

HEARING THE ROD

By Arthur W. Pink

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

“Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). How can it be otherwise, living as he is in a world which is under the curse that Adam’s sin entailed, and, what is worse, under God’s judgment because of its casting out of His beloved Son. Yet the subject of “trouble” needs to be “rightly divided” if we are to properly heed that exhortation, “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Ephesians 5:17), an important part of which consists in understanding the meaning and message of our Father to us in all the “trouble” which we encounter and experience.

As we turn to the Holy Scriptures for light upon this subject of Trouble, Suffering, Affliction, Tribulation, Persecution etc., we discover two distinct and different lines of Truth thereon, running all through the Word. On the one hand we read that, “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), parallel with which are such passages as Luke 6:26, 2 Timothy 3:12 etc. But on the other hand, we read that “the curse causeless shall not come” (Proverbs 26:2), that God does not “afflict willingly” (Lamentations 3:33), and that “if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Corinthians 11:31). Much of the “trouble” and “affliction” experienced by us, we bring upon ourselves, through our own folly. We see this plainly exemplified in the natural realm: how many are now suffering bodily ills through intemperate eating and drinking; how many are nervous wrecks as the result of “burning the candle at both ends”!

The same principle holds good in the spiritual realm: the chastening rod of God is upon many of His children because of their self-will and self-pleasing: some of them are passing through sore financial straits because their “sins have withholden” God’s temporal mercies (Jeremiah 5:25); still others, who have been favoured with clear and definite light from separating themselves from religious associations which dishonour Christ—and because they have not walked therein, the Lord has “hedged up their way with thorns” (Hosea 2:6). Nevertheless, it would be a serious mistake to draw the inference that every time we see a suffering Christian, we behold one who has seriously displeased God, and therefore is now being severely chastised by Him. It would be wrong to form such a conclusion concerning every case, because trouble and suffering issue from other causes, and are sent by God for other purposes than the reproof of sin—sent sometimes to experimentally fit the recipient for greater and higher usefulness in the service of Christ: compare 2 Corinthians 1:4.

Now from what has been pointed out above, it should be quite clear that real exercise of heart is called for from each one of us whenever painful trials come upon us; that we need to get down before God, and cry, “show me wherefore Thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2). To take this attitude is the part of wisdom, for if God be dealing with us over something that has displeased Him, and we fail to humble ourselves before Him and learn of Him what it is which is now choking the channel of His highest blessing toward us, and obtain grace from Him to put right what is wrong, then the chastening “profits” us not, and further and increased chastisement must be our portion; for it is not until we are “exercised thereby,” exercised in conscience, that we have any promise it will issue in “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).

If the “trouble” through which we are passing at any period of our lives be a reproof from God because of our sins or unfaithfulness, and instead of suspecting that He is displeased with us and taking our place in the dust before Him, begging Him to put His finger on the festering sore in our hearts: if instead, we proudly imagine that there is nothing wrong in our lives, that we have given God no cause to smite us, and complacently assume that we are suffering only for “righteousness’ sake,” and draw comfort from such promises as Matthew 5:11, 12, we are deceived by Satan, and are but “forsaking our own mercy” (Jonah 2:8). It is written, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper” (Proverbs 28:13). Thus, whenever “trouble” comes upon a Christian it is always the safest policy to come to the Lord and say, “Teach me, and I will hold my tongue: and cause me to understand wherein I have erred” (Job 5:24).

From what has been said above, it will be seen that it often falls to the lot of God’s servants to perform a duty which is most unpleasant to the flesh. When they come into contact with a Brother or Sister who is passing through deep waters, their natural desire is to administer comfort, but in some instances (at least) to do so would

be guilty of “healing also the hurt of the daughter of My people slightly”: and how is this done? The same verse tells us, by “saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14). That was what the “false prophets” had done to Israel, and that was the very thing which carnal Israel desired: their demand was, “Prophesy not unto us right things, speak to us smooth things, prophesy deceits” (Isaiah 30:10); and human nature has not changed any since then!

It is a thankless task for any true servant of Christ today to be faithful to his Master, and faithful to the souls of those with whom he deals. Not that God requires him to think the worst of every case that comes to his notice, but that it is his bounden duty to exhort each one to act on Job 10:2. But if he does do so, he may be assured at the beginning, that in the majority of cases he will be looked upon as harsh, hypercritical, unkind, like one of Job’s censorious comforters; for there are few indeed who have an honest heart, are ready to know the worst about themselves, and are willing to be cut by the knife of God’s Word. The great majority want only comfort, the “promises” of Scripture, the message of “Peace, peace.”

But do not the Promises of God belong unto His children? Certainly they do: but here too “there is a season, and a time to every purpose” (Ecclesiastes 3:1): there is a time when we may rightfully draw consolation and strength from the promises, and there is a time when we may not legitimately do so. When all is right between our souls and God, when every known sin has been confessed, and forsaken in sincere purpose of heart, then may we righteously draw milk from the breasts of Divine consolation. But just as there are time when it would be injurious for us to eat some of the things we do when we are well, so to take unto ourselves comfort from the Divine promises while sin is cherished in our hearts, is baneful and sinful.

The above (now slightly revised) was recently sent by us in a letter to one passing through deep waters. It occurred to us that it might be a timely word for others. Many are now in the fiery furnace, and few indeed are there capable of speaking to them a word in season. It is not sufficient to bid them “Trust in God,” and assure them that brighter days are ahead. The conscience needs to be searched; the wound must be probed and cleansed, before it is ready for “the balm of Gilead”; we must humble ourselves “beneath the mighty hand of God” (1 Peter 5:6), if we are to be exalted again by Him in “due time.” May the Lord be pleased to bless the above unto some of “His own.”