain than 1) the time when we shall die; 2) the place where we shall die; and 3) the manner how we shall die: as whether we shall die a sudden death, or a lingering death, or a violent death; or whether we shall fall by the sword abroad, or by famine or pestilence at home, or whether we shall fall by this disease or that; and therefore we had need be always in an actual readiness to die. No man shall die the sooner, but much the easier and the better, for preparing to die; and therefore, let us always have our loins girt and our lamps

⁴⁷ **pieces** – guns, as warning shots before a battle.

⁴⁸ **gripe** – affliction.

⁴⁹ **wrench** – sprain.

⁵⁰ See *A Believer's Last Day His Best Day* by Thomas Brooks, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

burning. As death leaves us, so judgment will find us; and therefore, we have very great cause to secure our interest in Christ, a changed nature, and a pardon in our bosoms, that so we might have nothing to do but to die. Except we prepare to die, all other preparations will do us no good. In a word, death is a change, a great change. It is the last change until the resurrection. It is lasting, yea, an everlasting change; for it puts a man into an eternal condition of happiness or misery. It is a universal change; all persons must pass under this flaming sword. That statute law, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen 3:19), will sooner or later take hold on all mortals; and therefore, it highly concerns us to prepare for death.

And thus, I have shown you these lessons that you are to learn by the rod. The Lord grant that your souls may fall under those fresh, those choice, those full, and those constant influences and communications of His Holy Spirit, as may enable you to take out those twenty lessons that I have laid open before you. I confess the epistle is large, but do but consider your own conditions and the present dispensations under which we are cast, and then I suppose you will not call it by the name of a tedious epistle.

