

For the Sick and Afflicted

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that the Christian must humbly and cheerfully accept God's chastening as a loving discipline, forsake sin, and submit wholly to His will for spiritual growth and glory.

Scripture: Job 34:31-32, Romans 8:28, Hebrews 12:6, John 15:2, Job 1:21, Psalm 119:71, 2 Corinthians 12:10

Topics: "Divine Chastisement", "Christian Suffering", "Submission to God"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon addresses those who are suffering under God's discipline, encouraging them to accept their affliction with humility and joy. He emphasizes the importance of self-examination, repentance, and wholehearted submission to God's will. Spurgeon reminds believers that God's chastening is an expression of His love and a means to spiritual growth, urging them to trust and glorify God through their trials.

Transcript

"Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more: that which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Job 34:31, 32

EVEN WHEN ADDRESSING our fellow-men there should be a fitness about our speech; therefore Solomon represents the preacher as seeking out acceptable words, or words meet for the occasion. When we approach those who are high in authority this necessity becomes conspicuous, and therefore men who are petitioners in the courts of princes are very careful to order their language aright. Much more, then, when we speak before the Lord ought we to consider, as the text does, the meetness of our words. Some language must never be uttered in the divine presence, and even that which is allowed must be well weighed, and set forth with solemn humbleness. Hence Elihu does well to suggest in the text language that is "meet to be said unto God." May our lips ever be kept as by a watchful sentinel, lest they suffer anything to pass through them dishonorable to the Most High. In the divine presence■ and we are always there■ it is incumbent upon us to set a double watch over every word that comes from our mouth.

Remember that thought is speech before God. Thought is not speech to man, for men cannot read one another's thoughts until they are set forth by words or other outward signs, but God who reads the heart regards that as being speech which was never spoken, and he hears us say in our souls many things which were never uttered by our tongues. Beloved, there are thoughts which are not meet to be thought before the Lord; and it is well for us, especially those of us who are afflicted, to be very watchful over those thoughts, lest the Lord hear us say in our hearts things which will grieve his Spirit, and provoke him to

jealousy. O saints of God, since you never think except in the immediate presence of your heavenly Father, make a conscience of your every thought, lest you sin in the secret chambers of your being, and charge God foolishly. Elihu tells us what it would be proper for us to think and say, "It is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend more: that which I see not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

We will use the text mainly at this time in reference to those who are being chastened; and afterwards we shall see if there is not teaching in it, even to those who, at present, are not smarting under the rod. Thirdly, we shall find a word in our text to those who are not the children of God, and, therefore, know nothing of the smarting rod of fatherly correction. Perhaps to them, also, God may speak through this text. O that his Holy Spirit may deign to do so.

I. But first, dear friends, let us commune together upon the text in its more natural application as addressed TO THE AFFLICTED. The instruction of the wise man is for them especially, and there are three duties here prescribed for them, or rather three privileges suggested, which they should pray the Holy Spirit to enable them to enjoy.

The first lesson is, it is meet for them to accept the affliction which the Lord sends, and to say unto God, "I have borne chastisement." We notice that the word "chastisement" is not actually in the Hebrew, though the Hebrew could not be well interpreted without supplying the word. It might exactly and literally be translated "I bear," or "I have borne." It is the softened heart saying to God, "I bear whatever thou wilt put upon me; I have borne it, I still bear it, and I will bear it, whatever thou mayest ordain it to be. I submit myself entirely to thee, and accept the load with which thou art pleased to weight me." Now, we ought to do this, dear friends, and we shall do it if we are right at heart. We should cheerfully submit, because no affliction from which we suffer has come to us by chance. We are not left to the misery of believing that things happen of themselves, and are independent of a divinely controlling power. We know that not a drop of bitter ever falls into our cup unless the wisdom of our heavenly Father has placed it there. We are not even left in a world governed by angels, or ruled by cherubim; we dwell where everything is ordered by God himself. Shall we rebel against the Most High? Shall we not let him do as seemeth good in his sight? Shall we not cover our lip in silence when we know that the evil is of the Lord? Shame upon us, if we be his children, if this be not the prevalent spirit of our mind■ "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." Moreover, we should not only bear all things because the Lord ordains them, but because he orders all things for a wise, kind, beneficent purpose. He doth not afflict willingly. He takes no delight in the sufferings of his children. Whenever adversity must come it is always with a purpose; and, if a purpose of God is to be subserved by my suffering, would I wish to escape from it? If his glory will come of it, shall I not even crave the honor of being the agent of his glory, even though it be by lying passive and enduring in anguish. Yes, beloved, since we know that God can only grieve his regenerated creatures for some purpose of love, we should willingly accept whatever sorrow he pleases to put upon us. And we have his assurance, besides, that all things work together for our good. Our trials are not merely sent with a good object, but with an object good towards ourselves, a design which is being answered by every twig of our heavenly father's rod. "The cup which our Father hath given us, shall we not drink it?" It is healing medicine and not deadly poison, therefore let us put it to our lips without a murmur, ay, quaff it to its very dregs, and say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

A constant submission to the divine will should be the very atmosphere in which a Christian lives. He should put an earnest negative upon his self-will by crying, "Not my will," and then he should with holy warmth beseech the Lord to execute his purpose, saying, "The will of the Lord be done." He should throw

the whole vigor of his soul into the Lord's will, and exhibit more than submission, namely, a devout acquiescence in whatever the Lord appoints.

Beloved friends, we must not be content with bearing what the Lord sends, with the coolness which says, "It must be, and, therefore, I must put up with it." Such forced submission is far below a Christian grace, for many a heathen has attained it. The stolid stoic accepted what predestination handed out to him, and the Mahometan still does the same. We must go beyond unfeeling submission. We must not so harden our hearts against affliction as not to be affected by it. That chastisement which does not make us smart has failed of its end. It is by the blueness of the wound, says Solomon, that the heart is made better; and if there is no real blueness■ if it be merely a surface bruise■ little good will come of it. "For a season we are in heaviness," says the apostle, "through manifold trials," and not only the trial, but the heaviness which comes of it, is needful to us. God would not have his children become like the ox or the ass, which present hard skins to hard blows, but he would have us tender and sensitive. There is such a thing as despising the chastening of the Lord, by a defiant attitude which seems to challenge the Lord to draw a tear or fetch a sigh from us. Against this let us be on our guard.

Neither, on the other hand, are we to receive affliction with a rebellious spirit. It is hard for us to kick against the pricks, like the ox which, when goaded, is irritated, and strikes out and drives the iron into itself deeper than it went before. We can easily do this by complaining that God is too severe with us. In this spirit we may "take arms against a sea of troubles;" but by opposing we shall not end them, but increase their raging. By a proud murmuring spirit we only bring upon ourselves trial upon trial; "the Lord resisteth the proud," and a high spirit challenges his opposition.

Neither, dear friends, as believers in God, are we to despair under trouble, for that is not bearing the cross, but lying down under it. We are to take up our appointed burden, and carry it, and not sit down in wicked sullenness, and murmur that we can do no more. Some are in a very naughty frame of mind, their moody spirits mutter that if God will be so severe with them they must yield to it, but they have lost all heart, and all faith, and all they ask for is leave to die. A child of God must not repine. He has not yet "resisted unto blood, striving against sin"; and, if he had, still he should say, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." Since Jesus, the man of sorrows, never murmured, it ill becomes any of his followers to do so. We must in patience possess our souls. Perhaps you think it easier for me to say this than it would be to practice it; and yet, by Almighty grace, a saint can bear to the utmost of bearing, to the utmost of suffering he can suffer, to the utmost of loss he can lose, and even to the uttermost of death itself he can die daily, and yet triumph through the divine life, for God, that worketh in us to will and to do, is almighty, and makes our weakness strong.

The Christian, then, is not to treat the cross which God puts upon him in any such way as I have described, but he is to accept it humbly, looking up to God, and saying, "Much worse than this I might reckon to receive even as thy child; for the discipline of thine house requireth the rod, and well might I expect to be chastened every morning." The child of God should feel that it is in very faithfulness that the Lord afflicts him, and that every stroke has love in it. Anything over and above the lowest abyss of hell is a great mercy to us. If we had to lie ill for fifty years and scarcely have a minute free from pain, yet since the Lord has pardoned our sins, and accepted us in Christ Jesus, and made us his children, we should be grateful for every pang, and still continue to bless the Lord upon our beds, and sing his high praises in the midst of the fires. Humbly, therefore, as sinners deserving divine wrath, we are bound to accept the chastenings of the Lord.

We should receive chastisement with meek submission, presenting ourselves to God that he may do with us still as he has dealt with us■ not wishing to start aside to the right hand or to the left: asking him, if it may be his will to remove the load, to heal the pain, to deliver us from the bereavement, and the like, but still always leaving ample margin for full resignation of spirit. The gold is not to rebel against the goldsmith, but should at once yield to be placed in the crucible and thrust into the fire. The wheat as it lies upon the threshing-floor is not to have a will of its own, but to be willing to endure the strokes of the flail that the chaff may be separated from the precious corn. We are not far off being purged from dross and cleansed from chaff when we are perfectly willing to undergo any process which the divine wisdom may appoint us. Self and sin are married, and will never be divorced, and till our self-hood is crushed the seed of sin will still have abundant vitality in it; but when it is "not I" but "Christ that liveth in me," then have we come near to that mark to which God has called us, and to which, by his Spirit, he is leading us.

But we ought to go farther than this. We should accept chastisement cheerfully. It is a hard lesson, but a lesson which the Comforter is able to teach us■ to be glad that God should have his way. Do you know what it is sometimes to be very pleased to do what you do not like to do? I mean you would not have liked to do it, but you find that it pleases some one you love, and straightway the irksome task becomes a pleasure. Have you not felt, sometimes, when one whom you very much esteem is sick and ill, that you would be glad enough to bear the pain, at least for a day or two, that you might give the suffering one a little rest? Would you not find a pleasure in being an invalid for a while to let your beloved one enjoy a season of health? Let the same motive, in a higher degree, sway your spirit! Try to feel, "If it pleases God it pleases me. If, Lord, it is thy will, it shall be my will. Let the lashes of the scourge be multiplied, if so thou shalt be the more honored, and I shall be permitted to bring thee some degree of glory." The cross becomes sweet when our health is so sweetened by the Spirit that our will runs parallel with the will of God. We should learn to say, in the language of Elihu "I have borne, I do bear, I accept it all." To be as plastic clay on the potter's wheel, or as wax in the modeller's hand, should be our great desire. That is the first business of the sufferer.

The next duty is to forsake the sin which may have occasioned the chastisement. "It is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement; I will not offend anymore." There is a connection between sin and suffering in every case. It would be very wrong for us to suppose that every man who suffers is therefore more guilty than others: that was the mistake of Job's friends■ a mistake too commonly made every day: but it is right for the sufferer himself to judge his own case, by a standard which we may not use toward him. He should say, "Is there not some connection between this chastisement and sin that dwelleth in me?" And here he must not judge himself unrighteously, even for God, lest he plunge himself into unnecessary sorrow. There are afflictions which come from God, not on account of past sin, but to prevent sin in the future. There are also sharp prunings which are intended to make us bring forth more fruit: they are not sent because we have brought forth no fruit, but because we are fruitful boughs, and are worth pruning. "Every branch in me that beareth fruit he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." There are also afflictions which are sent by way of test, and trial, and proof, both for God's glory and for the manifestation of his power; as also for the comforting of others, that trembling saints may see how weak and feeble men can carry the heaviest cross for Christ's sake, and can triumph under it. We are not to be sure that every sorrow comes to us because of any sin actually committed; yet it will be best for us to be more severe with ourselves than we should think of being with others, and always to ask, "Is there not some cause for this chastisement? May there not be something of which God would rid me, or something which has grieved him which has caused him to grieve me?" Brothers and sisters, I charge you never be lenient with yourselves. The best of us are men at the best, and at our best we have much to mourn over

in the presence of the Most High. It is good to be always dissatisfied with ourselves, and pressing forward to a something yet beyond; always praying that in us Christ's likeness may be completely formed. Thorns are often put in the nest that we may search for hidden evils. "Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?" Has there been a defeat at Ai? May there not be an Achan in the camp? Has not a traitor concealed in some secret place a goodly Babylonish garment and a wedge of gold? Does not trial give a hint that there may be something amiss? Beloved, I ask myself and I ask you to look now, not only to your outward character, but to your more private life and to your walk before God, and see if there be not some flaw. Is there trouble in the family? Have you always acted towards the children and the servants as you should have done as a master and a father? Question yourself. The child is grieving you. Have you, good mother, always been as prayerful about that child as you should have been? May not your child's conduct to you be a fair reflection of your own conduct towards your heavenly Father? I do not mention any of these things to increase your grief, but in order that you may put your finger on the evil which provokes the Lord God, and may put it away. Have there been losses in business? Are you sure, brother, that when you were making money you always used it for God as you should? Were you a good steward? Did you give the Lord his full portion■ the sacred tithe of all that you had? Or may you not have been too selfish■ and may not that be the cause why you must now be reduced from wealth to comparative poverty? Is that so? Does the affliction scourge your body? Then has there been anything wrong with your habits? Has the flesh predominated over the spirit? Has there been a failure of the entire consecration of the vessel unto the Lord? Does the trial occur in the person of some dear one? You may not be conscious of any wrong there, but still look, dear friends! Search the whole of your conduct as the spies searched Canaan of old. If your sin be glaring, there is little need of a chastisement to point it out to you, for you ought to see it without that: but there may be a secret sin between you and your Lord for which he has sent you chastisement, and after this you must raise a hue and cry. You know I do not mean that the Lord is punishing you for sin as a judge punishes a criminal, for he will not do that; since he has laid the punishment of sin upon Christ, and Christ has borne it as a matter of punitive justice. He, as a father, chasteneth his child, but never without a cause. I am urging you to see whether there may not be some cause for the present painful discipline. Never fall into the mistake of some who suppose that sin in God's children is a trifle. Why, if there is any place where sin is horrible it is in a child of God. Hence the text puts it, "I will not offend any more." Sin is an offensive thing to God, he cannot bear it. I should dislike a plague spot on anybody's face, but I should tremble to see it most of all upon my own child's face. Sin is more visible in a good man than in any other. I may drop a spot of ink upon a black handkerchief and never see it, but on a white one you will perceive it directly, and see it the more because of the whiteness of the linen which it defiles. You, child of God, know that just in proportion as you are sanctified■ in proportion as you live near to God■ sin will be grievous to the Most High. It is gloriously terrible to live near to God. I wonder if you understand me, all of you. To walk as a favored courtier with a monarch is a very delicate matter. Favourites have to pick their steps; for though they stand near a king, they well know how soon they may fall from their high position. We serve a jealous God. That is a wonderful question, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" God is that consuming fire. God is the everlasting burnings. Who among us shall dwell with him? The answer is, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart, he shall dwell on high. His place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks": but it is only the man who is very jealous of himself who will be able to bear that fierce light which beats around the throne of God■ that devouring flame which God himself is, as saith the apostle■ "Even our God is a consuming fire." Caesar's wife must not only be without fault, but she must be above suspicion, and such must be the character of the child of God who, like Moses, lives in the inner circle■ who stands on the mountain top■ who knows what the peaks of Sinai

mean, and what it is to be forty days in fellowship with the Most High.

Beloved friends, I urge upon you a very close search into what the transgression may be which has brought correction upon you, for it may be in you an offense which would scarcely be sin in anybody else. Another person might fall into your fault as a sin of ignorance but since you know better the sin is all the blacker in you. The Lord will be sanctified in them that draw near unto him, and woe to them if they defile themselves.

The third lesson in the text to the afflicted clearly teaches them that it is their duty and privilege to ask for more light. The text says, "That which I see not teach thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." Do you see the drift of this? It is the child of God awakened to look after the sin which the chastisement indicates, and since he cannot see all the evil that may be in himself, he turns to his God with this prayer, "What I see not teach thou me."

Beloved friends, it may be that, in looking over your past life and searching through your heart, you do not see your sin, for perhaps it is where you do not suspect. You have been looking in another quarter. Your own opinion is that you are weak in one point, but possibly you are far weaker in the opposite direction. In nothing do men make more mistakes than concerning their own characters. I have known a brother confess that he was deficient in firmness, when, in my opinion, he was about as obstinate as any man I knew. Another man has said that he was always wanting in coolness, and yet I thought that if I needed to fill an ice-well, I had only to put him into it. Persons misjudge themselves. Unfeeling people say they are too sensitive, and selfish persons imagine themselves to be victims to the good of others. So, it may be, you have been looking in one quarter for the sin, while your fault lies in the opposite point of the compass. Pray, then, "Lord, search me and try me, and that which I see not teach thou me." Remember, brethren, that our worst sins may lurk under our holiest things. Oh, how these evils will hide away■ not under the docks and nettles of the dungheap■ not they, but under the lilies and the roses of the garden. In the cups of the flowers they lurk. They do not flit through our souls like devils with dragons' wings; they fly as angels of light, with wings tinted as the rainbow. They come as sheep, and a very fat sort they seem to be, but they are wolves in sheep's clothing. Watch, therefore, very carefully against the sins of your holy things. In our holy things we are nearer to God than at any other time, and hence such defilement soonest brings upon us the stroke of our heavenly Father's rod. Perhaps your sin is hidden away under something very dear to you. Jacob made a great search for the images■ the teraphs which Laban worshipped. He could not find them. No; he did not like to disturb Rachel, and Laban did not like to disturb her either■ a favourite wife and daughter must not be inconvenienced. She may sit still on the camel's furniture, but she hides the images there. Even thus you do not like to search in a certain quarter of your nature; it is a very tender subject■ something you feel very grieved about when anybody even hints at it: it is just there that the sin is harboured. My brethren and sisters, let us be honest with the Lord. Let us really wish to know where we are wrong, and heartily long to be set right. Do you think we all honestly want to know our errors? Are there not chapters of the Bible which we do not like to read? If there are■ if any text has a quarrel with you, quarrel with yourself; but yield wholly to the word of God. Is there any doctrine which you almost think is a truth, but your friends do not believe it, and they might, perhaps, think you heretical if you were to accept it, and therefore you dare not investigate any further? Oh, dear friends, let us be rid of all such dishonesty. So much of it has got into the church that many will not see things that are plain as a pikestaff. They will not see, for truth might cost them too dear. They cover up and hide away some parts of Scripture which it might be awkward for them to understand, because of their connection with a church, or their standing in a certain circle. This is hateful, and we need not wonder if God smites the man who allows

himself in it. Be true, brother! You cannot deceive God. Do not try it. Ask him to search you through and through. Let your desire be, "Refining fire go through my heart with a mighty flame that shall devour everything like a lie, everything that is unholy, selfish, earthly, that I may be fully consecrated unto the Lord my God." This is the right way in which to treat our chastisements. "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more. That which I see not, teach thou me."

"Alas," says somebody, "we cannot say that we will do no more iniquity." Yes, we can say it a great deal more easily than we can practice it, and therefore it is a pity to say it except in the evangelical spirit, leaning entirely on the divine strength. He who says, "I will do no more iniquity" has there and then perpetrated iniquity if he has vowed in his own strength, for he has exalted himself into the place of God by self-confidence. Yet we must feel in our inmost hearts that we desire to depart from all iniquities. There must be an earnest and hearty intent that, as Paul shook off the viper into the fire, so will we, as God helps us, shake off the sin, whatever it may be, which brings us the trial, or that causes the Lord to take away the light of his countenance from us. Oh, how earnestly would I urge my dear tried brothers and sisters to seek after this excellent fruit of affliction. May it come to every one of us according as the affliction comes, that we may never miss the sweet fruit of this bitter tree. God bless you who are tried, and support you under your griefs; but, above all, may he sanctify you through tribulation, for that is the main point, and it little matters how sharp the flames if you are purified by the fire.

II. And now, briefly, I am going to use the text for THOSE OF US WHO MAY NOT HAVE BEEN AFFLICTED. What does the text say to us if we are not afflicted? Does it not say this■ "If the afflicted man is to say 'I bear,' and to take up his yoke cheerfully, how cheerfully ought you and I to take up the daily yoke of our Christian labor"? Brother, sister, do you ever grow weary? Does the Sunday-school tax you too much? Is that Bible-class becoming somewhat a heaviness? That house-to-house visitation■ has it become a drudgery? That distribution of tracts■ is there a great sameness and tedium about it? Now look, my brother, look at yonder dear saint of God who has been for months upon his bed till the feathers have grown hard beneath him. He shifts from side to side but finds no ease■ no sleep at night, no respite by day. Would you like to change places with him? Yet hear how he praises God amidst his many pains, and abundant weaknesses, and poverty. Do you prefer your lot to his? Well, then, in the name of everything that is good, accept your portion with joy, and throw your soul into the Lord's service. The great Captain might say to you, "What! tired of marching! I will send you back to the trenches, and let you lie there till you feel sick at heart of your inactivity. What! weary of fighting! You shall be put into the hospital with broken bones and made to lie there and pine, and see what you think of enforced inactivity." If I have any message to give from my own bed of sickness it would be this■ if you do not wish to be full of regrets when you are obliged to lie still, work while you can. If you desire to make a sick bed as soft as it can be, do not stuff it with the mournful reflection that you wasted time while you were in health and strength. People said to me years ago, "You will break your constitution down with preaching ten times a week," and the like. Well, if I have done so, I am glad of it. I would do the same again. If I had fifty constitutions I would rejoice to break them down in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. You young men that are strong, overcome the wicked one and fight for the Lord while you can. You will never regret having done all that lies in you for our blessed Lord and Master. Crowd as much as you can into every day, and postpone no work till to-morrow. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

We have yet another remark for those that are strong. Should not the favors of God lead us to search out our sins? Chastisement acts like a black finger to point out our failures: ought not the love of God to do the same with its hand glittering with jewels? Lord, dost thou give me good health? Lord, dost thou spare my

wife and my children to me? Dost thou give me of substance enough and to spare? Then, Lord, is there anything about me that might grieve thee? Do I harbour anything in my soul that might vex thy Spirit? Let thy love guide me that I may escape from these evils. It is a sweet text ■ "I will guide thee with mine eye. Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." Your child only needs a glance of the eye, and he runs to you; but your horse and mule will not do that, you must put a bit into their mouths, and some of them must have very hard bits, and their mouths must be made very tender before they can be guided. You are men, do not be as the beasts are. Yet some of God's own children are very brutish. They will not obey his words, and so their God has to give them blows, for he will have his children obey him: if they will be drawn with cords of love so they shall be, but if they will not, they shall be driven with the rod. If you make yourselves horses and mules he will treat you like horses and mules, or you will have reason to think so; perhaps the best way to prevent you becoming altogether mulish is to treat you as if you were a mule, and so drive you out of it, by letting you see the effect of your folly. Let our mercies act as a sweet medicine, and then we shall not need bitter potions.

Once again. Do you not think that while enjoying God's mercy we should be anxious to be searched by the light of the love of God? Should we not wish to use the light of the divine countenance that we may discover all our sin and overcome it. I know some Christians who will not come to this point. They have an ugly temper, and they say, "Well, you know, that is constitutional." Away for ever with such wicked self-excusing. It is idle to say, "I cannot help it, it is my temperament." Your temperament will destroy you, as surely as you live, if the grace of God does not destroy your temperament. If such excuses were permitted there is no crime, however abominable, for which temperament might not be pleaded. Thieves, harlots, drunkards, murderers might all set up this justification, for they all have their evil temperaments. Do you find in the law that any sin is excused upon the ground that it is "constitutional?" Do you find anything in the example of Christ, or in the precepts of the gospel, to justify a man in saying, "I must be treated with indulgence, for my nature is so inclined to a certain sin that I cannot help yielding to it: "My brother, you must not talk such nonsense. Your first business is to conquer the sin you love best; against it all your efforts, and all the grace you can get must be levelled. Jericho must be first besieged, for it is the strongest fort of the enemy, and until it is taken nothing can be done. I have generally noticed in conversion that the most complete change takes place in that very point in which the man was constitutionally most weak. God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. "Well," cries one, "suppose I have a besetting sin, how can I help it?" I reply, if I knew that four fellows were going to beset me to-night on Clapham Common, I should take with me sufficient policemen to lock the fellows up. When a man knows that he has a besetting sin it is not for him to say, "It is a besetting sin and I cannot help it," he must, on the other hand, call for heavenly assistance against these besetments. If you have besetting sins, and you know it, fight with them, and overcome them by the blood of the Lamb. By faith in Jesus Christ, besetting sins go to be led captive and they must be led captive, for the child of God must overcome even to the end. He is to be more than conqueror through him that has loved him. Let the love of God, then, lead you to search yourselves and say, "That which I see not teach thou me. If I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

III. The last remark I have to make is to THE UNCONVERTED. Perhaps there are some here who are not the people of God, and yet they are very happy and prosperous. They have all that heart can wish, and as they hear me talk about God's children being chastened, they say, "I do not want to be one of them, if such is their portion." You would rather be what you are, would you? "Yes," say you. Harken! We will suppose that we have before us a prince of the blood who will one day be a king. He has been doing something

wrong, and his father has chastened him the rod. There stands the young prince with the tears running down his cheeks; and over yonder is a street arab, who has no father that he knows of■ certainly none that ever chastened him for his good. He may do what he likes■ use any sort of language■ steal, lie, swear, if he likes, and no one will chasten him. He stands on his head, or makes wheels in the streets, or rolls in the dirt, but no father ever holds a rod over him. He sees this little prince crying, and he laughs at him, "You don't have the liberty I do. You are not allowed to stand on your head as I do. Your father wouldn't let you beg for coppers by the side of the omnibuses as I do. You don't sleep under an arch all night as I do. I would not be you to catch that thrashing! I would sooner be a street-boy than a prince!" Your little prince very soon wipes his eyes, and answers, "Go along with you. Why, I would rather be chastened every day and be a prince and heir to a kingdom, than I would be you with all your fine liberty!" He looks down upon the ragged urchin with the greatest conceivable pity, even though he himself is smarting from the rod. Now, sinners, that is just what we think of you and your freedom from heavenly discipline. When you are merriest and happiest, and fullest of your joy, we would not be you for the world; when you have been electrified by that splendid spectacle at the theater, or have enjoyed yourself so much in a licentious dance, or, perhaps, in something worse, we would not be as you are. Take us at our worst■ when we are most sick, most desponding, most tried, most penitent before God, we would not exchange with you at your best. Would we change with you, for all your mirth and sinful hilarity? No, that we would not! Ask the old woman in the winter time, who has only a couple of sticks to make a fire with, and has nothing to live upon but what the tender mercy of the parish allows her, ask her if she would change with Dives in his purple and fine linen. Look at her. She puts on an old red cloak to shelter her poor limbs, which are as full of rheumatism as they can be; the cupboard is bare, her poor husband lies in the churchyard, and she has not a child to come and see her. Ah, there she is. You say, "She is a miserable object." Here is the young squire in his top-boots, coming home from the hunt. He is standing in front of her. He might say to her, with all his large possessions and broad acres, "You would change with me, mother, would you not?" She knows his character, and she knows that he has no love to God, and no union to Christ, and therefore she replies, "Change with you? no, that I would not, for a thousand worlds."

"Go you that boast of all your stores, And tell how bright they shine; Your heaps of glittering dust are yours, But my Redeemers mine."

I have yet another word for you that fear not God. I wish you would reflect for a moment what will become of you one of these days. God loves his dear children very much: he loves them so much that Jesus died to save them, and yet he does not spare them when they sin, but he chastens them with the rod of men. Now, if he does so with his children, what will he do with you who are his enemies? If judgment begins at the house of God■ if when his anger does but gently smoke it is so hot■ what will it be when the winds of justice fan it to a furious flame? As when the fire sets the forests of the mountains burning, or as when the vast prairie becomes one sheet of fire, so shall it be in that dread day when God shall launch out all his vengeance against the sins of the ungodly. I beseech you, think of this. He spared not his own Son, but put him to a cruel death upon the tree for the sins of others: will he spare his enemies, think you, who have rebelled against him, and rejected his mercy, when he visits them for their own personal sins? "Beware, ye that forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver you."

One only thought, for I must not send you away with that terrible warning and no gospel encouragement. Learn a lesson from the Lord's children. When his children are chastened they submit, and when they submit they obtain peace. Sinner, I pray you, learn wisdom; and if you have been troubled of late, if you have had trials from God, yield to him, yield to him. Old Master Quarles gives a quaint picture of a man

who is striking at an enemy with a flail. The person assaulted runs right into the striker's arms, and so escapes the force of the stroke, and Quarles adds the remark, "The farther off the heavier the blow." Sinner, run in, run into God's bosom to-night. Say "I will arise and go unto my Father." God will not smite you if you come there. How can he? The Lord says, "Let him take hold of my strength." When that arm is lifted to scourge you, lay hold of it. Lay hold upon that arm of strength as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, for in him God hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the people. Hang on the arm that else might smite you. Trust in the Lord, sinner, through Jesus Christ, the atoning sacrifice, and you shall find peace with him. Ask him with humble submission to put away the sin that has made you suffer, and has nearly cost you your soul. Pray him to search you, and find out the sin. Repent and believe the gospel. Forsake evil and cling to the Savior, the great Physician who heals the disease of sin, and you shall live. Come now to your Father's home. Those rags, that hungry belly, those swine and filthy troughs, those citizens that would not help you, that blindest of all citizens whose only kindness lay in degrading you lower than you were before■ all these are sent to fetch you home. Believe it, soul, and say, "I will arise and go unto my Father, and will say unto him, Father I have sinned"; and while you are yet saying it you shall have the kiss of his love, the embraces of his affection, the robe of his righteousness, and the fatted calf of spiritual food, and there shall be merriment concerning you, both on earth and in heaven. The Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON■ Job 34.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"■ 91, 701.

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