



IT IS WELL

Submitting to God's Providences

JOHN HILL (c. 1711-1746)

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“IT IS WELL”

“Is it well with thee?...And she answered, It is well.”

—2 Kings 4:26

1. Introduction

“And she answered, *It is well.*” These are short words and soon spoken. But to have a suitableness of heart to them is one of the highest attainments of faith.

To be sure, *it is well*. We think so when all things go according to our wish, when there is nothing in providence that crosses our desires, that thwarts our designs, that sinks our hopes, or awakens our fears; submission is easy work then. But to have all things seemingly against us, to have God smiting in the tenderest part, unraveling all our schemes, contradicting our desires, and standing aloof from our very prayers—how do our souls behave then? This is the true touchstone of our sincerity and submission. “Here,” as it is said in Revelation 13:10, “is the patience and the faith of the saints.” This shows what they are made of, what they are within. But there are many instances in the Book of God wherein we find this sweet frame prevailing, as Abraham, Job, David, and the Shunamite in my text—whose story we meet with few things in providence more affecting. If you look back a little, you may see what were her circumstances and those of her family.

She was a “*great* woman,” says vs. 8; and that she was a *good* woman the whole context shows. Her husband and she wanted but one thing to make them as happy as the vanity and uncertainty of all human affairs would admit of. They had enough of the world, and they seem to have had the enjoyment of it; for when Elisha, to requite¹ their kindness, asks, “What is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king?” she answers, “No: I dwell among mine own people. I seek nothing greater than what I have,” only (as Gehazi learned from her) they wanted a child, to comfort them now and to inherit what they had when they were gone. God, in a miraculous way, gives their request. This child grows up, and was, no doubt, the delight of his parents. [But] just at the time of life when children are [most] engaging, before they are capable of doing anything to

¹ **requite** – repay; reward.

grieve their parents, God lays His hand suddenly upon him—and takes him away!

The dearest comforts are but shortlived; and the dearer they are when living, the deeper they cut when they are removed. Many of you can judge what the loss of a son, an only son, must be, and when there is no hope of a Seth instead of an Abel (Gen 4:25). But behold, He taketh away, and who shall hinder Him?

Well, what does the mother do now? One would think all her hope was cut off and all her comfort dried up. No, it is far otherwise; the same power that gave him could raise him. In faith of this, she lays him upon the prophet's bed and makes all the haste to him she could. [With her] concealing what had happened from her husband (as it is probable), he objects to her going to the prophet, "Wherefore wilt thou go to him today? it is neither new moon, nor sabbath. And she said, It shall be well" (vs. 23). Faith sets aside every obstacle. "It shall be well; the end will be peace; God is with me, and He will make all things work together for good" (see Psa 37:37; 1Co 15:10; Rom 8:28-29).

Commentators in general make very light of this and of her answer to Elisha's message in my text. Some suppose she has a reserve in her breast when Gehazi asks after her family; that this "well" only refers to her husband and herself. Others think it is but a transition to something farther that she was in haste to say; as if she had said, "All is well; do not hinder me. I have urgent business with your master Elisha and cannot stay to talk further with you upon any matters." This is the sense that most annotators² incline to—which, I confess, I the more wonder at because all agree that the apostle's words, in part, refer to this story: "Women received their dead raised to life again" (Heb 11:35). How they received them is there specified, namely, by or through faith—faith not, as some carry it, in the prophet, but [faith] in the persons who had their dead restored to them; or else there would have been no need to make mention of any by name.

Now, in what this woman's faith appeared, my text and context make manifest.³ Here was a dependence upon God's promise, an abiding by that. God had promised her a son—a son, not to lose him, but to have comfort in him. It is as if she had said,

As for God, His work is perfect; He does not raise His people's expectations for nothing; to give and immediately take away again. My son is dead, but God, all-sufficient, liveth. Why should I mourn as though I had no hope? God's power and faithfulness, there is no abatement in them.

² **annotators** – those who explain a written work by adding insightful notes.

³ **manifest** – apparent; visible to the understanding.

Therefore she makes no preparation for his burial and tells her husband nothing of his death; but seeks to God by the prophet and expects help from Him. See how she expresses herself: “Is it well with thee?” says Gehazi, “Is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?” And she answered, “*It is well.*”

Here is the greatest submission in the deepest distress; her son—her only son, the son of all her love, the son of her old age—he is taken away with a stroke, and yet *all is well*. There is nothing amiss in the dispensation.⁴ Had she been to choose it, she would not have had it so, but as God has chosen it, it is well, it is best—she has nothing to object. Here are submission and faith both discovered in their sweetest exercise: submission to what God *has* done; faith in what He is *able* to do, and in what she believed He *would* do.

“By faith women received their dead raised to life again” (Heb 11:35), so that the words thus explained afford us this plain and useful observation:

Faith in God’s promises and power will bring a man to submit to the sorest and most trying dispensations of His providence.

To put it another way: Faith, where it is in exercise, will teach the Christian to say of ALL God does, “*It is well.*”

2. What Is Submission?

What is submission to the will of God? To prevent mistakes, we will consider a little what it is *not*, and then *what it is*.

a. What Submission Is Not

1). *Not ignoring of evil*

This “well” does not suppose there is nothing in providential dispensations that, to flesh and sense, appears evil. Submission quiets under an affliction, but it does *not* take away our sense and feeling of the affliction. The apostle speaks what is every believer’s experience, “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous” (Heb 12:11). Whatever be spoken of the good of it, it presents to us a very different face; it is a matter of present grief and sorrow to them that are chastised, nor are we blamed for our feeling and sense of it. Our blessed Lord Himself wept at the grave of His dead friend (Joh 11:35). And, at the approach of His last sufferings, His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death (Mat 26:38). Yet He was led as a lamb to the slaughter; He opened not His mouth (Isa 53:7; 1Pe 2:20-24). There was patience and quiet submission

⁴ **dispensation** – God’s arrangement of an event by divine rule and care.

under all His sorrows while nature had some vent, for groans are sometimes an easing of our grief.

Thus, it is said of this good woman, “that her soul is vexed within her” (vs. 27). Elisha saw her agony in her looks, though he knew not the cause of it; and yet all is well. When Job lost his substance and his children, and was smitten in his body with sore boils; when Heman (Psa 88), and when the church in the Lamentations was deprived of the consolations of God; when the Comforter, Who could relieve their souls, was far from them; when David also was cursed by Shimei and was turned out of doors by his own son—can you think that in all this there was no feeling? Had there been none, there could have been no profit by any of the dispensations. Unless we realize our trials and account them trials indeed, what are we the better for them? This would be to “despise...the chastening of the Lord” (Heb 12:5), to be above correction. To be smitten and not to grieve is one of God’s sorest judgments, and always indicates a soul ripe for ruin. This “well” does not suppose us insensible of the evil of affliction.

2). *Not indifferent acceptance*

Though we believe all that befalls us is well, this does not forbid our inquiring into the reasons of God’s providential dispensations, and a searching out the cause for which they come upon us. Every rod has a voice in it, and the man of understanding will hear it and see the name of God in it (Mic 6:9). He will see what God intends by it and what is His end⁵ and design in it, “For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lam 3:33). There is a “need be” in every dispensation that befalls us; “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if *need be*, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations” (1Pe 1:6). God acts with judgment in proportion to our needs: there is a convenience⁶ and fitness—even more, there is an absolute necessity—in the case; it *must be* that we are in heaviness and that [this heaviness comes] through manifold temptations. One single trial oftentimes will not do to empty us of self, to wean us from the world, to show us the vanity of the creature, the sinfulness of sin, and so on. Rather, it must be repeated or [have] others joined with it, so fast⁷ are our affections glued to things of time and sense.

Now what this need is in us, what this intention and end is in God, the Christian will and ought to be searching out and inquiring daily into. This was Job’s state (and ye have heard, as says the apostle, of the patience of Job; Jam 5:11): “Surely it is meet⁸ to be said unto God, I have borne chas-

⁵ **end** – goal; purpose; what is being aimed at.

⁶ **convenience** – suitability.

⁷ **fast** – with firm grip; securely.

⁸ **meet** – fitting; appropriate.

tisement, 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). Sin lies deep; it must be searched after in the deep and secret corners of the heart. There is so much self-love and self-flattery hid there, that a man cannot judge aright of himself or of God without divine teachings. “It is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement.”

Now, it is one thing to be chastised and another to bear chastisement—to behave aright under it; to be patient, submissive, thankful; to have a state of heart suited to the dispensation, whatever it is. This is to bear chastisement. Wherever this is, the language of the soul will be, “That which I see not teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more.” When an affliction is sanctified,⁹ it always produces godly fear and jealousy.¹⁰ A man is then most afraid of his own heart lest [it] should deceive him, lest he should come out of the furnace unpurged and unrefined, lest the end of God’s visitation upon him should be unattained. And this is well, consistent with our believing all that God does is done well.

3). *Not passive acceptance*

A soul may say, in a proper frame of mind and in the exercise of suitable affections, “It is well,” and yet long, pray, and wait for deliverance from the trial. Submission to the will of God under awful dispensations is not inconsistent with earnest prayer for a gracious and speedy outcome to these very dispensations. “It is well,” says this good woman in my text; and yet how does she plead for the life of the child!—vs. 28, “Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?” As if she had said, “I asked it not; I could scarce believe it when it was promised me. God raised my expectations Himself, He encouraged my hopes; surely He will not go back from His own word.” It was a wonderful act of faith. But the promises of God can never lie long unfulfilled; when He has prepared the heart to pray, His own ear is open to hear. He has not called Himself “I AM THAT I AM” for nothing (Exo 3:14). Abraham staggered not at the promise through unbelief (Rom 4:20); no more does this daughter of Abraham here.

It is blessed pleading: “Did I not say, Do not deceive me?” [as if to say,] “May I trust? May I venture? He has given me the faithful word of God to rely on; here my faith rests.” And a son came in due season. Now she looks to God, the author of the mercy, and applies to the prophet who was the revealer of it. He sends Gehazi with his staff, but this will not content her except Elisha goes himself—she knew he was great with God; she will, therefore, have his prayers and presence. “As the LORD liveth, and as thy

⁹ **sanctified** – set apart for God’s holy use.

¹⁰ **jealousy** – intolerance of unfaithfulness or rivalry.

soul liveth, I will not leave thee” (vs. 30). All this argues the strong desires of her heart for the return of the child’s life, though still she says, “All is well.”

While we bear chastenings, we may pray—and pray hard—that God would take them off. “If it be possible,” says innocent, aggrieved nature in the man Christ, “let this cup pass from me” (Mat 26:39). Opening our mouths *against* God is our sin; but it is our duty to open our mouths and our hearts *to* Him. In the former sense says David, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it” (Psa 39:9). And yet, with the same breath, he adds, “Remove thy stroke away from me; I am consumed by the blow of thine hand” (vs. 10). Were a child, [when] under the correction of a parent, to show no desire of his leaving off,¹¹ should we not rather account him stubborn than submissive? In like manner, not to ask of God release from troubles is as *offensive* as to murmur at them. It is a token of a proud heart and a relentless spirit. God expects other things at our hands. Even of the wicked He says that, in their affliction, “They will seek me early”—much more shall His own people, who have known His name and put their trust in Him, who have known the advantage of prayer, and been so often set at liberty by it from all their fears. If these are silent, they cannot be sensible nor submissive. Only, in all their prayers when they are most earnest and vehement, [they may add] “if it be consistent with the will of God,” and there will be no limiting Him as to time or way.

These things are none of them inconsistent with the soul’s saying, under the most awful rebukes, “All is well.”

b. What Submission Is

Now, what *is* included in this “well” in my text? Or, what is this submission to the will of God? It takes in, as I apprehend, these three things.

1). Justifying God

Submission to the will of God is justifying God in all He does: “It is well.” God cannot do amiss; He worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, to the praise of His glory. “And after all that is come upon us,” says the church, “thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve” (Ezr 9:13)—Thou hast not taken vengeance according to the desert of our sins. When sin appears to be what it is in itself, exceeding sinful, then affliction will appear light—and not till then. Therefore, says the church, “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?” (Lam 3:39). So long as we are out of hell, God punishes us less than our iniquities deserve.

¹¹ **desire of his leaving off** – desire that the father would stop the spanking.

Whatever be our trial, it comes from God; He is the author, whoever be the instrument—therefore it is well. He cannot do iniquity. David had not one word to say by way of complaint when he saw God's hand in the affliction: "Let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him" (2Sa 16:11). We may puzzle and distress ourselves about instruments and second causes; but no quiet, no rest can we have till we are led to the first [cause]. "He performeth the thing that is appointed for me"; that settles the soul—but nothing else will do it. "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psa 46:10). If thy children are taken, thy substance fails, thy body is sore vexed, thy comforts and even the presence of thy God leave thee, yet be still—that is, do not say a word against the dispensation, do not fret, do not censure and condemn Providence. "I am God; who shall say, What doest Thou? I will neither be questioned nor directed by thee. I know My own way, and I regard My promise and covenant. I am God, thy God in all; and a covenant God cannot do amiss." God will be glorified and exalted; that is enough for us. This "It is well" implies in it, not in some things, but in *all*.

2). *Approving what God does*

This submission implies in it our approving of all that God does; not only is it not amiss, but it is *right*. It is the *best* way, the only sure way to bring about our good. Therefore holy Job blesses God in all: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). He had the same great and good thoughts of God as ever he had; God was his God still and the God of his mercy. He believed still that he should have an expected and desired end, because God's thoughts were the same as they ever were, that is, thoughts of peace and not of evil (Jer 29:11).

And this is the state in which we find the poor saints that were scattered up and down throughout almost the whole world, "Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice" (1Pe 1:5-6). They went far from one another to avoid persecution; yet wherever they were, they met persecution. It was in their way, but none of these things moved them. There was joy in their expected rest and happiness at last, though there was great pain and heaviness in their way to it. The way was rough, but right; therefore they approved of it, they acquiesced in it—no, herein they *greatly rejoiced*. Thus the saints of old took joyfully the spoiling of their goods—and were tortured, not accepting deliverance—because they knew in themselves that they had "in heaven a better and an enduring substance" (Heb 10:34). O that blessed knowledge! It comforts, refreshes, and fills the soul, and lifts a man above himself.

Every path that God takes is right, then; it is safe, and the believer chooses to walk in it. His God, his Father, has marked it out. Nothing goes so against the grain, but that all is well which his Father does. His will is brought to be one with God's. The soul approves of all that God does.

3). *Cleaving to God*

Submission [to God's will] implies in it our cleaving to God in all—to be pleased with God as a friend when He seems to be coming forth as an enemy; to lean upon a promise when all the ways leading to the performance are shut up; to rejoice in God when we have nothing left to rejoice in, and faith is hard put to it to call God ours. Thus, to cleave to God when we do not find comfort from Him, this is believing indeed. To love the hand that smites, that is true grace and great grace. A noble act of faith was that: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15).

So Abraham "staggered not at the promise...through unbelief" (Rom 4:20). He brought God's promise and faithfulness close together, and considered none of the difficulties or absurdities that came between them. It was not, "Is this reasonable? What probability is there in that? How can these things be?" But being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. Abraham clave to God, abode by His promise in a way of faith and firm dependence.

This is the true nature of submission, and is contained in that expression in my text, "*It is well.*"

c. Applications

Now a word of use.

1). *Do not wonder.*

Wonder not at your trials, be they never so strange, grievous, and distressing. All is well; some secret end is to be answered that you see not. God is in all; the hand and love of a Father is there. They are to purge from sin, to wean from the world, to bring you to the feet of God, to show you that your rest is not here, that it lies beyond the grave. What though they make you smart?¹²—they do you the more good! This argues your sensibleness¹³ under the rod; that is not a rod which does not cause smart.¹⁴ The sharpest medicine does most service because it reaches the inward, hidden cause. Not one of our many trials could we well spare.

¹² **smart** – sting.

¹³ **sensibleness** – good sense; sound judgment.

¹⁴ **that...cause smart** – A rod that does not sting is not a true rod as used by God.

2). Have a suitable frame.

Do not think any trial sanctified till you have a suitable frame to the trial, whatever it be. Are you humbled? Are you prayerful? Are you submissive? Have you looked inward and confessed your sins, saying, “Take away all iniquity”? If affliction has not brought you to this, it has done you no good! For all you may have borne, “his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still” (Isa 5:25).

3). Do not think of other means.

Do not think of other means¹⁵ whereby God’s end in visiting you might have been as well answered; that is in fact to quarrel with God in what He has done or is doing. Have care for your thoughts; non-submission slips in at that door before one is aware. “It is well” is the only soul-quickenings and God-glorifying state. God, Who has appointed the end, has settled and will order the means; rest there, and all is well.

4) Have peace and joy in it.

“And she answered, It is well.” To have a frame of heart of [peace] with these words is one of the highest attainments of faith; and it brings to my mind the apostle’s prayer for the believing Colossians, That ye might be “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering, with joyfulness” (Col 1:11). According to the degrees of that glorious power that is communicated from God to the believer, so does his faith in God increase or decline. All our strength is from above; it is not lodged within. Our supplies are from God, not from ourselves.

Be the affliction ever so heavy, be the continuance of it ever so long, if the Christian be favoured with the might of God’s power, he is strengthened to bear it with all joyfulness. Whence is it else that so great an example of faith as was Jacob when he came to part with his beloved Benjamin, and for a while finds himself so exceedingly distressed? When he was turned out of his father’s house, with his staff only, he is submissive and content; and afterwards, when Esau came out against him with four hundred men, he acts with moderation and prudence: sets every drove in order, prepares his present, and gives every one a speech for his brother (Gen 32:16). Surely at this time he believed that all was well. But when “Joseph is not, and Simeon is not,” and Benjamin is going after them, he says, “all these things are against me” (Gen 42:36). God left faith alone there, and then it soon fails. If the arm of His power be withheld, the actings of our faith soon cease.

¹⁵ **means** – the instruments through which God works to communicate to the hearts of men.

This is why I think that the Holy Ghost lays such an emphasis upon the story of which my text is a part. “Through faith women received their dead brought to life again”: the emphasis lies upon the *persons*, not so much upon their faith or the glorious effects of it. “Through faith women”—such as had the warmest passions, and tenderest affections, and therefore the most aggravating sorrow when all that was dear to them was gone—even they believed. Faith conquered nature; there was submission under heart-rending providences because they believed. The mighty power of God—when a believer rests upon that, all things are safe, all is well. When Jacob lost but one son, “he refused to be comforted” (Gen 37:35). This good woman in my text had but one to lose, and no hope of another in place of him; yet, says she, “*It is well.*”

3. The Foundations of Submission

We come now to show what are the grounds of this submission [to God’s will]; or whence it is that a believer says of all God does, “*It is well.*”

a. The Sovereignty of God

The sovereignty of God is a ground of this submission. God has an absolute power and right of dominion over all His creatures to dispose and determine of them as seems good to Him. He has a right to do what He will with His own. This quieted Aaron when fire from heaven consumed his two sons; “Aaron held his peace” (Lev 10:3). And Eli, when that tingling sentence was denounced against him and his household, said, “It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good” (1Sa 3:18). This gave David ease when he was driven from God’s sanctuary and his throne usurped by his ungodly son, “Behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him” (2Sa 15:26). In these instances, the affliction was not only borne, but accepted. “If their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob” (Lev 26:41), that is, willingly borne, contentedly enjoyed (so Ainsworth¹⁶ renders it). O! it is a sweet disposition when our trials are accepted ones, when God’s chastening hand is esteemed a kindness, when medicine as well as food excites our thankfulness. I do not say God’s sovereignty alone, in our clearest views of it, will of itself bring our souls to this; yet this I say: that sovereignty works submission.

How dare I [complain] that God takes away part of my substance when He has a right to all? My children, my friends, my dispositions were all

¹⁶ **Henry Ainsworth** (1571-1622) – English Nonconformist clergyman and scholar; born in Norfolk, educated at Cambridge, associated with the Puritan party in the Church of England, but eventually joining the Separatists.

lent me. God gives us nothing to have and to hold but His Christ, and we cannot always see our hold of Him. Why should I object? why murmur? why gainsay? Does He give any account of His matters? Is it befitting Him, Who has absolute dominion over all His creatures, to be arraigned at man's bar?¹⁷ Or is it in my breast, by all my devices, reasonings, and demurs, to change the purposes of His heart? Lord, I will puzzle myself no longer with hows, whys, and yet. Thou hast done it, I rest there. It seemed good in Thy sight, that is reason sufficient. Thus God has left it; and I dare not bring in my "yet, Lord, I would fain have it otherwise."

My friends! you bring in a bill of complaints against God and His providence: this grieves you, the other is not right with you, a third thing you find hard to submit to. Pray, where is there anyone who has a trial like Aaron, Eli, or David? And yet the remedy was near—and it was a tried one: "It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good." This never fails when it is well applied; if it be really taken, it will do *you* good. But it is not enough to look at the cup and then turn away your head; or take it as children do medicine, with their eyes shut! No, no, the more you weigh matters over, the better always. The more purely faith eyes God's sovereignty in all, the stronger are the actings of it. "It is the LORD," and Eli has nothing more to say. Let God choose my portion, then I am sure it will be best and pleasantest in the end; for even when He acts as a sovereign, He forgets not His relation as a Father—in His hands we are safe. Faith acts here with the greatest reason, for it is the highest reason to leave all with Him Who worketh, ordereth, and overruleth all that befalls us, for His own glory and our spiritual good. This therefore is one reason or ground of this submission.

b. The Justice and Righteousness of God

The justice and righteousness of God is a further ground of submission. "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more" (Job 34:31). If sin sits heavy, all afflictions will soon appear light. The sensible Christian is for digging deep into his own heart; for the more spiritual sins, which are most offensive to God, are most secret and hidden. By-ends¹⁸ and aims in duty, pride, vainglory, carnal confidence, insensibleness under providential rebukes, worldly disposition, lifeless moods, creature love, and hopes and expectations—where is the man wholly free from these things? And yet, when awful strokes come, where must I look for the Christian who is patient and submissive under them? Who, if he does not fret and fume under the rod, yet is not apt to

¹⁷ **man's bar** – the court of a man's opinion, where he decides for himself what is right.

¹⁸ **by-ends** – secondary and incidental purposes; hidden agendas.

harbour thoughts within as if God dealt hard measures by him? Oh! converse more with the nature and perfections of God; converse more with His holy Law; converse more with your creatureship, and more with your natural guilt and corruption—or else submission, as necessary as it is, will never be practiced by you.

When a Christian is in a right state, his heart always goes with Ezra's words, "After all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, thou...our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezr 9:13). The best way to prize our mercies is to be affected with our sins; scarce a trial comes but a little heart-examination will suggest what the cause is. But where there is no special sin for which God visits, is it not enough to reconcile you to the stroke that you are so proud, that you are so unholy, that your heart starts aside so often from God—that you are so far from Him, so unlike Him, so full of plague-sores from which you have not been cleansed? When once your heart comes to be duly affected with these things; when God speaks, as Zophar has it in Job 11:5-6 when He shows "thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is" (i.e., to that which appears to be)—then you will have felt understanding and a knowledge of this: that God exacts of you less than your iniquity deserves! Just thoughts of the justice and righteousness of God is another argument of submission.

c. The Wisdom of God

The wisdom of God as exercising itself in all that befalls the Christian is a further ground of submission [to God's will]. To this, holy Job has recourse, "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?" (Job 9:4). The expression imports, says Caryl,¹⁹ "that He has infinite wisdom. His is not wisdom only in the tongue, or some flashes of wit; but deep, solid, rooted wisdom." He is God only wise (Rom 16:27). From eternity He saw what we should need in time, and our supplies were all wisely adjusted, settled, and proportioned in the everlasting covenant.²⁰ Therefore, nothing can be wrong that we meet with in time; it is all [in] the way to rest.

¹⁹ **Joseph Caryl** (1602-1673) – English Nonconformist divine, born in London, educated at Oxford. He was a member of the Westminster Assembly in 1643.

²⁰ **everlasting covenant** – The covenant "made from all of eternity and put into operation at the fall of man, to bring salvation from sin and its penalty. It is generally subdivided...into the covenant of redemption, made between the Father and the Son [whereby the Son agreed to redeem God's elect children], and the covenant of grace, made between God and His elect [whereby God agreed to give His elect children new hearts that they might believe]"—*Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Alan Cairns (Ambassador Emerald International, Third Edition, 2002); 112.

The way lies through thorns, briers, crosses, and snares; the wisdom of God has so ordered it for the best. There is no getting any other way to glory. What was said of Israel of old is true of us now, “And he led them forth by the *right* way, that they might go to a city of habitation” (Psa 107:7). We know it was not the shortest way, nor was it the smoothest; but it was the right way. It was the way that God’s wisdom had appointed as best suiting their froward²¹ tempers and the ends of His own glory. Alas! until we get to see this, we shall never speak the words of my text from the heart. If we do not see God’s wisdom in our trials, we shall never be thoroughly brought to submission under them.

Look at them afresh, see, inquire; it may be you have passed over some circumstances attending them too lightly. Whatever your burden be, it is suited to your back; it is the proper trial of your faith. “By these things,” says Hezekiah, “men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit” (Isa 38:16). Every single circumstance attending your trials has its use, and makes most surely for your advantage.

Perhaps you have a *stout spirit*. God sees it proper to break your heart with reproaches, to lash you with the scourge of tongues. Or, it may be, your credit sinks, your reputation wastes away; or else it may be strong pain pulls you down upon your bed till you look no higher than just yourself. This was the very trial you needed, for by it the end for which it was sent is attained.

Or it may be you are of a *tender spirit*. Your heart has been wrapped up in the creature. Here you have settled, fixed, and nothing could move you from it. Well, God will deal with that, to kill your creature love and delight; your all is taken away with a stroke. He rends the creature from you—husband, wife, children, friends. God removes them to bring your heart nearer to Himself.

Or it may be you are of an *ambitious, aspiring temper*; but as you climb, so you fall. God unravels your schemes, breaks your plots, advances you to poverty. And a blessed advancement that is, in your case. It is what best suits you: you could not bear to be rich, to be used tenderly, to be indulged.

Again, others there be who are *cross, rugged, who value no man*. The world smiles; the creatures they have—wife, children, lands, etc.—all are with them. And they are of that unhappy temper: they think all no more than they deserve. But Infinite Wisdom has provided for them too; God will bring down their high looks. They shall be afflicted in the creature; their sorrows shall grow out of the root, in the fruit of which they ex-

²¹ **froward** – not willing to yield; stubbornly contrary.

pected comfort. [There is] no stroke so heavy, no rod so smarting, as this. Moses had his Zipporah; Abigail a Nabal; David an Absalom; Ammon, Adonijah. Better follow children to the grave than bring them up for hell—the thought wounds as it enters the heart. Yet there is wisdom in all this because no other medicine will reach the case, no other affliction will do you so much good—therefore God applies this.

And then, as to the *time of an affliction*, God's wisdom shines in that. When you began to grow weary of Him, heartless in duty, proud of gifts, or fixed in some evil course, then was the time that the hand of God was lifted up; He would bear [with you] no longer.

And is there not also wisdom seen in *making contraries work together* for your good? That which is now your burden might have been your ruin. "Out of the eater came forth meat" (Jdg 14:14). Joseph's seeming death was the way to save his father and his family alive! Our sorest crosses are often made the way to our sweetest comforts.

Thus a believer cannot reason always; but he finds it hard to believe it shall be so when the trial is upon him. He rests here: "Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known" (Psa 77:19).

"O!" says the Christian, "my God is here; the dispensation is not so dark but I see God in it. He works deep; trace Him I cannot, but follow Him I will. It is my duty and my delight to resign to Him. I cannot wade in the sea, it is out of my depth—but God can walk there. The reasons of His dealings with me I see not, but they are laid in infinite wisdom. I may believe Him, trust in Him, hope in Him—though I cannot see Him. He knows His own way, let that be sufficient!"

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" (Psa 42:5). Be still, say no more. God, a God of counsel and wisdom, has thee by the hand, and He will not fail thee. "Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron" (Psa 77:20). God's infinite wisdom is a ground of submission to the darkest steps of His providence.

d. The Love and Mercy of God

The love and mercy of God is a further ground of submission [to God's will]. These are always at the bottom of the sorest trials; and when the believer sees this, he says of whatever God does, "It is well done." If He chastens, He sustains and refines when He tries. "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Gold loses nothing by the furnace but its dross; it is not consumed in the fire, but only made more pure.

There is a sparing justice and a punishing mercy. Thus says God of the wicked: “So will I make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry” (Eze 16:42)—enough to make one tremble at the hearing of it. If God corrects no more, He will destroy next; here is a *sparing justice*. To the godly there is also a *punishing mercy*: “When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1Co 11:32).

There is a blessing hid in the worst of things. Better to be punished now than to perish forever; it is kindness in using the rod to prevent the child’s ruin. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amo 3:2). Above all others, says God, I will see to you; and it is condescending²² love in Him thus to punish. Why should He not give us up? He might say, “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more” (Isa 1:5), but His love, His mercy, holds out still.

The believer, in the most dark and cloudy day, has light enough to read so far in the name of the Lord as that He is Jehovah, merciful and gracious. [There are] two things that faith will discern and rejoice in, when it is ever so little helped: *sparing mercy in this life*, and *saving mercy in that which is to come*. It was a melancholy²³ time with the church [at the second deportation]. God had brought her into darkness, enclosed her ways, filled her soul with gall and wormwood; yet, when she bethinks herself, she says, “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not” (Lam 3:22). [As if to say,]

We are yet on this side of hell; it is not so bad with us but it might have been worse. God lives still, and His compassions are as full and free as ever; in these is continuance, and we shall be saved. A full end is not made of us, be our trials what they will; “in measure, when it shooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it” (Isa 27:8). Sparing mercy we see here, and saving mercy will follow after.

Now, whatever comfort God removes, He does not take away His Christ, His great gift. Our pains may be great, but His comforts are sweet and infinitely outweigh them. Though our bodies may be covered over with sores, our souls, our consciences, are sprinkled with blood. “Ye are come...to the blood of sprinkling” (Heb 12:24); blessed is the trial that brings us there. To be sure, love is in it, or else Christ would never have been rendered precious by it. And then the rest remaineth for us (Heb 4); and it is well kept, for Christ has possession of it. Thither, as our forerunner, He is for us entered (Heb 6:20)—not gone as a private person into the

²² **condescended** – descending or stooping to things unworthy.

²³ **melancholy** – calamitous; that which produces great grief.

rest, but gone thither as our representing Head, to occupy our place until we come there.

It is a comfort to the saints that in this world they have the worst place they ever shall have; things grow better with us every day, as every day brings us nearer to our Father's house. A traveler has but little concern that his money is all spent, when he has got within sight of home. What though there be no candles in the house when we are sure break of day is near? The believer is looking for the mercy of Christ unto eternal life, and there is much mercy amidst all the trials that he meets with in his way to it. Every cross is sweetened with some mercy. This is another argument for submission.

Observe providence if you would profit by it. Experiences are reckoned choice things. They are to be laid by and kept safe against a time of need. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD" (Psa 107:43). A Christian should be best versed in the history of his own life; there is always matter of instruction and entertainment there. Do not let signal mercies pass and repass without taking account of them. "Thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no" (Deu 8:2). Some of the minutest circumstances of providence are the sweetest, because they introduce many others: Ahasuerus' not sleeping was the circumstance that led the way to the salvation of all the nation of the Jews (Est 6:1ff)!

Three things I would earnestly recommend to myself and you to be well studied; each of our pains in the work will be abundantly recompensed by the pleasure of it. One is the study of providence; the other, of grace; the third, of our own hearts. A Christian may find work enough there to keep him employed all his life long. Observe providence if you would profit and be instructed by it, "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things" (Psa 107:43). Much spiritual wisdom and much of God's loving-kindness will you discover by it. "And she answered, *It is well.*"

We see a Christian here in his best light and in his sweetest frame. It is not always so with the child of God. There is nature as well as grace in the best of saints, flesh as well as spirit, strong corruptions as well as strong faith and hope. Wherefore strength must be communicated from God or else, even under lesser trials, there will be no firm trust in Him. Patience is not a mere endurance of trouble, but it is the exercise of those graces that are suited to a suffering state. To believe God, to love Him, to delight in Him, to resign ourselves over to His sovereign will and pleasure; and from a settled valuation of things eternal, above all that this present

life promises or can give, to have the soul quiet and composed, cheerful and dependent, even under the frowns and rebukes of Providence, keeping fast hold of the promise, the covenant of God—this is the faith, this the patience of the saints. Here you best see its nature and use, and here you see the trial of it.

e. The Faithfulness of God

The faithfulness of God is a further ground of submission [to God's will]; this also the believer sets before him under the saddest providences, and this puts a beauty and pleasantness upon all. "I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me" (Psa 119:75). The faithfulness of God appears two ways, and in both it works submission: in sending an affliction, and then in guiding it.

First, the faithfulness of God appears in *sending* an affliction. This David acknowledges in these words—not only that God was faithful, Who sent his trial, giving that measure of grace which was necessary under it; but He was faithful in sending it, vs. 67. The affliction itself was an act and discovery of God's faithfulness; He could not have been faithful had He not done it.

A noble act of faith is this, to speak thus from the heart when afflictions come thick and close—when our dearest comforts are taken, such as credit, liberty, health, children, and so on—that God is faithful in all. To know it, to feel it, and therefore to approve His way with us—this is true submission. But it is hard work. It is one thing to be convinced in one's judgment of this, another thing to acknowledge and approve in the heart; to find all still, composed, and satisfied within—a cleaving, relying frame in all. Then, says the Christian, "True, Lord! I needed this rod; my heart was stupid, secure, wavering, proud! This rouses and fixes me. I know Thee better, I love Thee the more for it. Thou art a holy, a pure, a jealous God; sin shall not dwell with me. Oh, this revenge and holy fear that I now find working in me, it is the sweetest state to serve my God in! My thoughts are raised; what is this world to a moment's communion with Thee? What an empty nothing it is! My heart dies to it; Lord, I am weaned. My God will have a whole heart and, Lord, it *is* Thine. Thy love is judicious, not just sentiment. My good, not my ease, is what my Father, my God, consulteth. And I know I now feel my wants:²⁴ my prayers have a spirit in them. Mercy is not asked for form's sake, I find I need it. And blessed be a covenant God for such full supplies as I see in Christ. God commendeth His love and faithfulness to me by this affliction. When I sit down and count the cost, I can presently see I am no loser. O, it is good for

²⁴ **feel my wants** – have what I lacked before.

me that I have been afflicted!" God is faithful in sending afflictions—this works submission.

Secondly, God is faithful also in *guiding* afflictions. "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" (1Co 10:13). When they fall too heavy, either they shall be removed, or you supported. "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2Co 12:9). God deals by His children as Jacob by his: "The children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die...I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me, and the children be able to endure" (Gen 33:13-14). Your Father knows your strength, and His own covenant, better than you do or can.

What have you lacked yet, that your fears are so great, your cries and complaints so exceeding pressing? Wherein did He leave you? Wherein has He failed you? Say the time, name the place, give particulars of the affliction. "According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" (Num 23:23). Not only now, but upon all like occasions, God will show Himself strong in your behalf, O ye that put your trust in Him. This and the other present salvation²⁵ is but a pattern of what shall be when your needs, and the ends of God's glory, require it. And is not this an argument of submission! O! it is—it composes, it settles the soul, and makes it to glory in tribulation also.

f. The Power and All-sufficiency of God

The power and all-sufficiency of God are a further ground of submission [to His will]. These have a tendency to work in the soul this blessed state my text speaks of.

"Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isa 40:27).

Whatever thou lovest, is there not enough in God still? Are His consolations small? No, but thy faith is weak! The fountain is as full as ever: "I am the Almighty God," the all-sufficient One (Gen 17:1).

God, Who is sufficiency, though this or that pipe, this or that means of conveyance, be cut off. Couldst thou ever say this of any creature? Was there ever any evidence of all-sufficiency in that? O with what eyes do the

²⁵ **present salvation** – deliverance from a current trial.

best see God and the creature! Jonah loses his gourd, and he must needs die too! Jacob loses his son, and he can have no comfort more! Surely we have a patient God as well as a mighty Saviour. Had God taken either at their word (one was a prophet, the other a patriarch), I will not say as David did of Abner's death (2Sa 3:28-29), but surely they must have died martyrs to their own sinful creature affections.

O! if you must have your props, your comforts, from the creature, woe to you! Rachel must needs have children or die (Gen 30:1). And she died in her child-bearing. God gave her a son, but it was Benoni, the son of her sorrow, her death; she never lived to have one moment's enjoyment of him. If you suck at the nether²⁶ springs of creature sufficiency for satisfaction and rest, you will draw not comfort, but poison.

God has not invested any creature with His own all-sufficiency; it is dreadful to wrest what we fondly esteem blessings out of God's hands. I admire Hagar's faith; I adore the wisdom and goodness of God in giving the occasion of it: "She called the name of the LORD that spake unto her, Thou God seest me" (Gen 16:13).

Do not faint under your burden, poor distressed saint; whatever it be, God, your God, sees you and it. Thy Jesus is a tenderhearted friend; while you are looking after Him, He will speak to you. He will be found of you; and love is in His lips, salvation is in His hand. He is the God that lives and sees you. God's all-sufficiency is another ground of submission. It must be well when we have our interest in an everlasting and all-sufficient God.

g. The Unchangeableness of God

God's unchangeableness is another ground of Christian submission [to God's will]. "But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end" (Psa 102:27). "*But* thou art the same": it is a blessed "*but*." It comes notwithstanding all changes, not only that have been, but that may be. My health weakened, my days shortened; alas, what is this! These heavens themselves shall perish, they shall wax old like a garment; but Thou, Lord, shalt endure, Thou shalt stand eternally the same. The Rock of Ages is a sure dwelling-place. The believer's portion in God is perpetual and everlasting. No change [is] in Him, nor the least shadow of it.

"I AM THAT I AM," says God (Exo 3:14). In all the revolutions of time and distress of nature, when it shall be convulsed and wrecked and the whole frame of it crumbled into nothing, He is still the same. What a stable foundation of comfort is here! what a prop for hope! what a blessed argument of submission! Look into the church, look into the families of friends, look into the world, look into thyself—what innumerable changes

²⁶ **nether** – lower. Creature sufficiency is dangerous compared to sufficiency in God alone.

do we see on every side, in every circumstance and season of life. A week, a day, what an alteration does it make! And how can a Christian be easy with this? Whence is it he can say, “It is well”? O! it is because of God’s eternity, God’s unchangeableness—Who is a tried God and a Saviour, a never-failing rock of refuge. Once a father, faith will say, “and always a father”: once a friend, and always so. My God, my Jesus, my portion, changes not. His conduct may alter, His heart cannot; His expressions may vary, but not His affection!

Everlasting love makes sure work; it reaches through all dispensations. God has spoken peace and He will never unsay it. I may lose my comfort but not my interest. He has laid the foundation of it in His everlasting love, purpose, promise, and covenant. Men shut their hands (as one well says) because they have opened them; but because God has once opened His, He will never shut them. He is of one mind, and who can turn Him? [He is] good and gracious, wise and powerful. And His name *Jehovah* shows that He is eternally and unchangeable so.²⁷

Peace, then, my soul; be still. You shall wade through this trial as easily, as safely, as you did through the last. He is a rock, and His work is perfect. This God is thy God for ever and ever. He will be thy guide even unto death. Thus does God’s unchangeableness lead to submission.

And thus much as to the grounds of a Christian’s submission, whence the soul thinks and says of all God does, “*It is well.*”

4. The Fruits of Submission

What are the blessed fruits and effects of this submission [to God’s will], or what benefit redounds to the believer, what glory to God, when he is enabled to think and say of all God does, “It is well”?

It would make the discourse very sweet to him that preaches it, could he bring every particular [as] warm from his own heart. But alas! we are as low, faint, lifeless, and unbelieving, at times, as you can be [whom] we preach to. However, it *is* his desire and prayer that God would bring his heart down to every particular, and that his own soul may be refreshed with those consolations that he is seeking to administer to others; that he may say, “I believed, therefore have I spoken” (Psa 116:10). We live upon the same food we provide for you. And, blessed be God!—He often makes that word a comfort to ourselves, in which we aim chiefly at the support and establishment of others.

²⁷ **Jehovah** – “the unchanging, eternal, self-existent God,” the “I am that I am” (Exo 3:14).

Well, what are the blessed fruits and effects of this disposition my text speaks of? There are four evils that it prevents, and as many real, positive blessings it procures.

a. Evils Prevented

What are the sins and evils that [the attitude of submission to God's difficult providences] prevents and that, when sin prevails, cost the Christian dear?

1). *Rash conclusions*

First, [the attitude of submission] prevents rash conclusions. Such was that of Jacob: "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me" (Gen 42:36). Such was that of David: "David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1Sa 27:1). And such was that also of the church: "And I said my strength and my hope is perished from the LORD" (Lam 3:18). [As if to say,] "I give up all for lost. I can stay myself no longer upon God for support. My case is remediless. I have no encouragement, no hope." This is the language of unbelief: rash conclusions that arise from a bare looking to second causes,²⁸ without bringing God's word of promise and His faithfulness together—whereas He is of one mind, ever pursuing the designs of everlasting love towards His church and people, though the thought does not always possess their hearts. "Behold," says God, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me" (Isa 49:16)—I see thy ruined walls; I have the model of My own mercy still in Mine eye; My heart is not off thee, as desolate as thy circumstances appear to be. God will yet have mercy upon Zion, when the set time to favour her is come.

Hence we read of him that believeth, that he maketh not haste: "He that believeth shall not make haste" (Isa 28:16). He is not straightway at his wit's end because a mercy that has been often asked and long expected is delayed. It is a metaphor taken from a person in some great danger, without any certain, tried means whereby he may escape; he tries this way and that way, keeping constant to none—or else, despairing of safety, he makes all the haste possible to quit the place where he is at present, though he cannot tell where he shall do better. Not so does the Christian, whose hope and whose refuge the Lord is. He waits the time of mercy. Can you not easily remember when the delay of mercy has been for thy advantage? God has been not only preparing the mercy for you, but also pre-

²⁸ **second causes** – God is always the primary cause behind all events. He uses visible means to accomplish His will that, when man looks at them, appear to be a main cause—but they are always second causes after God Himself, the first cause.

paring your heart for the mercy. “And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a GOD of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him” (Isa 30:18). Had it come sooner, it might have turned to your detriment, not your real good.

Can you not call to mind how God’s mercies were nearest when your own heart and hopes were lowest? “At evening time it shall be light” (Zec 14:7). When darkness is expected, light appears. Can you not look back and see faithfulness in sending the rod, as well as faithfulness in removing it? The cross that we met with trembling, have we not kissed at parting? That which occasioned the trial was the means of some unforeseen deliverance. “God sent me before you,” says Joseph, “to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance” (Gen 45:7). Yet this is the son Joseph, concerning whose supposed death Jacob refused to be comforted. But this “believing all is well” stills the tumults and rising passions of the soul, strikes it dumb when it is apt to murmur, and prevents these rash and hasty conclusions against God and the ways of His providence.

2). Sinful staggerings

Secondly, [submission to God’s will] prevents sinful staggerings. Thus we read of Abraham, “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20). Observe: unbelief lies at the bottom of all our staggerings. It is not God’s promise that fails; it is our faith. We lose our sight and hold of the promise; that makes us stagger. Perhaps there is some particular promise we have prayed over and over again. God has fed our hopes by His providences; we have seen the fruit of our prayers; and all things go on according to our wish—it is easy believing then. But, behold, when in every way there seemed to be a revival, God on a sudden deadens and damps it. He makes an unexpected breach, as He did upon Uzzah (2Sa 6:7), and at a time when His people, as David was, are rejoicing before the ark. How do we behave at such a time? I know how this affects me, though I would hope better concerning others. I am apt to stagger at the promise through unbelief: to dispute matters, to consider and weigh things in my own mind according to the mere dictates of flesh and sense—without paying that reverence and regard to God’s word of promise that I ought.

But Abraham staggered not at the promise through unbelief. He held no self-consultation, no debate about it; did not allow himself to consider whether he should close with it or not—but, by a resolute and peremptory act of his soul, ventured his all upon it.

“It is right; it is best; it is the word of God, Who cannot lie—of a God infinite in power and of unchanging faithfulness. It will not admit of an argument, a debate. I am at a point in it, and it is a ruled case;²⁹ I am sure I am safe.” “He staggered not at the promise through unbelief.”

This, my friends, this is the disposition that gives glory to God, because it takes God at His word and gives Him credit as God. Where we have to do with men, the more we weigh and consider matters the better. But we know Whom we have believed when we trust God—there is the greatest ground of confidence and highest assurance, that what He has promised He is able to perform. Hence in the actings of Abraham’s faith it is remarked, “He considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb” (Rom 4:19). He did not dwell in his thoughts about it, but cast it out of his mind, passed it by. The stability of the promise and the faithfulness of the great Promiser, he was swallowed up with the contemplation of these. Nothing else had room in his heart.

This is the way to be kept from sinful staggerings: to keep our eye fixed and steady upon God’s promise. Had not this good woman in my text so done, her frame of mind and heart would never have been so sweet and so exceedingly becoming. It is the mere weakness of faith, says the great Dr. Owen,³⁰ that makes a man lie poring upon the difficulties and seeming impossibilities which lie in the way of a promise. An acquiescence in God’s will, a resting upon His Word, an eye to His wisdom, power, all-sufficiency, and faithfulness in all He does, will keep a man from staggering when the storms and waves of God’s providence beat ever so fast and strong upon him—because he hath God, “I AM THAT I AM,” wherewith to answer every rebellious doubt and sinful fear. This is another of those blessed effects that flow from the disposition in my text.

Faith in God’s promise and power will bring a man to submit to the sorest and most trying dispensations of Providence. Faith in lively exercise will teach the Christian to say of all that God does, “It is well” done.

Sure this doctrine is never out of season. Sovereign remedies are good to lay by against a time of need, but the use and value of them is best known when the time of trial is. It is a good hint that I have met with in one author, “We are perfect in no lessons so much as those into which God whippeth us.” We cannot speak of any argument so warmly and feel-

²⁹ **ruled case** – settled decision by the authoritative judge.

³⁰ **John Owen** (1616-1683) – called “The Prince of the Puritans”; committed to the Congregational way of church government; chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell and vice-chancellor of Oxford University; minister in congregational churches. His written works comprise twenty-four volumes representing the best resources for theology. Born to Puritan parents in the Oxfordshire village of Stadhampton, England.

ingly as when we preach out of present experience. When a man feels his wants and his weaknesses, being ready to faint in the day of adversity, let a friend then bring the cordial that he has recommended before without success, and he is welcome—because there is a special suitableness in the remedy to his present case and circumstances.

Believers themselves look at trouble too much as a distant thing. It is needful that we be undeceived in this, for else God will have our heart less, and we shall have less of the comfort that arises from His perfections, His promises, and His covenant. Hence we read of the trial of faith as being precious (1Pe 1:7). A believer is a gainer by all the exercise, conflicts, and oppositions of his faith; because his faith honours God, God will maintain, establish, and increase it. Wherein faith honours God, and how it supports, quiets, and relieves the soul in all its dangers, and under all its fears, my text tells us. It teaches the Christian to say of all God does, *“It is well”* done.

3). *Immoderate sorrow*

Thirdly, the state that my text speaks of likewise prevents immoderate sorrow. *“It is well”*—God-glorifying language, benefitting the mouth of a Christian whose life, whose refuge, [whose] trust the Lord is. It is not: *“I am ruined and undone; I have lost my all; my heart is overwhelmed; it is quite broke; what good will my life do me? Oh! where is my comfort? Sure I have no interest in Christ and His covenant; God would not else show me such great and sore troubles as these.”* No; here is not one word, not the least show of this sort. She leaves her son where she had ventured her soul, and, because God has done it, all is well. She has nothing to object, no fault to find with God.

In like manner David, when he was greatly distressed and the people talked of stoning him, He “encouraged himself in the LORD his God” (1Sa 30:6). As God had given him the promise of a kingdom, he will trust himself in His hands, and leave Him to bring it about by what means He pleases. A little faith, when it is in lively exercise, will carry a man above great distresses. Why? Because it discovers an ordered covenant, a wise providence, sure promises, and a faithful God. Little faith will make great improvements here!

“Shall I,” says the Christian, “mourn immoderately for the loss of a creature, when my God, my Jesus, lives? Is not my heart His? Are not His love and covenant mine? Must I needs live upon my losses? If He has taken away, did He not first give? And what though my name dies and is extinct in this only branch of my family, His name remains; my God is better than many sons!”

Again,

“My child is not lost, though he is absent; I shall go to him. And wherein does there appear anything hard, that one who is born from above—whose treasure is above, whose heart and whose conversion are above—that God should satisfy every desire at once and take him to Himself? ‘It is well’; he is taken from the evil to come; he is gone to be with Christ, which is far better than to be here; his race is soon run, his work is soon ended. Had he not been so soon ripe, he had not been so soon gathered. It is well for him and well for me, for God will have more of my heart, my love, my trust, my praise now. The creature stole it away, and I perceived it not; now the creature is taken, I find how I loved it: Lord, I acquiesce.”

Thus the streams of the Christian’s sorrows are stopped, at least they are turned another way; for if he laments, it is his sins rather than his afflictions—and here there is always cause of mourning, and but little danger of excess in it.

4). *Heartless complaints*

Fourthly, this state also prevents heartless complaints. The Shunamite in my text wholly looks over all second causes and goes directly to the first. God hath done it; all events are appointed and ordered by Him. “My times,” says the psalmist, “are in thy hand” (Psa 31:15)—i.e., Thou hast the care of all that concerns me, and Thou wilt perform it. There is nothing wherein believers show a meaner³¹ spirit, and yet few sins beset them more easily, than an anxious concern and fretful care about some outward things that have in themselves no power to do good or evil, other than as instruments in God’s hands to attain His appointed end. Shall we quarrel with the sword because it suffered itself to be drawn? or be angry with the air because it is polluted? No second cause can act without the direction of the first; there is no design in the instrument as an instrument that acts, but [only] as ordered by Him Who uses it.

It has grieved me to hear Christians aggravate their trials and debase their profession³² by looking back to this and the other circumstance, dwelling upon it as what gave rise to the whole affliction. “Oh! if I had but had such advice!—Had I but thought!—That I should consent my child should go to such a place!—That I should not foresee!” And yet all the while the man believes God’s purposes and decrees, and that He “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph 1:11). How beneath a Christian is this! Can you set aside divine counsels? or would you alter an ordered covenant? Use the means; but live upon God’s power, wisdom, and faithfulness, Who blesses or blasts them just as He pleases. To do other-

³¹ **meaner** – more common; not rising above one’s natural tendency.

³² **profession** – expression of faith in Jesus Christ.

wise is to make your burden a thousand times heavier than it is. *“It is well.”*

That is the only reconciling principle under the severest trials. Even under lighter strokes, mere casual things as they appear to us, the soul can have no rest till he issues his concern here. I have known little insignificances very vexing and grieving, and the more so because one thinks how easily they might have been prevented. But the best way to quiet the soul is to eye God’s hand. “I was dumb,” says the psalmist, “I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it” (Psa 39:9). Well these evils are prevented by the disposition in my text.

b. Blessings Procured

There are also four real positive blessings that [submission to God’s will] procures.

1). *Inward peace*

It gives inward peace, be the burden or trial what it will. “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living” (Psa 27:13). But this cheered him; this revived, composed, and settled him, that God would appear on his side and right his cause against the many that breathed out cruelty (vs. 12)—even so: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isa 26:3). There is nothing but peace at such a time because he has a God to overbalance every trouble. Trust enters into the secret of his heart; his thoughts are full of it; he no sooner allows himself to think, but he begins to trust and stay³³ himself upon his God; and there is enough in God to bear him up.

Can a soul sink that has almightiness, everlasting strength, and faithfulness to lean on?—who has a rock underneath him, which has borne it out against all storms, and will never fail till everlasting life comes? Hence David prays: “When my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I” (Psa 61:2). This gives perfect peace. Let whatever trial come, though it may shake him, it does not unsettle him; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. Oh! how deep are His counsels; how wise His designs! His thoughts are not as our thoughts; our thoughts are of yesterday, but His are of old, even from everlasting. We see but some rough sketches of His work; but faith throws a beauty upon these, because it gives a subsistence to things hoped for and a convincing demonstration even of things as yet not seen (Heb 11:1).

³³ stay – rest; abide; remain.

As for God, says faith, His work is perfect; let Him alone with His own work, His own cause; it is in the best of hands. What! shall His gospel drop because we see a flower fade, which we thought would have been very beautiful and adorning in His church? Yea, let God choose for Himself, that you may know He is God; He will lay aside an instrument we thought ready polished for His work, and choose and square another that shall do equal [or] more service. He will appear God in all things. Believe all to be well, and amidst the most distressing vicissitudes³⁴ of providence your soul shall be at rest. This is one blessing arising from the disposition my text speaks of.

2). Enduring patience

[Submission to God's will] gives an enduring patience. "Behold," says the Apostle, "we count them happy which endure" (Jam 5:11). Whence arises this endurance, this longsuffering, which is the crown of patience? Paul tells us: "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom 5:3). It is from a review of the blessed issue of all former trials: tribulation has worked patience; all things have worked together for good (Rom 8:28), and that unthought of by us—and why should the stream of God's everlasting love or the tenor of His covenant be now turned backwards? Why must our God cease to be Jehovah now, any more than heretofore? What new trial can be so shocking as to un rivet our faith, our trust, and affiancement³⁵ in Him?—seeing there is no trial new to God, no trial for which He did not lay by support and comfort for us, according to His own purpose and grace, which "was given us in Christ before the world began" (2Ti 1:9). Everlasting strength! What burden is so heavy as to depress that? Everlasting consolation! What trial so great as to suck up the fulness and sweetness of that! A covenant ordered in all things and sure! What stress of sorrow can make a confusion there?

Our Saviour knew the virtue and good of patience, as well as His disciples' need of it, when He commanded them, "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luk 21:19). A man cannot possess himself without this—he is at the beck³⁶ of every trial; every mere inconvenience in life has power to depress him, and to hurry him away from himself. Oh, whither does a poor soul fly when he forgets his God? He wanders from mountain to hill, and comes back just as he went, finding no resting place. A Christian cannot enjoy himself if he does not at the same time enjoy his God, because the springs of patience are all hid in Him. There is no waiting patiently for the

³⁴ **vicissitude** – change of circumstance, often for the worse.

³⁵ **affiance** – pledge to marry; betrothal.

³⁶ **beck** – a call or summon by nodding.

Lord if there be not a believing that God does all things well. This disposition begets enduring patience.

3). *Living expectations*

[Submission to God's will] creates in the soul living expectations. "I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" (Isa 8:17). It denotes not only the soul's willingness to stay God's time, but a blessed expectation of some great fruit of his faith and patience.

"He will come at last," says the Christian when in this state, "and salvation is in His hand. Unto the Lord our God belong the issues from death—even His rod shall bud and blossom (Num 17:18)—and I am looking out to see the return of my long prayers: how is it God will sanctify and sweeten this affliction, and make it turn to my soul's good. It shall be well; I can see so much of God in the appointing, ordering, continuing this trial, that I am sure the end will be peace."

It shall be well if He *removes His hand*; it has been a prayed mercy, therefore come when it will, it will be sweet. It shall be well if He *continues the trial*; I shall lose the mere dross, and my grace be purer and fitter for exercises in the service of a holy Lord God. And it shall be well if *I am removed by it*; for, Lord, Thy time is mine—so I get safe to glory, Thou shalt choose the way. O my gracious God, always choose for me, and spare not the rod for Thy child's crying, though this state should not always abide. I have now living, precious, increasing comforts, and these are not given for nothing; why not die and go to heaven now, when my heart is there already? I can triumph in the Lord, and why should not my next work be to rejoice eternally in His presence?" This is the height of Christian expectation, and this also flows from the disposition in my text.

4). *Settled praise*

[Submission] begets in the soul settled praise and thankfulness. The Christian is in a state in everything to give thanks, as the apostle directs (1Th 5:18). He can bless a taking as well as a giving God; he is assured all is well. And were God to put the question, Wherein wilt thou have it otherwise? with all cheerfulness he would refer the matter back again to Him, would dare by no means to set up [to be] his own chooser.

Brethren, look back and you will find your moods have been usually sweetest when your trials have been sorest; when tribulations abound, comfort abounds too. "Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2Co 4:9). This holds good of every Christian. Communion with Christ is a heaven upon earth; to enjoy Him is to enjoy everything. Hence Job blesses God in the loss of all things, and our holy reformers sang

praises in the flames.³⁷ Nothing terrified, nothing distressed them; they knew that they had in heaven a God, a Christ, a mansion prepared; they saw all was well and they were satisfied, they were delighted. They were “more than conquerors,” as the apostle speaks, “through him that loved” them (Rom 8:37). Oh, how sweet, how becoming, is a praising disposition! “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me” (Psa 50:23). In your most afflicted state, there is a foundation for praise; and then there will be a disposition for praise when, looking into God’s providential dispensations, you can say with this good woman in my text, “*It is well.*”

Thus have I considered, as God has helped, the blessed fruits and effects of disposition [to submit to God’s will in all circumstances of life].

5. Faith and Submission

It appears that this submission to providential dispensations flows from faith being in lively and vigorous exercise. For the apostle lays the ground of this blessed faith as drawn into exercise by the Spirit of God: “Through faith...women received their dead raised to life again” (Heb 11:33-35).

a. Faith to View Unseen Things

It is by faith we are helped to take *a view of unseen things*. This is what supports and refreshes the Christian under dark dispensations, that he looks “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” (2Co 4:18). God’s everlasting love and sure covenant; Christ the mediator,³⁸ surety,³⁹ and trustee of the covenant; the wisdom, power, and faithfulness of a covenant God; and the purchased possession when the end comes—by these faith sees its mark and takes its aim. The believer knows this world is a world of trial; he expects and would be taking up his daily cross—but then he sees something better beyond it. All will be well when he gets above, and he is for having as much of the comfort and happiness of heaven as he can in his way to it. He therefore looks

³⁷ **sang...in the flames** – Many who stood for the truth of justification by faith alone during the Reformation and its aftermath, were put to death by those who sought to preserve the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church over the Bible.

³⁸ **mediator** – a go-between; “It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.” (1689 London Baptist Confession 8.1; see also “Christ the Mediator,” *Free Grace Broadcaster* #183; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)

³⁹ **surety** – one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another.

at eternal things, endeavours to keep his eye and his heart upon the blessed place where his treasure is. His life is hid with Christ in God. Thus his affections are set on things above, and this quickens and enlivens his patience when trials lie long and heavy upon him. It takes off the bitterness that there is in the cup of affliction. It is like the tree that was cast into the waters of Marah to make them sweet and wholesome, “And they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter” (Exo 15:22-23).

Creature expectations God usually disappoints. That blessing of which the Christian is ready to say, as Lamech did of his son Noah, “This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands” (Gen 5:29)—there is the most bitterness, vexation, and disappointment. But when God is pleased to lead the soul higher and to fix its hope and expectation upon Himself, Who is the living God and unchangeable God, this infinitely preponderates⁴⁰ and weighs down creature crosses—and comforts too.

But what is it that gives us a sight of these distant and better things? Why, this is faith: “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Hope looks to *future* good things; for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But faith gives them a *present* subsistence; it mixes itself with the promise, and thereby tastes the goodness and experiences the power of it, and receives the first-fruits of promised blessings. Abraham saw Christ’s day and rejoiced, because faith gave a present subsistence to it in Abraham’s apprehension and judgment. There was as great a reality in it to Abraham’s faith as if he had lived in John the Baptist’s time; and accordingly, there were suitable actings of his soul about it—he “was glad” (Joh 8:56). Faith substantiates things unseen; it brings distant things near and gives such an evidence, such a demonstration of them, as carries with it an answer to all objections to the contrary. It silences every objection of unbelief; so that the soul rests upon them, casts anchor on them—which anchor is “both sure and steadfast” because it enters “into that within the veil” (Heb 6:19). It keeps a man from being blown about with every wind or storm that rises. Faith it is that helps the believer to view unseen things, and hence it is the ground of his acquiescing and approving of all that God does.

b. Faith to Show the Fruits of Trials

Faith stills and composes the soul in every dispensation because it shows *the blessed fruits and effects of all past trials*. Faith is the believer’s best remembrance, when it is drawn into exercise by the Spirit of God.

⁴⁰ **preponderates** – outweighs.

Thus Asaph speaks when he comes a little to himself: “And I said, This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High” (Psa 77:10). Before, it was: “I remembered God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed” (vs. 3). But when faith revives, that sets all to right again:

“I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?” (vv. 11-13).

[As if to say,]

“I will see whether I cannot find help given in a like extremity, whether there is nothing in my experience to match it. God’s right hand has done wonders, and His hand is not shortened that it cannot save. In the mount of the Lord it has been seen. I have been able to put an ‘hitherto’ at the end of every distress and trial: ‘Hitherto hath the LORD helped us’ (1Sa 7:12); and shall I ever have occasion to alter? I am well persuaded...that I [never] shall have occasion to say, ‘He hath left me, He hath forsaken me.’ When I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not. I cannot see Thy path, but I shall soon glory in Thy work. ‘Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron’ (vs. 20).”

This is a great ground of patience and submission to the will of God, what God has done. And this should come more often into our meditations when we are looking on our present difficulties and trials of faith. Forgetfulness is a sin that easily besets God’s choicest saints. Their need of past trials, their help under them, the blessed fruits and effects that have attended them—these are soon forgotten; but faith brings them to remembrance. It leads a Christian far back, and so helps him to say of all God does, “*It is well.*”

c. Faith to Lead to God

Further, submission flows from faith because it *leads the soul to God*, and fetches strength from Him under every new trial and emergency. There is no living upon past states or past mercies; a receiving life is what every believer lives. “Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (Joh 1:16). There must be a daily coming to Christ for grace to help in time of need. “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God” (1Pe 2:4); [coming] for support, strength, subsistence. Faith is one continued act in the soul; it is our daily, our hourly work. Our life is in Another, not in ourselves. And how is this life maintained?—by spiritual communications from Christ, Who is the bread of life, and the Rock Who gives us drink, following us in the wilderness for this very end: “And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink

the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1Co 10:3-4). All the grace His elect should need to the end of time was put into His hands as their covenant head, and He was made trustee of it. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2Ti 1:9).

It is faith that receives that grace from Christ, whether it be pardon, righteousness, preparation for duty, strength under trials and temptations, peace, comfort, and the like. The Spirit shows the believer first what his needs are, and then directs him to Christ for the supply of them. Faith takes hold of, receives, and applies what Christ gives; and so feeds, supports, and sustains the soul. Hence the same things that are spoken of Christ are applied to faith.

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

Never can we say, “All is well,” when faith sinks! No, then “All these things are against me” (Gen 42:36). There must be a revival before it comes to this.

You know how it was of old with Elisha’s servant (2Ki 6:15). The king of Syria sends horses and chariots, a very great host, to fetch the prophet; he found nothing was to be done against Israel while he was there. When the poor servant sees this, he was greatly distressed and cries out, “Alas, my master! how shall we do?” He thought of nothing but destruction till God opened his eyes, and then he saw a mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about them. So faith—when it sees God for us, God with us—bids defiance to the whole world. What are trials, crosses, disappointments, when God lives and God is ours? They are ordered by Him, and by Him shall they be overruled. His covenant love and faithfulness are the same now as they ever were.

Soul! there is mercy laid by against this trial; the end of it is peace. The God of all peace will stablish, strengthen, and settle you. There is a rock that is higher than you; the foundation of God standeth sure. You want⁴¹ nothing but your Lord has it to give, and He will withhold no good thing from him that walks uprightly. There is grace laid up in Christ for every emergency; this faith receives, and this is a further ground of patience and submission under every trial.

⁴¹ want – lack.

d. Faith to Abide by the Promise

Submission [to God's will] is grounded on faith because it *teaches a Christian to abide by the promise* when all promised supply fails. Thus says Jacob when he is in danger of falling into the hands of an angry brother with four hundred men: "Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good" (Gen 32:12). He had nothing to fly to but the promise; but that was hold enough because that takes hold of God—the great, the faithful, the holy God. It is God's Word, His Word of grace; and grace, you know, is His darling⁴² attribute: "The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exo 34:6). "And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good" (Gen 32:12).

The best thing we can say to God is what He hath first said to us; promises are the sweetest grounds of hope, the sweetest pleas in prayer. God—that knows all His purposes and designs, that knows how far His promise goes; God almighty, that can do all He has promised; the true God, He that cannot lie—has spoken it, Who will therefore do what He has said.

"Oh," says the soul, "the promises will bring forth; the vision is for an appointed time. I do but credit God, and He is a tried God. It shall be well. Mercy shall be built up forever, though it does not yet appear in view, for 'all the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies' (Psa 25:10)."

Hence Joshua pleads as Jacob did, "O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!...what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" (Jos 7:8-9). [Faith says,]

"Who can secure the glory of that but Himself only? But He is a God that keepeth covenant and mercy; surely, then, He will not lay it aside. He keeps His covenant to show it forth, to make it known. Sooner or later, help will come."

However, faith also says, "Should it not come, I will die trusting." Hence say the three children, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods" (Dan 3:17-18). If a doubt may be made of this particular deliverance, we will still persevere in a course of duty. "The Lord he is God" (Dan 4:35), and His name "is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe" (Pro 18:10). "Thither," says the soul, "will I flee. If God cannot, or if He will not save, I am ready to perish. Elsewhere I cannot, I will not look, for this God is my salvation. And 'though he slay me, yet will I trust

⁴² **darling** – favorite.

in him' (Job 13:15)." Faith hangs on the promise, and so it helps to submission.

6. Applications

Thus have we gone through the several things proposed from the text. What remains is the use and improvement of the subject, in doing which I shall confine myself chiefly to this single inquiry: What considerations and directions are there that may be of use, under the aids of the Spirit, in order to our obtaining this blessed state my text speaks of: [the continual submission to God's will regardless of circumstances]?

a. Directions

1). Judge nothing before the time.

Judge nothing before the time. When the end comes, pass a judgment on providential dispensations; not before. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD" (Psa 107:43). David's haste might have cost him dear: "I said in my haste, All men are liars" (Psa 116:11). [It is as if David had said,] "Samuel and all are liars: I shall never obtain the kingdom; I shall now perish by the hand of Saul." It was well God did not take him at his word, as he refused to credit God. God works often above means; sometimes without them; nay, sometimes contrary to them—but it is a settled rule with Him, which every believer has found true in experience, namely, "He led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation" (Psa 107:7). There may appear some flaws at present, but there will be none in the end; it will appear to be the right way. Wherefore, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jam 4:10). Humbling providences are sweetest in the end, for they bring a man to himself—and till a man be thoroughly emptied of self, he can never, as he ought, prove Christ.⁴³

What though God bereave you of children, friends, substance, health?—"All is well." There is no empty, void space, but what He Himself fills up. "Surely," says one, "he dieth oft whose life is bound up in the dying creature; as oft as a creature fails, his hope fails, his heart fails. When the creature dieth, his hope giveth up the ghost." He lives an unchangeable life only, who by faith can live on an unchangeable God. Do not say what His end is till you see it. Many a saint has eaten his own words for want of this: "I said in my haste, I am cut off from before thine eyes: nev-

⁴³ **prove Christ** – show Christ to be true and faithful in all He has said in the Scriptures.

ertheless thou heardest the voice of my supplications when I cried unto thee" (Psa 31:22). These hasty speeches are seldom right ones.

2). *Keep God with His Promise.*

Bring the promise and a promising God close together; whatever be the promise, consider He is faithful that hath promised. All intervening difficulties should be viewed in the light of the promise. What is that? Why, all things are yours, and all things work together for good. We need our crosses as well as our comforts. Are we through many tribulations to enter the kingdom? Then we must have these tribulations before we possess it. Abraham, you have heard, "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief" (Rom 4:20); he, against hope, believed in hope. He left out all buts, whys, and ifs; he had God's word of promise. He knew God's arm of power, and also that He was faithful Who had promised—that is enough! But we shall never say, "All is well," till God's promise and faithfulness are brought closer together. Faith sets all difficulties aside, removes them out of the way, never considering them but in the light of the promise.

3). *Consider the grace of the covenant.*

Consider the grace and order of the covenant: "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (2Sa 23:5). Everything is wisely adjusted there; the sending of trials, as well as the removal of them, come under the covenant and promise. "My covenant," says God, "will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Psa 89:34). What that was you have in vv. 30 and 32: "If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments...Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes." And the Christian, when faith is in exercise, would have it so—would have every cross and every trial, that patience may "have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting [i.e., lacking] nothing" (Jam 1:4). "Give me," said the prodigal, all "the portion of goods that falleth" to my share (Luk 15:12)—the believer would have the same thing, though he asks for it for different ends. "Therefore, behold," says God, "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her" (Hos 2:14); but wilderness feelings attend wilderness dispensations—and they are sweet ones. The duty of some sore visitations has been, to many, the time of special love. There is a time to favour Zion, a season of mercy; be it a time of affliction, adversity, temptation, or whatever else—"all is well." The covenant stands sure, and everlasting love runs through every trial that befalls you. First, bless God for the grace of the covenant, and then for the order of it.

4). *Weigh your sins before your trials.*

Weigh your sins and your mercies together before you look at any of your trials. Never think of your sufferings but at the same time think of your sins; afflictions will sit light where sin sits heavy. You will find then that you have sinned away this comfort, and overloved the other blessings; have abused God's mercy, and stood in need of His rod—for He does not "afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men" (Lam 3:33). Whatever be the temptation or affliction, there is a need of it.

Then, have we no mercies under our strong temptations and sore trials? The church, upon consideration, found it [just the opposite]. Though God had written bitter things against her in righteousness, "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lam 3:22). No trial is so grievous and bitter but it might have been worse.

5). *Exercise faith much.*

Be much in the actings of present faith. Thou lovest a child, a friend, a husband, or wife; but thou hast not lost thy God. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul" (Psa 94:19). As much confusion as I have within, I have comfort when I look above. My thoughts are dark and doleful, intricate and perplexing, and there is a multitude of them that break in upon me, as if they would swallow me up—but Thy comforts are life, light, and delight to my soul. My thoughts do not sink me deep, but Thy comforts are a heaven to me. "It is well," God hath said. "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me" (Jer 49:11). If they are God's care they shall be well provided for. He that feedeth the ravens and clotheth the lilies, will He be less kind and bountiful to thee (Mat 6:26-29)? "The earth is the LORD's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psa 24:1). Every heart is at God's disposal; rather than His poor shall want bread, God will feed them from their enemies' table.

You have a certain promise; God hath given His word and there is no exception to it: "Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed" (Psa 37:3). I had rather, says one, have God's *amen*, His *verily*, than a promise from all the princes or potentates of the world; if God has said it, it shall be well. Be much, then, in the actings of present faith. Believe for this trial; believe today. Put not off till you see how things will go—that is to *know*, not to *trust*.

Faith brings down general promises to a man's own particular case and circumstances. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5)—there is the promise. Says faith,

“Lord, I trust Thee, I credit Thee upon that word of Thine. I am poor, but the poor committeth himself to Thee. I am a widow and desolate as to outward comforts, but I trust in God. The Lord ‘thy Maker is thine husband’ (Isa 54:5); ‘fear not, nor be dismayed,’ for He will help and uphold thee (1Ch 28:20; Isa 41:10)—it is as easy for God to help me in these distressing circumstances as in any other. Thou art the Holy One of Israel. All Thy saints have borne testimony to Thy faithfulness and truth—Lord, shall I be an exception? Sure, Thou wilt not fail me; I feel Thou hast not. My cup is sweetened by Thy presence and love; Thou strengthenst me with strength in my soul. I will believe; Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief (Mar 9:24). It is well; Lord, it is well.”

Present faith must be enacted when present trials come. God, where He gives a promise, gives faith also to lay hold of it.

6). *Pray much.*

Be much in prayer. Prayer calls in God’s help; almightiness itself can never be worsted. This was David’s first and last refuge, and every saint has found it his best refuge. “In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul” (Psa 138:3). Prayer brought in God, and God brought in strength, and by this the psalmist got the better of all his discontents and fears. It is said of Luther, whatever opposition he found, whatever discontent in his mind or distraction in his soul, he presently carried it to the throne, and never gave over praying till he prayed his heart into the state he prayed for. Jacob, you know, got the blessing; but how? Why, he wrestled for it till break of day, that is, as the prophet explains it, “he wept, and made supplication unto him” (Hos 12:4). He was importunate⁴⁴ in his request. He could take no denial from the blessed Jesus; but put in one plea, then another, till he had power [by] Him, and came away a prevailer. Prayer sets every dispensation in sweet light because it brings in strength from God to the soul, whereby it is helped to wait to the end of it. When our eye and heart are up to God, fixed upon Him, “all is well.” Be much in prayer; carry your difficulties, temptations, fears, unbelief, to God—and leave them with Him.

7). *Think of heaven often.*

Be frequent in thoughts of heaven, your rest, your home, where all your sorrows will have a full end. There remaineth a rest for the people of God (Heb 4:9). Every one of our sorrows takes off one from the account; we are one step the nearer to glory—the same trial is not to come ever again. “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours” (Rev 14:13). Christian, you shall rest from your labours soon; there is a heaven above, and

⁴⁴ **importunate** – persistent.

the hope of it comforts and delights you here. It is well; it must be so. “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11). Heaven will make you amends for everything. What a blessed reckoning Paul made! and do not you account it so too? “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). You have them not all at once; God proportions your day to your strength—it is but here a little and there a little, as you are able to bear it. You have a wise and gracious God, who orders and overrules all that concerns you. Hitherto He has done all things well, and He will perfect that which concerns you.

b. Abiding in a State of Well-being

These considerations are of use to beget and keep alive in the Christian this state [of submission to God’s will which] my text speaks of.

1). Not learned quickly

Do not think this great and sweet lesson is to be learned at once. God teaches His children as you do yours, little by little; something this week, and more the next; something by this affliction, more by another. As our crosses, so neither do our comforts come all at once. The fruit of affliction is not gathered immediately. “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 12:11). The fruit is not gathered instantly; it must have a ripening time. Faith must be tried before it will come out precious as gold does out of the fire. Do not expect to learn this lesson at once, “It is well.” Such knowledge and attainment is the fruit of long experience and observation.

2). Not always with the same ease

Do not expect, if you are able to use the language in my text now, that you shall do it with the same ease and comfort always. Abraham staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief when he received the tidings of a son—but it would seem afterwards he doubted it, when he went in unto Hagar. “Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong,” says David—but let God hide His face, and immediately David is troubled: “thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled” (Psa 30:7). A Christian is flesh as well as spirit. We hear not only of Job’s patience, but of his impatience too.

Observe: we usually read of the failure of the saints in that grace for which they were the most eminent. The reason is this: to show that no man is to be trusted in; no, not to trust himself, or his own heart. A settled, even state of hope and trust, few Christians maintain here.

c. Support when the Promised Blessings Are Not Received

Two things faith sees in the promises, which support and comfort the soul though the promised blessings are not received.

1). Christ in the promise

Faith sees God's Christ in the promise. This was the reach and aim, and the support and comfort, of Old Testament faith. All the promises are but one and the same thing diversified. Christ, and salvation by and in Him, is the substance of all the promises. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen" (2Co 1:20). Be the promise in itself never so sweet, so suitable and engaging, if Christ be not even in it, it is a dry breast, a well without water. How is the curse taken away? is the first inquiry of a poor guilty sensible soul, "How can man be just with God?" A sight of Christ in the promise is the only satisfying resolve; He is called therefore the rest and refreshing of His people, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing" (Isa 28:12). Let a poor soul see Christ and tell of Him—of peace with God, interest in the covenant, special guidance here, and of everlasting life and glory hereafter—[and] all is well. He can believe and stay himself upon the promise. Why? because there is nothing to hinder the performance of the promise. Christ has died, therefore God is just in justifying the ungodly (Rom 4:5); Christ was made sin and a curse, therefore God is to His people a blessed God (2Co 5:21; Gal 3:13). Christ has triumphed over death, therefore in Christ's name, and by virtue of relation to Him, believers can sing, "Oh! death, where is thy sting?" (1Co 15:55). Or if the clouds be thick and dark in a dying hour, they can trust Christ to be their guide through death; "yea, though I walk through the valley" (Psa 23:4). The faith on which they lived is a tried faith, and they can venture upon the same basis into eternity that has carried them safe and comfortable through the storms and tempests of time. That which makes faith so precious, so relieving to the soul, is because its hold is on Christ, its refuge only in Him. Faith sees God's Christ and salvation in the promise; therefore, in the absence of promised good, it supports and relieves the soul.

2). God's heart in the promise

Faith sees God's heart in the promise. What is a promise but an expression of the love of God's heart in word? "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things," says David (2Sa 7:21). That is the secret in all God's promises, and none but a believer can spell it out. Faith looks to God's everlasting covenant love in every promise.

"Is the rod," says the afflicted saint, "put into the promise? then it is good for me that I am afflicted; it would never have been ordained in ev-

erlasting counsels, were it not for the best. Oh! I will kiss the rod; 'not my will, but thine be done' (Luk 22:42). Must faith have a trial? love and patience be tried? Has my Father and my God promised strength equal to my day? It is well. There is love in fixing the trial, or else God would have given no promise to bear me up under it."

Love is in the pain, as well as in the promise. And is it "appointed unto men once to die" (Heb 9:27)? It is the chosen way to the Father's house. Then, says the soul, as once God did to Jacob, "Fear not to go down into Egypt...I will go down with thee" (Gen 46:3).

Your God will not leave you at last, He will go down with you to the chambers of death and see you forth from them. Your Jesus loves and pities your dying, orders your pains, and tells your groans and every sigh of your faith; He stands ready to receive and present it to the Father. God's heart is in all the strokes of His hand. Faith sees God's Christ and His heart in the promises, and therefore acts on these promises, and supports and refreshes the soul by them, though the good promised is not as yet received.

3). God's truth with the promise

This persuasion relates to the things themselves. Gospel principles, gospel doctrines, privileges, duties, they are inlaid in the soul as well as gospel promises. A believer will sooner lose his life than sell God's truth. This persuasion arises not from conjecture, opinion, reasoning, nor merely the authority of the speaker, but from that taste and feeling which he has of the things themselves.

"If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1Pe 2:3). There is no disputing against taste. You have a wicked and rebellious heart, which is ever annoying you with some vain or vile thought in holy duties. Can any man persuade you against original sin, or the remains of corruption in the saints after conversion to God?—it is to speak against your very feeling! So you have felt the power of sovereign grace in conversion, the strength of divine consolations under distress and darkness; you have known what a sure hold the righteousness of Christ is, and the everlasting covenant, and the Redeemer's intercession above. You have been fed and sustained by the promises all your life long. They are the issues of the love of God to your soul, from duty to duty, in all states, circumstances, and conditions.

Thus God opens His heart to you, and melts, cheers, refreshes yours. Can anyone persuade you these blessed doctrines are false, these precious promises but mere imaginary delusive things? You have an answer in your heart more ready than words can ever be to express it. Your soul recoils within you; you even sink to hear your God and His grace so far abused.

d. Embracing the Promises

Faith reveals itself by *embracing* the promises: the word signifies to salute, a metaphor taken from the manner of parting between two dear and intimate friends.

Intimate acquaintance is implied. The saints of old were very chary⁴⁵ of God's promises; they were searching and digging into them to know what [they]—or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them—did signify (1Pe 1:11). Hence is it that one saint tells God's covenant and his own experience to another: Abraham to Isaac to Jacob, etc. The things were familiar to them, their whole soul was in them. Thus should believers live in the frame of meditation on God's promises. If new promises are wanting, go back to those of older date; bless God for them, and your experience from them. A believer, when he is taking his leave⁴⁶ of the promises, takes a sweet farewell of them; though he is going to walk by sight, yet he bears a noble and just testimony to the promises as to their use and sweetness in his walk by faith.

"These," says he, "have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage; my refreshment, and pleasant pools in Baca's vale.⁴⁷ I love them now, though I shall have no more need of them henceforth forever. Oh! my dear friends whom I leave behind, value, and live upon these precious promises."

Acquaintance is one thing intended by them.

The will chooses them and cleaves to them. If a believer has any delight, it is in them! "Oh how love I thy law; how precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God; how great is the sum of them" (Psa 119:97; 139:17). Such are precious interjections; a man's whole soul is wrapped up in them. Persuasion of interest, some humble, desponding saint may want; but not a soul present who wants an hand or heart to embrace the promises. When the Spirit whispers any one to his soul, he catches hold of it, is afraid of looking off it, is humbled and amazed God should thus manifest Himself to him, rejoices in it, and throws away a whole world for it. Try a believer in his darkest state, and you may soon know how his heart stands affected to Christ in the promise. Offer him all that can be thought of in time, and he had rather have a promise of forgiveness, sanctification, freedom from temptation, victory over death, and eternal life afterwards. He despises all in comparison of the promises. Be his fears never so great in

⁴⁵ **chary** – careful.

⁴⁶ **taking his leave** – i.e., about to die physically and go out of this world.

⁴⁷ **Baca's vale** – (Psa 84:6) a picturesque expression for the experiences of those whose strength is in God, and who through His grace find their sorrows changed into blessings.
—Willis J. Beecher

life or death, away his soul goes to the promises; he clasps them in his arms. Many a saint has dropped the tabernacle [i.e., his body in this earthly life] pleading and urging [the promises] before a faithful God.

When we come to be with God, we shall walk by sight. Now we walk by faith (2Co 5:7); and this faith is often weak, therefore the Christian's trust often fails. But though he is moved, he shall never be removed; though he fall, he shall never fail. This is the foundation of every Christian's hope. O that it were more the rejoicing of his hope! May God the Spirit enable us so to do! ❧

'Tis well

*What cheering words are these;
Their sweetness who can tell?
In time and to eternal days,
" 'Tis with the righteous well. "*

*'Tis well when at His throne
They wrestle, weep and pray;
'Tis well when at His feet they groan,
Yet bring their wants away.*

*'Tis well when they can sing
As sinners bought with blood;
And when they touch the mournful string,
And mourn an absent God.*

*'Tis well when on the mount
They feast on dying love;
And 'tis as well, in God's account,
When they the furnace prove.*

*'Tis well when joys arise;
'Tis well when sorrows flow;
'Tis well when darkness veils the skies,
And strong temptations blow.*

*Well when the gospel yields
Pure honey, milk, and wine;
Well when thy soul her leanness feels,
And all her joys decline.*

*Well when they see His face,
Or sink amidst the flood;
Well in affliction's thorny maze,
Or on the mount of God.*

*'Tis well when Jesus calls,
"From earth and sin arise,
Join with the host of virgin souls,
Made to salvation wise. "*

*In every state secure,
Kept as Jehovah's eye,
'Tis well with them while life endure,
And well when called to die.*