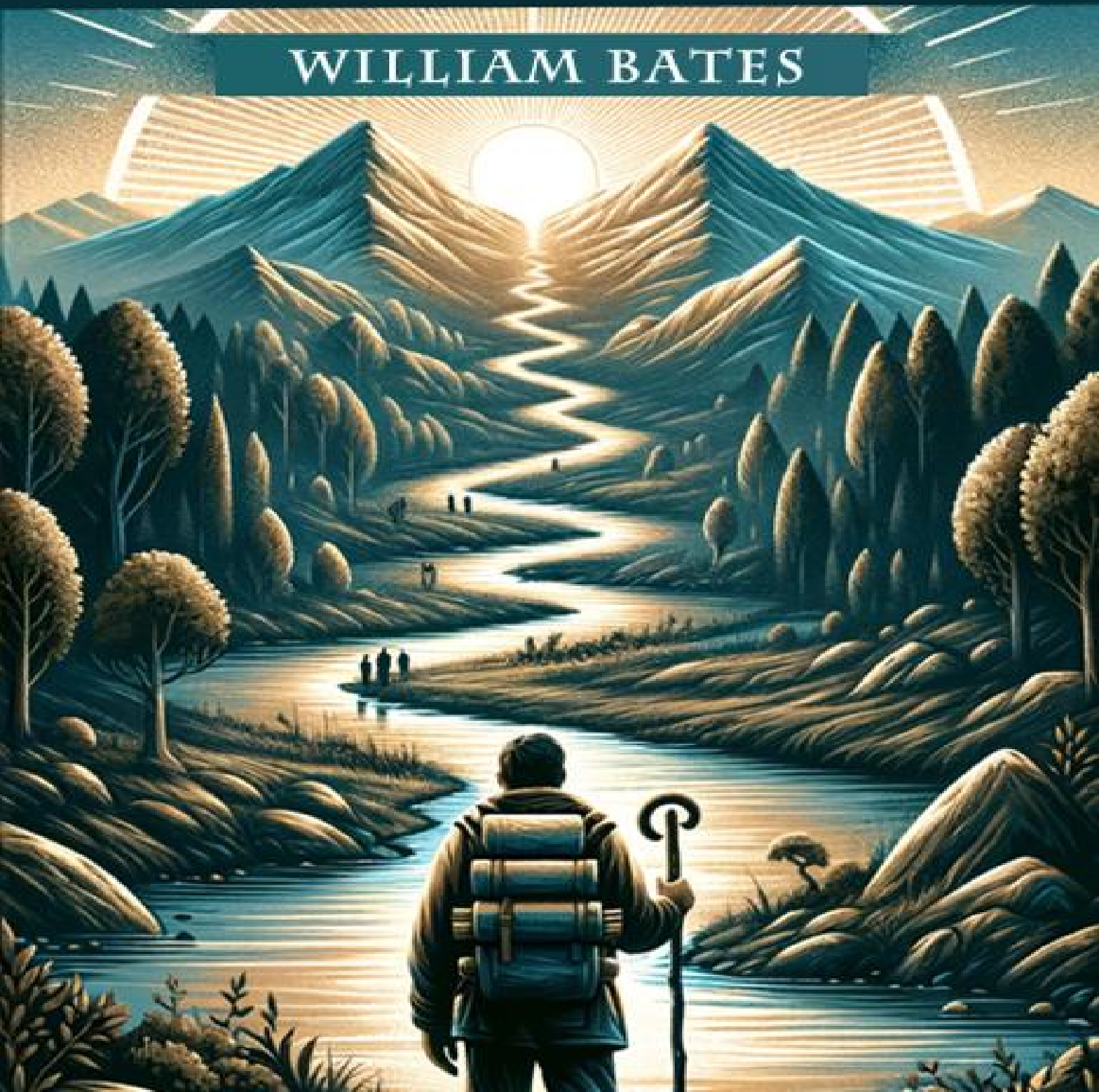


# THE GREAT DUTY OF RESIGNATION

TO THE DIVINE WILL,  
IN AFFLICTION

WILLIAM BATES



THE GREAT DUTY  
OF RESIGNATION  
TO THE DIVINE WILL  
IN AFFLICTION

WILLIAM BATES



# **The Great Duty of Resignation to the Divine Will in Affliction**

## **by William Bates**

"And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." - Matth. 26:39

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

[The Preface](#)

[Explanation of the Duty](#)

[ARGUMENTS to convince us of this duty of resignation](#)

[1. God's supreme right over us](#)

[2. His righteousness in all his ways](#)

[3. His uncontrollable power](#)

[4. His paternal love in sending afflictions](#)

[5. His infinite wisdom orders all things for the best](#)

[MOTIVES to persuade us to this duty of resignation](#)

1. The example of Christ in his sufferings

2. The examples of the suffering saints in all ages

3. All creatures obey the will of their Creator

4. It is our most glorious perfection, to have our wills united to the divine will

5. It is our felicity quietly to resign our wills to the will of God

DIRECTIONS how to perform this duty of resignation

The properties of acceptable prayer

## **PREFACE**

THE first man by rebellion against his Maker, lost his innocence and felicity, and conveyed a sad inheritance of sin and misery to his universal progeny: ever since it has been esteemed a principal part of wisdom to prepare the minds of men to encounter with innumerable evils that surround them, and to preserve a well-ordered contented state of soul, when actually under the greatest afflictions. All the famous sophists of the world, the most celebrated professors of patience, could not attain to this skill. Their consolatory discourses composed with, wit and eloquence, are like artificial fruits of wax, that seem to surpass the productions of nature, but can only please the sight, and afford no real refreshment to the taste. Or, like rings of steel that are joined by the attractive virtue of the loadstone, that make a chain fair to the eye, but of no, strength and use. It was inexcusable ignorance, their not resolving temporal evils to their

proper original, the righteous providence of God. They erected a blind and foolish power under the title of fortune, to preside in this sphere of mutability: they always boast of their playing a prize with fortune, and triumph over a phantom, of their own fiction.\* This conceit was both impious and uncomfortable; impious, to take the sceptre of government from God's hand, and attribute the foolish pleasure of fortune, what is ordered by his providence: and uncomfortable, for they fancied their deity to be blind, without discerning between the worthy and unworthy, and inexorable to the complaints of the injured, and the prayers of the miserable. The common topics from whence they hardened themselves are, that none are exempted in this open state, from afflicting accidents, the common tribute of mankind: that it is in vain to struggle with what is irresistible: that death is the balm and close of all evils. And the best, of their moral arguments for patience under sufferings, such as the dignity of the reasonable soul; and that nothing inferior to it should have power, or is worthy to put it into confusion; that virtue is the noblest perfection, and is increased by the most difficult exercise; that it is best to yield up ourselves to the divine disposal. These arguments are with infinite more advantage propounded in the sacred scriptures: and for christians to attend to the instructions of natural reason, and neglect the divine revelations of the gospel, is a folly like that of the silly Indians of Mexico, who having plenty of wax, the natural work of the bees, yet made use of firebrands to light them in the night, that afforded a little light mixed with a great deal of smoke. Briefly, they had but wavering conjectures of the future state, and the recompences thereof; from whence are derived the most powerful motives of active and passive obedience to the commanding and disposing will of God: but in the scripture are laid down in the clearest manner, and with infallible assurance, such principles as are effectual to compose the mind to patient suffering, and to meet with valiant resolution all the terrible contrarieties in the

way to heaven. It declares, that sin opened an entrance unto all the current adversities in the world, which are the evident signs of God's displeasure against it. In anguish we are apt to dispute with providence, and an imagination of innocence kindles discontent: of this impatience, some even of the best moral heathens were guilty; Titus and Germanicus charged the gods with their untimely, and, in their apprehension, undeserved deaths; but the due sense of sin will humble and quiet the mind under sufferings; it directs us to consecrate our sorrows, to turn the flowing stream into the channel of repentance. And thus the passion of grief, which, if terminated on external troubles, is barren and unprofitable, it can neither retrieve our lost comforts, nor remove any oppressing evil; if it be employed for our offences, prepares us for divine mercy, and is infinitely beneficial to us. And thus by curing the cause of afflictions, our guilt that deserves them, we take away the malignity and poison of them. The word of God assures us, that all the perturbations and discords in the passages of our lives are ordered by his wisdom and will, so that without extinguishing the two eyes of reason and faith, we must acknowledge his providence, and observe his design in all, which is either to excite us when guilty of a careless neglect; or remiss performance of our duty; or to reclaim us from our excursions and deviations from the narrow way that leads to life. Indeed there is nothing more common nor more fatal, than for afflicted persons to seek by carnal diversions and contemptible comforts, to overcome their melancholy, and the sense of divine judgments; and hereby they add new guilt, and provoke new displeasures. This presages and accelerates final ruin; for such whom afflictions do not reform, are left as incorrigible.

But above all encouragements, the gospel sets before us the sufferings of our Redeemer, and directs all his disciples in sincerity to accustom themselves to the contemplation and expectation of

troubles on earth: it tells them it is a branch of their religion, to suffer with him that they may reign with him. And what is more reasonable, than if our Saviour endured superlative sufferings to purchase eternal glory for us, that we should with the same mind bear lighter afflictions to prepare us for it? If this principle be alive and active in our breasts, that our present afflictions shall determine in our future happiness, when time shall cease and eternity succeed; this will encourage us to serve God with our best affections when our days are overcast with sorrow, as in a bright prosperity: this will secure our passage through a stormy tempestuous world, as if it were a truly pacific sea, knowing that divine providence always guides us to the port of eternal tranquillity. This is the substance of what is amplified in the following treatise. And whilst there are miseries in the world, no discourses are more seasonable and useful than those that lighten our oppressing sorrows, and that enable us with uniformity and constancy in all the changes of this mortal life, to pursue our eminent end. The Holy Spirit, the great comforter, apply these truths to the hearts of the afflicted.

WILLIAM BATES.

## **THE GREAT DUTY OF RESIGNATION**

"And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." - MATT. 26:39

THE words are our Saviour's prayer at his private passion in the garden. In paradise was the first scene of man's sin, and in a garden the first scene of Christ's sorrows.

He was now in the near view of his extreme sufferings; the fatal hour approached when he was to die with all the concurrent circumstances of shame and cruelty. His nature was human and holy, and therefore apprehensive of misery and the wrath of God. In this exigency, "he fell on his face," a posture of humble reverence, and with earnestness prayed, saying, "O my Father," an expression of his steadfast trust in the love of God: "if it be possible," not with respect to his absolute power, for by that he could easily have preserved him; but with respect to his sovereign pleasure, and eternal decree: "let this cup pass from me;" that implies a complete deliverance from the rage of the powers of darkness, and of the perverted world in conjunction with them. He suffered innocent nature to act as nature, for he submitted to our infirmities, but without our imperfections. "Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt:" his petition was qualified with an act of submission; the desire of his nature, that recoiled from such sufferings, was overruled by the resignation of grace. There was no repugnancy, but a subordination, between the sensitive will and the rational will, directed by his mind, that foresaw the blessed effects of his sufferings, "the glory of God," with the "salvation of lost mankind." And that just horror, with the strong aversion of his nature from such a terrible death, renders his willingness more conspicuous and meritorious. As man, the apprehension of it put him into an agony;



but as Mediator, by a firm resolution and clear choice he submitted to it.

Now the example of our suffering Saviour, lays an obligation on us to transcribe his copy; his titles in scripture declare both his eminency and exemplariness. He is our Head, and our Leader, the Captain of our salvation, whom we are bound to follow in taking up our cross: his sufferings were designed not only for our redemption, but for our instruction and imitation. What he commands as God, he performed as man, that we might voluntarily yield up ourselves to the holiness and equity of his law. Thus from the pattern of our Saviour's deportment, the point of doctrine is this:

## **Explanation of the Duty**

The entire resignation of our wills to the disposing will of God, is the indispensable duty of christians under the sharpest afflictions.

In the explication and proof of this point, I shall

I. Consider what is consistent with this resignation.

II. What is implied in it.

III. The reasons to convince us of this duty of resigning of ourselves, and all our interests to God: and then apply it.

I. Consider what is consistent with this voluntary resignation. That will appear in the following particulars.

1. An earnest deprecation of an impending judgment is reconcileable with our submission to the pleasure of God, declared by the event. Our Saviour with humility and importunity desired the removing of

the cup of bitterness. We must distinguish between God's law, and his decree and counsel: the law is the rule of our duty, and requires an entire exact subjection in all our faculties, even in our internal desires, in the first motions of the will: the least velleity, or rising of the heart against the divine command, is irregular and culpable; for not only the acts of sin are forbidden in every command respectively, but all the incitations of concupiscence, before the deliberate judgment of the mind, or the actual consent of the will. But the decree of God is not the rule of our duty; and is secret till manifested by the event of things. This being premised, the reasons are evident why we may pray against an affliction that threatens us, without violating our duty.

(1.) Because afflictions are evils which the will naturally declines, and are not desirable things in themselves. They are not beneficial and productive of our good by any proper efficacy and operation, but by the overruling providence of God, and the gracious assistance of his Spirit. When Aaron's rod was put into the sanctuary, and became green and flourishing with blossoms and almonds, it was not from any inherent virtue of its own, but from the special influence of the divine power; for the other rods remained dead and dry: thus the happy effects of the afflicting rod are from divine grace.

(2.) There are proper temptations that attend the afflicted state. Many are encompassed in a sad circle; their sins procure afflictions, and their afflictions occasion many sins. Indeed, tribulation that is sanctified, by a happy gradation worketh patience; and patience, experience of the divine mercy; and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed. But when it meets with a stubborn spirit, there are fearful descents of sin: tribulation excites impatience, and impatience causeth perplexity, and that despair, and despair, confusion The devil lays his trains in every condition, and sometimes

by immoderate sorrow, sometimes by inordinate joy, doth mischief to the soul. And as more perish by surfeits than abstinence, yet the diseases that are caused by emptiness, are more dangerous and incurable than those that proceed from fulness: so more are ruined by prosperity than adversity: but the guilty passions that ferment and rage in adversity, are more pernicious, and more hardly tempered and subdued, than the luxurious appetites that are fomented and drawn forth by prosperity. We are directed by our Saviour to pray, that we may "not be led into temptation, and to be delivered from all evil."

2. A mournful sense of afflictions sent from God, is consistent with a dutiful resignation of ourselves to his will. It was the vain boast of the philosophers, that their instructions would fortify men with such magnanimous principles, and generous spirits, as with an equal calm tranquillity of mind to encounter all the fierce and sorrowful accidents to which they might be exposed here:\* they speak high against fortune and fate, and resolve stubbornly, that no misery, whether poverty or disgrace, torments or death, should extort from them a confession that it was misery. It was one of their axioms, that a wise man is not subject to the vicissitudes and instability of things here below; that he suffers no conflict of contrary passions in his breast; that he is always above in the<sup>†</sup> serene, where no tempests can disturb, no eclipse can darken his mind: but these proud pretensions were empty of reality. Indeed such a perfect exemption from all afflicting passions, is neither possible nor regular in our present state: not possible, for the best men are not all spirit, but united to flesh; and when the body is under strong pains, the soul suffers in its sufferings; and while we are thus compounded, the loss of those comforts that support and sweeten the present life, must cause grief. It is easy to utter brave expressions, and lay down severe precepts in contempt of evils<sup>‡</sup> when they are at a distance, but hard to sustain

the spirit under the actual feeling of them; it is one thing to discourse of a battle, and another to be engaged in the heat of it. But supposing by a philosophical charm the heart were so hardened as to be proof against the most piercing afflictions, such a forced insensibility is not regular, but proceeds from the extinction of humanity and piety; and that will appear by considering afflictions in a natural or moral respect.

(1.) In a natural respect, for so they are destructive or oppressive evils, and a pensive feeling of them is suitable to the law of our creation: for the human nature is framed with such senses and passions, as according to God's intention should be affected suitably to the quality of their objects; and if the soul acts rationally, it is moved accordingly. A saint on earth is not a saint in heaven, raised above all disasters and troubles, freed from all hurtful impressions from without, and sorrowful impressions within, but is liable to afflicting evils: and it is becoming his duty to have his passions pliable to his condition, but without excess; the eyes must not be drowned, nor dry, but tenderly affected.

(2.) Considered in a moral respect, as they are sent from the high and just providence of God, it is absolutely necessary there should be an humble resentment of his displeasure. This is a consequent of the former; for if our affections are seared up, that we do not feel the stroke; how shall we regard the hand that smites us? If we are not sensible of afflictions, we are secure in our sins. Natural sorrow is introductive of godly sorrow. There are two extremes to be avoided by the afflicted, according to the direction of Solomon in the person of wisdom, and repeated by the apostle: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." Some are discouraged and overborne by afflictions as insupportable: others are stubborn and careless, and never lay them to heart: they

never look upward to the original efficient cause, an offended God, nor inward to the impulsive deserving cause, their sins; but esteem them fortuitous events that happen in this mutable state, without a design to correct and reform sinners; or to proceed from a blind necessity, things of course; or merely regard the second causes and instruments of their troubles: accordingly, when they meet with calamities, all their care is by a perverse shift to seek for relief only in temporal comforts; without serious applying themselves to God, whose end in sending troubles, is to reclaim us from sin to holiness, from earth to heaven, from the creatures to himself.

This secret atheism, like a benumbing opium, stupifies the conscience; and the insensibility of God's hand inflicting evils, is as different from christian patience and constancy, as a mortal lethargy is from the quiet, soft sleep of health: nothing kindles his anger more than neglecting it; it is equally provoking with the despising of his love: it is a symptom of a wretched state of soul; if there proceed no sighs and groans, no signs of grief from the sense of God's displeasure, it is a sad evidence there is no spiritual life. Indolence under the effects of God's anger, is like the stillness of the dead sea, whose calm is a curse. The Jews, though entitled the people of God, are deeply charged for this prodigious madness; "O Lord, thou hast struck them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refused to return." Jer. 5:3. We have whole quarries of such obdurate wretches amongst us; this impenitent disregard of God's hand is a dreadful presage of future and more heavy judgments. "Who ever hardened himself against the Lord, and prospered? Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" The most refractory he can compel to acknowledge with bitter lamentations his wickedness and weakness, how unable he is to contend with his Judge. But supposing a respite

from punishment here, there is an hell prepared for stubborn sinners, where is weeping and wailing for ever. Whom the rods do not awaken, the scorpions shall.

II. I shall now proceed to explicate what is included in the resignation of ourselves to God in times of affliction. This will be made evident by considering the leading powers and faculties which grace sanctifies and works in, according to their natural subordination.

1. The understanding approves the severest dispensations of providence to be good, that is for reasons, though sometimes unsearchable, yet always righteous, and for gracious ends to the saints. When Hezekiah heard the heavy prophecy, that all his treasures should be carried to Babylon, and his royal progeny should become slaves there, he said to Isaiah, "good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken." His sanctified mind acknowledged it to be a just correction of his vain pride, and quietly submitted to it: and as there is a satisfaction of mind in the rectitude, so in the graciousness of his proceedings. The misapprehension and misbelief of God's design in afflicting, causeth impatience and murmuring; but when the mind is convinced, that he afflicts us for our benefit, that bodily diseases are medicinal advantages, the remedies of the soul; that the losses of earthly comforts prepare us for divine enjoyments; that the way which is sowed with thorns, and watered with tears, leads to heaven; the heart is compliant with the sharpest methods of providence. But these things will be more fully opened under the several heads of arguments to enforce the duty.

2. This resignation principally consists in the consent and subjection of the will to the orders of heaven. The will is an imperious faculty, naturally impatient of opposition to its desires, and we pay the

highest honour to God in the lowest submission of our wills to his appointments. It is true, the will cannot make a direct choice of evil, nor love afflictions, but the holy spirit by a powerful operation so disposeth it, as to renounce its own inclinations when discordant with the will of God. And the more humble, ready and entire the submission is, the more difficult and harsh the denial of our natural desire is, the more supernatural grace shines and is acceptable. It is the perfection of holiness to do what God loves, and to love what God does. There is a rare example of this in David's carriage, when under his greatest affliction: it was in his flight from his son Absalom, who endeavoured to deprive him of his kingdom and life. 2 Sam. 15:25. "And the king said unto Zadok the priest, carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in his eyes, he will bring me again, and show me both it and his habitation; but if he shall say, I have no delight in thee, behold here I am, let him do to me as seems good unto him." O happy frame! his spirit was so equally balanced, that if God would suffer a rebel that violated the most tender and strict relations of a son and subject to a gracious father and sovereign, the murderer of his brother, and a parricide in his desires, to usurp his throne, he humbly submitted to it.

3. The duty of resignation consists in the composure of the affections to a just measure and temper, when under the sharpest discipline. Of the passions, some are tender and melting, others fierce and stormy, and if a ponderous oppressing evil happen, or the loss of that good that was very pleasing, they sometimes join together, as the clouds at the same time dissolve in showers, and break forth in thunder and lightning. Now when sanctified reason hath a due empire over them, and the soul possesseth itself in patience, it is a happy effect of resignation to the divine disposal. Of this we have an eminent instance in the afflicted saint fore-mentioned. When David was so wickedly reproached by Shimei, and Abishai fired with indignation,

would presently have taken exemplary revenge, by stopping his breath for ever: 2 Sam. 16:9, 10. "Should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head." How cool and calm was David's spirit? he felt no æstuations nor tumults within, expressed no outrageous complaints, but said, "Let him curse, because the Lord hath said to him, curse David." There is a twofold excess of the sorrowful affections in troubles:

First. In the degrees of them.

Secondly. In the continuance.

First; in the degrees of them, when they exceed their causes. Afflictive things that deeply wound us, are usually represented by the reflection of sorrow, with all the heightening circumstances, the loss as invaluable, the evil as intolerable. As objects appear greater than their true proportion, when seen through a mist; so do evils, apprehended through grief: and after such a false judgment the passions take their violent course, and the spirit sinks under overwhelming heaviness. The soul is disabled from performing what belongs to it, with respect to the general and particular calling, and cannot with freedom wait upon God, but neglects its duty and felicity. It was the complaint of the afflicted poet, *Hei mihi quod miseros prudentia prima relinquit*. The first effect of misery is black confusion in the thoughts, that the mind doth not distinctly consider and apply such thing as would be effectual to mitigate, or remove it. Besides, as when the stream overflows the channel, it runs foul and turbid: so immoderate sorrow often causeth secret discontent and anger at the Almighty, disquieting and tormenting risings of heart against his providence. All things are disordered and turbulent in the little and marvellous monarch of the soul. And such seeds of incitation are in our corrupt nature, that in the extremity of anguish,



the furious passions swell into a storm, and break the restraints of reason and grace. Job in a hot fit expostulates strangely with God, Job 10:3. "Is it good unto thee that thou shouldest oppress?" He was a holy man, and a prophet, who in the paroxysm of his passion, Jer. 20:14. "curst the day of his birth."

Secondly; there is an excess in the continuance.

Deep grief doth more arrest the thoughts upon its object, than the affection of joy doth. The mind is not so easily diverted from what afflicts, as from what delights. The main strain of the soul is towards the mournful object; and in the midst of comforts to support the fainting spirits, there still remains a sad remembrance of that which torments: a swarm of stinging thoughts continually wound and inflame the breast: no counsels prevail, but the soul is resolved in its grief, and always restless with a bitter desire of what is irrecoverable. Thus the prophet describes the misery of Rachel, "weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not." Jer. 31:15. As some venomous creatures turn all that they eat into poison; so obstinate sorrow takes occasion from every thing to increase itself. This consumes the strength, and the mourner lives only to feel his misery, and thinks death too slow for him, that was so precipitate for the person lamented. Thus by the fixed contemplation of its trouble, the soul is distracted from its heavenly original, and from pursuing its blessed end, and indulgeth its sorrow, as if the loss of a temporal comfort were utterly undoing to it.

This obstinate grief is inconsistent with a resigned frame of spirit. Though in great afflictions, there will be a conflict of nature, and it is wisdom to let grief breathe forth, and have a passage, yet grace will assuage the fury, and limit the time, by regarding the will of God, and

by deriving from the springs of comfort above, some inward refreshings, when the streams below totally fail.

## **ARGUMENTS to convince us of this duty of resignation**

I shall now propound the arguments that will clearly convince us of this duty of resignation; some of which are powerful to silence all rebellious arguings, and suppress all the transports of the passions; others to raise the drooping spirits, and incline the heart to a calm yielding, and complete subjection to the divine will.

### **God's Supreme Right Over Us**

I. The first argument ariseth from God's original supreme right in our persons, and all things we enjoy. He is the fountain of being, and produced us out of the depth of our native nothing, and made us little lower than the angels. He is the author of all our good, the just and true proprietor of all his benefits. From hence results his sovereignty and dominion over us, which is declared in his law, and the dispensations of his providence. His law is the rule of our lives and actions, his governing providence the rule of our sufferings and passions. There is indispensably due, a free and full obedience to his commands, and an entire universal resignation to the order of his providence. The enjoyment of all our blessings is from his pure goodness, and rich bounty, which requires our humble and affectionate thankfulness; and his resumption of them should be entertained with a holy and patient submission. He gives then freely, and may recal them at his pleasure. In whatsoever instance his will is declared, we must with humility and meekness submit; for he hath an equal empire in disposing all things that are equally his own, and

we are bound by an equal obedience to acknowledge his dominion. When Eli received the terrible message of the ruin of his family; the final excision of it from the dignity of the priesthood, he patiently submits: "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." The mere desire of exemption from his overruling will, is a heinous sin; and a stubborn uncompliance with it in the issues of things, is direct rebellion, mixed with ingratitude, obstructive to our present peace, and future happiness. If the afflicted would for a while suspend their tears and sighs, and with free reason consider, that what relation soever they had in their dearest loss, whether of a father, a son, of a husband or wife, or any other amiable and passionate terms, yet God hath a nearer right and juster claim in those persons, being his by his best titles of creation and redemption, it would silence murmurings and impatience, and stop the scope of inordinate sorrow. Our property in them was derived from his favour, and our possession was depending on his will, for his right in all his creatures is unalienable. This consideration was the foundation of Job's patience; when he was stripped of all his outward comforts, how composed was he in his mind! how considerate in his words! he reflects upon his native poverty, "Naked came I into the world, and naked shall I return thither:" and adores God's dominion, "The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken, blessed be his name." Add farther, that which by immediate connexion follows, the consideration of the glorious majesty of God, and our natural meanness and unworthiness. The distance and disproportion is so vast between him and us, that we are not able to conceive the full and just idea of his excellent greatness: we are fain to assist our minds in the thoughts of God by sensible representations; and to express our conceptions by borrowed terms; his immensity by the ocean; his eternity by the returning of a circle into itself; his power, by thunder; his majesty by the sun in its meridian splendors. As the flying fishes, (shoals of which are met in sailing to the Indies,) can fly no longer than their

wings remain moist; when those membranes are dry, they cannot move, and are forced to dip themselves again in the sea, that by softening them, they may renew their flight: thus when we ascend in our minds to God, we form no conceptions but what take their rise from sensible things, which infinitely fall short of his perfections. Who can fully understand the transcendent excellencies of his nature? Who can describe what is ineffable, and most worthy to be adored with silent admiration and ecstasy of mind?\* "He dwells in that light which is inaccessible;" the angels, the most comprehensive spirits, "veil their faces in the presence of his glory." He is his own original, but without beginning: alone, but not solitary; one ever blessed God, yet communicates his entire Deity to the Son and Spirit; he is not divided in number, nor confused in unity. He is not compelled by necessity, nor changed by liberty, nor measured by time: if we ascend to the first fountains of all ages, then his infinite understanding comprehended in one clear view, the whole compass, extent and duration of all things. His powerful word made the visible and invisible world, and upholds them. That which was spoken with flattery, of a Roman emperor, by† Seneca, (who as much degenerated from the dignity of a Stoical philosopher, in licking Nero, as in biting Alexander) is absolutely true of the sovereign Lord of the world: his providence is the band that unites the parts of the universal commonwealth, the vital spirit and virtue that sustains all: without his eye and hand, his dispositive wisdom and power, the whole frame would disband and fall into confusion and ruin. He is seated upon the throne of the universe. "Thousand thousands of glorious spirits minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him," in the quality and humility of his servants, ready to execute his commands. He is the Judge of the living and the dead, that disposeth of heaven and hell for ever. And what is man? a little breathing dust. He is infinitely above us, and so strangely condescends, in having a tender care of us, that the psalmist was

swallowed up in ecstasy and amazement at the thoughts of it: "Lord, what is man that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou regardest him?" Nay, we are beneath his anger, as a worm is not worthy of the indignation of an angel. Now the more we magnify God, and exalt his authority in our judgments, the more our wills are prepared to yield to him: "His excellency will make us afraid to oppose his providence." When the Son of God appeared to Saul in his glory, and commanded in person, he presently lets fall his arms of defiance, and says, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" His resignation was absolute; nothing was so hard to do, nothing so formidable to suffer; but he was ready to accomplish and endure in obedience to Christ. The more we debase and vilify ourselves, the more easy it will be to bear what God inflicts; humility disposeth to submission. Our passions are not excited at the breaking of an ordinary glass; but if a vessel of crystal be broken, it moves us: the lower esteem we have of ourselves, the less we shall be transported for any breach that is made upon us. We read in the history of Job, many heavy complaints uttered by him of his sufferings, all the sad figures of passionate eloquence made use of to represent them, and the fruitless essays of his friends, that did rather exasperate than appease his spirit: and it is very observable, that when the Lord interposed himself to justify the ways of his providence, he did not charge upon him the guilt of his sins that deserved the severest judgments, but appears in his glory, and reminds him of his original nothing. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding." He opens to him some of the excellencies of the Deity in the works of creation and providence, and the present effect was, Job adored with humble reverence the divine majesty, and acknowledged his own unworthiness: "Behold, I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth; now mine eyes see thee, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The thickest smoke by ascending, dissipates and vanishes. If

the troubled soul did ascend to heaven, and consider that even the worst evils are either from the operation or permission of the divine providence, the cloudy disturbing thoughts and passions would be presently scattered. David had a blessed experiment of this in his distress: "I was dumb, and opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." Psal. 39:8. Such an awful apprehension he had of God, as transcendently superior to him, and unaccountable for his proceedings. When any impatient thoughts arise, we should presently chain them up, for there are folly and fury in them: what am I, that my sullen spirit should dispute against the orders of heaven? that my passions should resist the will of the highest Lord? that my desires should depose him from his throne? For thus by implication and consequence they do, who are vexed at his providence. A holy soul will tremble at the thoughts of it. Methinks God speaks to the afflicted and disturbed soul, in the words of the psalm, "Be still, and know that I am God." The actual consideration of his supremacy will be powerful to lay the growing storm of passions. Impatience ariseth from the ignorance of God and ourselves.

## **His Righteousness in All His Ways**

II. The righteousness of God in all his ways, if duly considered, will compose the afflicted spirit to quiet and humble submission. He is never injurious to us when he deprives us of our sweetest and most precious comforts, because we have incurred the forfeiture of all. He is not cruel in laying the heaviest punishments upon us, for we deserve them. If we were free from actual sins, yet our depraved nature, so repugnant to the pure law of God, involves us under an obligation to punishment. If we had not been attainted with the guilt of original sin, yet the sins committed in the course of our lives, make

us deeply obnoxious to divine justice: how much more the concurrent guilt of original and actual sins? The acts of sin are transient and pass away; but the guilt and stain of sin, and the conscience of sin remain, and no less than eternal punishment is commensurate to the obliquity. From hence there is the clearest reason to justify God in all his proceedings. "Righteousness establishes his throne." The prophet saith, "thy righteousness is like the great mountains, thy judgments are a great deep." Psal. 36:6. The special ends of God in severe dispensations, are sometimes indiscernible, but never unjust; his righteousness is obvious to every eye. The actual consideration of this is powerful to silence the uproar of the passions, and to make us lie humbly at his feet under the sorest chastisements. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord" (without murmuring, saith the afflicted church) "because I have sinned against him." Mic. 7:9. As disobedience in our inclinations and actions, is a tacit reflection upon the equity of his law, as if the restraints of it were unreasonable; so impatience and fretful discontent is upon the equity of his providence, as if the afflicting dispensations of it were not due to us: and the sense of our sinfulness, and God's righteousness, is an excellent preventive of it. If thou art in great afflictions, and feelest any tumultuous thoughts, any rebellious risings within thee, consider thou art a sinner, guilty of ten thousand provocations, and darest thou appear before his enlightened and terrible tribunal, and challenge him for any unrighteous proceedings? "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" Lam. 3:39. Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I will not offend any more. That which I know not, teach thou me; and if I have done iniquity, I will do no more. Job. 34:31, 32. Besides, all the punishments of men here, are with merciful allays, not in just proportion to their guilt. The church in its calamitous state, described in the most doleful lamentations of Jeremiah, when the greatest number of the Jews perished by the

sword, or famine that attended the war, their city and temple were laid in ruins, and the unhappy people that escaped the fury of the Chaldeans, were the captives and triumphs of their enemies; yet in that unparalleled affliction she acknowledges, "it is the Lord's mercies that we are not" utterly and totally "consumed Lam. 3:22.;" and lays her mouth in the dust, a posture of the lowest abasement. And holy Ezra reflecting upon that dreadful calamity, acknowledgeth their punishment was beneath their desert, as their deliverance was above their expectation: "and for all that is come upon us for our evil deeds and great trespasses, seeing thou hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and given us such a deliverance as this." Ezra 9:13. Our deserts are less than the least of God's mercies, and our offences greater than the greatest of his judgments. This should make us not only patiently submit, "but humbly accept the punishment of our iniquity, as far less than what is deserved." Levit. 26:41. If the sentence of death against a malefactor be exchanged for banishment, or banishment be remitted for a short confinement, is there not incomparably more cause to be thankful for what is pardoned, than to complain for what is suffered? What ingratitude is it to be impatient and murmuring for these "light afflictions that are but for a moment," when we deserve an eternal and insupportable weight of misery in hell? It is infinitely more becoming us and safe, to argue against our irregular passions, than to tax his righteous dispensations.

## **His Uncontrollable Power**

III. His power is immense and uncontrollable, and it is a vain attempt to contend with him, as if the eternal order of his decrees could be altered or broken. The contest between God and the sinner, is, whose will shall stand. It is his glorious work to depress the proud, and



subdue the stubborn refractory spirits. The punishment of the first pride in the angels, is an eternal and terrible example of his powerful justice; and how intolerable a crime it is, that heaven could not bear, but presently opened, and the guilty fell into the bottomless pit. Now pride is a seminal evil, and lies at the root of stubbornness and impatience under judgments. Proud dust is apt to fly in God's face upon every motion of the afflicting passions. And by the resistance of self-will he is provoked to more severity. "Woe be to him that strives with his Maker." Isa. 45:9. This is to be like a restive horse or mule, without understanding, that flings and foams when the burthen is laid upon him, but gets nothing but blows, without the removal of the burthen. It is our duty and interest to observe the blessed apostle's direction, "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and he shall exalt you." 1 Pet. 5:6. There is a passive humbling by his irresistible providence, and an active voluntary humbling, which implies a subjection to his law, and a submission to his providence: this is infinitely pleasing to him, it is the right disposition that prepares us for mercy, and is the certain way of exaltation; for then God obtains his end. The humble prostrating ourselves at his feet to receive his correction, causes his bowels to relent, and stops his hand: the seeming humiliation of Ahab procured a respite of those fearful judgments denounced against his house. It is said of the generosity of the lion, that he spares his prostrate adversary. In short, our salvation depends upon our humble demeanour under afflictive dispensations. "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much more be in subjection to the father of spirits, and live?" Heb. 12:9 Unsubmission induces a deadly guilt upon the rebellious.

## **His Paternal Love in Sending Afflictions**

IV. His paternal love in sending afflictions, is a sufficient argument to win our compliance with his will. The blessed apostle applying lenitives to the afflicted, propounds two divine truths, that if seriously thought of, and steadfastly believed, are powerful to mitigate the acerbity of all sufferings, and support the spirit in the greatest agony. The first is, "God scourgeth every son whom he receiveth:" Heb. 12:6. and the other that is joined with it is, "Whom the Lord loves, he chasteneth."

The rule is general:

(1.) All his sons are under the discipline of the rod; and who would be so unhappy as to be exempted from that number, for all the prosperity of the world? Afflictions sanctified, are the conspicuous seal of their adoption and title to heaven: and who would forfeit the honour of that adoption, and lose the benefit annexed to it, the eternal inheritance, rather than patiently bear his fatherly chastisements? Others that enjoy a perpetual spring of pleasure here, are declared bastards, and not sons: they are indeed within the compass of his universal providence, but not of that peculiar care that belongs to his sacred and select progeny. His corrections are an argument of his authority as our father, and an assurance that we are his children: this should induce us not only with submissive temper of soul, but with thankfulness to receive the sharpest correction from the hands of our heavenly Father. This was the reason of our Saviour's meek yielding himself to the violence and cruelty of his enemies. "The cup which my father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

(2.) Chastisement is the effect of his paternal love: he is the father of our spirits, and that divine relation carries with it a special love to the spirits of men, and in that degree of eminence, as to secure and

advance their happiness, though to the destruction of the flesh. The soul is of incomparably more worth than the body, as the bright orient pearl than the mean shell that contains it: this God most highly values; for this he gave so great a price, and on it draws his image. If temporal prosperity were for our best advantage, how willingly would God bestow it on us? "He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. 8:32. Which words, among all that the Holy Ghost hath dictated to the interpreters of God's heart to his people, are most expressive of his love and bounty, and most for their comfort. He that gives grace and glory, the most real testimonies of his love, certainly withholds no good thing from them. I shall produce one convincing instance of this. St. Paul, who by an incomparable privilege was rapt up to the celestial paradise, and heard ineffable things, yet was tormented by the angel of satan, and his earnest repeated prayer for deliverance not presently granted. Did not God love that blessed apostle, whose internal love to Christ almost equalled the seraphims, those pure everlasting flames, and was expressed in the invariable tenor of his life, by such miraculous actions and sufferings for the propagating and defence of the faith of Christ, and the glory of his name? "If we love him because he first loved us," as St. John testifies, certainly he that returned such a superlative affection to Christ, received the greatest love from him. Now if Christ did love Paul, why did he not upon his earnest repeated prayer, deliver him from his wounding trouble, whatsoever it was? That permission was a demonstration of the love of Christ to him, as it is acknowledged by himself; "lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelation, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, and the messenger of satan to buffet me." 2 Cor. 13:7. That the afflictions of the saints proceed from God's love, will be evident, by considering,

First. His gracious design in sending them.

Secondly. His compassionate providence over them, and his assisting power afforded to his people in their troubles.

Thirdly. The happy issue of them.

First; His gracious design in sending them. "God doth not afflict willingly, but if need be; not for his own pleasure, but for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Heb. 12:10. The expression is high and emphatical, "his holiness," the brightest glory of his nature, the divinest gift of his love.

The two principal parts of holiness, are ceasing from doing evil, and learning to do well. And afflictions are ordained and sent as profitable for both these effects.

For the prevention or cure of sin, which is an evil incomparably worse in its nature, and terrible consequents in this and the next world, than all the mere afflicting temporal evils. Sin defiles and debaseth the soul, which is the proper excellency of man, and separates from God our supreme good. "Your sins have separated between you and your God, and have hid his face from you." Isa. 59:2. All afflictions that can befall us here in our persons or concernments, the most disgraceful accidents, the most reproachful contumelious slanders, the most loathsome contagious diseases, that cause our dearest friends to withdraw from us, yet cannot deprive us of union with God by faith and love, nor of the fruition of his propitious presence. Lazarus when covered with ulcers, was kissed with the kisses of his mouth: but sin hath this pernicious effect, it separates from his gracious presence here, and, if continued in without repentance, will exclude from his glorious presence for ever. Now afflictions are medicinal applications for the cure of sin, the

disease and death of the soul, and therefore infinitely worse than the sharpest remedies.

The beginnings and progress of conversion to God, are usually by sanctified afflictions. Indeed, considering our folly, and perverse abuse of his blessings, they are the most congruous means for our recovery. The light of God's law doth not so powerfully convince us of the evil of sin, till felt in the effects of it. "Thy own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee; know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that thou hast forsaken the Lord thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord of hosts." Jer. 2:19. The instructions of the rod are more sensible than of the word; as the feeling of a tormenting disease produceth another kind of understanding of it, than the reading of its nature in books of physic; and they make us more attentive to God's call, and leave a deeper impression on us. It is Elihu his observation, "if sinners be bound in fetters, and held in cords, then he shows them their works, and their transgressions, that they have exceeded." Job 36:8, 9. Affliction clarifies their sight, makes sin to be as heinous in the view of conscience, as in its own foul nature. It follows, "he openeth also the ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from their iniquity." Ver. 10. Gentle methods were lost upon them, but by judgments he effectually commands, they relent and return to their duty. And after conversion, we need their discipline, to make us more circumspect and obedient. The Psalmist declares, "it is good for me that I have been afflicted:" Psal. 119 for before he was afflicted he went astray: he was reduced from the error of his ways by his troubles: and it was his experimental observation, "I know in faithfulness" (from the constancy of love) "thou hast afflicted me." Nothing so cools our zeal to eternal things, as the love of the world. Vital heat declines and languishes, as the feverish heat is inflamed; and till we feel the vexations, we are allured by the vanities of the

world: therefore God is pleased by such bitter means to make us more holy and heavenly. Sometimes he removes with jealousy those objects to which our hearts are so entirely engaged, that the enjoyment of them intercepts the ascending of our affections to himself. Besides, he will not suffer us to perish in prosperity. "We are chastened of the Lord for our amendment, that we may not be condemned with the unreformed world." 1 Cor. 11. And is not this an infallible testimony of his love? David said, "let the righteous smite me, and it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, and it shall be an excellent oil." Psal. 141:5. If he valued the reprehensions that were not contumelious and injurious, not to upbraid but reform him, as a favour and dear obligation, how much more should we the corrections of our heavenly Father? And it will be a greater incitement to an humble and grateful acceptance of this discipline, if we consider what a severe neglect it is, when God suffers the wicked to lead a voluptuous life without disturbance: they are encircled with riches and honours, softened with pleasures, charmed with enticing objects, and thus become hardened in sin; they are riotous and luxurious, and give the reins to their corrupt unruly appetites without control; the slaves of sense, led only by principles of pleasure, and hereby are inexcusable, and made ripe for perdition, and reserved for final vengeance. Others, though not guilty of scandalous enormities, yet are by continual prosperity settled upon their lees, careless and secure, "neglect the great salvation," and say in their hearts, "it is good to be here;" and their damnation is as certain, though not so visible, as of those who commit gross and open wickedness. Sad preterition! In the midst of pleasures they are truly miserable. They have just reason to be abandoned to sorrow, being forsaken of the love of God. The bramble is not cut, when the vine is pruned till it bleeds, in order to its fruitfulness: this letting them alone to take their fill of pleasures, is a heavy presage of final ruin. When the patient is desperate, the physician lays no restraint

upon the diseased appetite, but permits him to take what he craves. Heb. 4:14.

Besides, the intention of God is by affliction to exercise and illustrate their graces. The most excellent christian virtues would be comparatively of little use, without hard trials. Unfeigned faith in the truth and power of God to accomplish his promises, sincere love to him, humble self-denial, persevering patience then appear in their radiancy and vigour. What a blessed advantage is it, by the loss of temporal comforts to increase in the graces of the spirit? They are the truest riches, the fullest joy, and the highest honour of a christian. St. Peter declares, "the trial of our faith is much more precious than of gold that perisheth;" 1 Pet. 1:7. it is refined and resplendent by the fire of affliction, and "will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Christ." It is the advice of St. James, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. Knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience." Jam. 1:2, 3. Though afflictions simply considered, may be very grievous, yet if we advisedly weigh, and rightly compare things, even when our sorrowful passions are moved, our judgments will esteem them matter of joy, not only in expectation of future happiness, but as divine grace is thereby drawn forth in the most noble operations. In short, the ultimate design of God in afflicting his people, is thereby to bring them to heaven. Affliction mortifies the lusts of the flesh, purifies the spirit, "and makes us fit for the inheritance of the saints in light." By persevering patience in sufferings, they are approved of God, and obtain a right and title to the kingdom of glory. For according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, heaven shall be conferred as a reward to those that overcome. Rev. 22. If there be no enemy, there will be no fight; and if no fight, no victory; if no victory, no triumph; only those who conquer are crowned.

The beloved disciple, with his brother, though allied to our Saviour by consanguinity, who expected by special favour to be glorified without a preparatory trial, yet he tells them, "without drinking of his cup, they could not have a share in his kingdom:" and this should reconcile our spirits to all our troubles; for the apostle declares, who was a competent judge, having been thoroughly acquainted with griefs, and had a prospect into the glorious kingdom; "I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us." Rom. 8.

Secondly. God's love is discovered in his compassionate providence over them, and assisting power afforded to them in their afflictions: he speaks to the afflicted and disconsolate, "my son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:" Heb. 12:5. to sweeten by that tender expression, the rigour of his discipline; to signify his dear sympathy with their anguish and sufferings.

Heavenly consolation! God himself bears a share in their sorrows, "is afflicted in their afflictions:" and the effect of this love is, that he always tempers and moderates their trials to their strength; or increases their strength in proportion to the trial. His corrections are deliberate dispensations, that proceed from judgment, not from fury, which the prophet earnestly deprecates. Jer. 8. His rods are bound up with mercy, his faithfulness joins with his affection, in moderating their sufferings. It is one clause of the covenant of grace, made with Christ, typified by David, "if his children break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression with a rod," to amend not to destroy them; "but my loving kindness I will not take away from them, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail." Psal. 89:31, 32, 33. The apostle assures believers, "that God is faithful, who will not suffer them to be tempted above



what they are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that they may be able to bear it." 1 Cor. 10:13. Our Redeemer in his agony was relieved by heavenly succour, the presence of an angel with a message of comfort. St. Paul found it verified by his own experience, "that as the sufferings of Christ abounded in him, so his consolations abounded by Christ," 2 Cor. 1:5, 2 Cor. 12:9. and the divine power was accomplished, illustriously appeared in supporting his weakness. How many have enjoyed comforts of a more precious nature, and more abundant, in want of supplies from the world, than in the possession of them? When there is a total eclipse below, the blessed Comforter descends with light, and fills the soul with joy in believing.

The historian tells us of a\* clear vein of water that springs from Mongibel, (that great furnace, that always sends forth smoke or flames,) yet is so cool, as if it distilled from a snowy mountain: thus the saints in the fiery trial have been often refreshed with divine comforts; and such humble submissions, and gracious thanksgivings have proceeded from their lips, as have been very comfortable to those about them.

Thirdly. The issue out of all, is the most sensible declaration of God's love to them. The continuance is limited by his tender love, till they are prepared for mercy. The prosperity of the wicked is wine in the beginning, and lees at the bottom; but the worst and afflicted state of the saints is first, and will at length certainly end in felicity. In the tragedy of Job, the devil was the author, Chaldeans and Sabeans were the actors, "but the end was from the Lord." We are instructed by the apostle, "that although no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them that are exercised thereby." Heb. 12:11. It is an allusion to the rewards in the Olympic

games, when the persons that overcame in those exercises, were crowned with wreaths of olive leaves, the emblem of peace. Thus christians, who with unfainting perseverance in their duty suffer affliction, shall be rewarded with holiness in conjunction with peace. This peaceable fruit of righteousness is not the natural product of affliction: grapes do not spring from thorns, nor figs from thistles; neither can it be so properly ascribed to the afflicted person, as to the powerful virtue, and special grace of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies afflictions, and makes them profitable for effecting God's intention by them. And when the afflicted person becomes more humble, more holy, more weaned from the world, more resigned to the will of God, this "fruit unto holiness" will compensate all their pains and sorrows. And in conjunction with holiness, there is a divine peace, a joyful calm and quietness of conscience, in the sense of God's favour; his answers of peace are usually a reward, according to the operations of grace: his comforts are dispensed as encouragements to obedience. Besides, when the sinful corruptions are purged out, which caused perpetual disturbance, and our affections and actions are correspondent to the divine law, there is that clearness and serenity of mind, that rest and ease in the soul, arising from its just and due subordination unto God which the disobedient, in all their seeming prosperity, never enjoy. "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." These beginnings of happiness are obtained here, but the perfection of it is in the next life. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of righteousness, which God hath promised to them that love him." James 1:12. The richness and value of the "crown of life" is so great, that God, the most wise and just esteemer of things, gave the precious blood of his Son to purchase it for us. It is a felicity so transcendent in its quality, and stable in its duration, that the blessed God cannot give us a greater; for what greater good is conceivable than himself? And what more stable enjoyment of it than eternity?

The hope of this makes a christian blessed in the midst of the greatest miseries. "Our light afflictions that are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 2 Cor. 4.

## **His Infinite Wisdom Orders All Things for the Best**

V. The infinite wisdom of God orders all things in the best manner for his own glory, and the final good of his people. If he governed by absolute empire, none in heaven or earth might say unto him, What dost thou? But there is an inseparable connexion between his wisdom and his will; he is "the King eternal," and "the only wise God," 1 Tim. 1. as the apostle joins those divine titles. In this the excellence of the divine liberty shines, that it is always regulated by infinite wisdom: "he works all things according to the counsel of his will:" Eph. 1:11. this is spoken according to human conceptions, but must be understood in a sense becoming the perfections of God: for counsel cannot properly be attributed to God, whose understanding is infinite, and in one view comprehends all things; but as those things are most complete that are the product of our deliberate reasonings and deep contrivance; "so his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment." Deut. 32:4. Whenever we are dissatisfied or displeased with his proceedings, it is from the error of our minds, and the viciousness of our affections; we presume to correct his providence, as if he were defective in regulating the affairs of this lower world; but "he is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." Isa. 28:29. In the creation this regular and beautiful world was formed out of darkness and confusion: and his providence, that is now mysterious and veiled to us, will bring into glorious order and Sweet agreement, those things in their final resolution, that now

seem so perplexed to our apprehensions. It was a confounding reproach from God to Job, "who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" Job 32:2. His passionate exclamations were such, as if the divine wisdom had not disposed all the afflicting circumstances in the series of his sufferings; and that holy man being convinced of his presumptuous folly, repeats the charge against himself with tears of confusion: "who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not, things too wonderful for me, which I knew not; wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes:" Job 42:3, 6. more particularly,

1. All things are so wisely ordered, that God shall be glorified in the event; and it is the noblest disposition of a christian, to prefer the advancement of his glory, before all the comforts of this life, and life itself. Our blessed Saviour in the forethoughts of his sufferings, was in distress and perturbation of mind, like the darkening of the sky before a great shower: "now is my soul troubled, what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour." John 12:27. But the short conflict of nature was presently at an end, he willingly yielded up himself to be a sacrifice to the divine honour, and said, "Father, glorify thy name." Moses and Paul, whose admirable zeal, had only a parallel between themselves in the same degree of holy heat, desired the salvation of the Jews before their own, if God might be more glorified by it. This is the first petition in order and dignity, in that complete form of prayer composed by our Saviour, as the rule of all our desires. "Thy name be hallowed and glorified in us, and by us." The admirable history of Jephtha's only daughter, is applicable to this purpose; she joyfully came forth to meet her father, returning victorious and triumphant after his war with the Ammonites. Judg. 11:36. He had made a rash vow, to offer up in sacrifice to God, whoever should first meet him after his victory, and upon the sight of his daughter was so deeply wounded with sorrow, that his triumph was converted into

lamentations: but the grief was only in the father; for in that first surprise of such a terrible sentence to be executed upon her, she did not answer his tears with tears, nor lamentations with lamentations, but said unto him, "my father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth, forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee on thine enemies." Methinks the admirable love and generosity in a young virgin, to whom her father's honour and exaltation was more dear than her life, upbraids us for our unwilling submission to those providential dispensations that are ungrateful to flesh and blood wherein the glory of God is advanced. If we were called to martyrdom for his truth, and our lives should bleed forth, as sacrifices on the altar, or our bodies be consumed as incense on the censer, it were an unjust and ungrateful complaint, to express passionate reluctancy against his providence. If there were no other consequences of our present sufferings, but the glorifying God, we should be content. That is the worthiest end which he proposeth to himself, and will accomplish: his divine excellencies will be illustrated by the wickedness of men, that at present obscures the glory of his government; his wisdom, power, holiness, mercy and justice will be acknowledged, admired and magnified at last.

2. His wisdom will order all things, even the most afflicting and dolorous, for the good of his people. This is a fearful paradox to a carnal mind, that judgeth of good and evil, as present things are pleasant or unpleasant to sense, without regard to what is future. It is like Samson's riddle to the Philistines, "out of the devourer came meat, and out of the strong came sweetness." But to the mind that hath spiritual discerning, and judgeth of good and evil, as things are conducive or destructive to the happiness of the soul, it is a clear undoubted truth. "We know," saith the apostle with the greatest assurance, "that all things work together for good to them that love

God." Rom. 8:28. All things, the most adverse to their present desires, are so disposed and overruled by his providence, as if there were a secret intelligence and concert between them, to promote the happiness of the saints: thus in mixed bodies the contrary qualities are reduced to such a just measure and temperament by the wisdom of the divine Maker, that a sound and healthful constitution results from them. We have a rare instance of this in the history of Joseph; his envious brethren were the instruments of his exaltation; they sold him for a slave into Egypt to frustrate his prophetic dreams; and there, by many admirable turns of providence, he was advanced to the highest dignity; and then was verified in him and his brethren, "that his sheaf arose and stood upright, and their sheaves stood round, and did obeisance to his sheaf." God had reserved purposes of greater good for Joseph, than if he had continued under his father's tender eye and care; therefore it is said in his history, that they perfidiously "sold him, but God sent him." He that attentively reads the journies of the Israelites through the wilderness to Canaan, cannot but wonder at the circuits and indirect motions in their tedious travel for forty years; and when near the borders of the place, so long and ardently desired, they were often commanded to retreat in the same line wherein they had advanced to it: had they chose the shortest way, and disobeyed the divine conductor, they had never entered into the land of promise: but following the pillar that directed their march, though they seemed lost in their intricate wanderings, yet they obtained the joyful possession of it. This was a type of the saints' passage through a troublesome world, to the true rest above, and that they are guided through many cross ways directly to the kingdom of heaven. "Who knows," saith Solomon, "what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?" Eccles. 6:12. That which is desired with importunity, as tending to his happiness, often proves his woe: some had not been so wicked, and consequently so miserable, if their lusts

had not been excited by riches and power: others had not been secured from destructive temptations, but in a low and afflicted state. It is therefore both our duty and interest not to pray absolutely for any temporal thing; but when our desires are most passionate, to say with the humility and holiness, the reverence and obedience of our Saviour, "not my will, but thine be done." We shall find ourselves more happy by the divine disposal of things, than if we had obtained our dearest wishes, and most ardent prayers. And when we shall come to the top of the holy hill, and look down on the various circuits of providence by which we ascended, we shall then understand that wisdom and love conducted us safely to felicity; we shall approve and admire all the divine methods in order to our blessed end. Now the belief of this should compose us to a patient and cheerful resignation of ourselves to God's providence and pleasure. Who would not accept of the counsel of a friend that proceeds from love, though his judgment were not so exact as to be relied on? Much more should we thankfully receive the appointments of God, whose knowledge and affection are equally superlative, in whom there is united the wisdom of a father's, and the tenderness of a mother's love to his children. Briefly, as Jonathan by tasting the honey at the end of his rod, had his eyes enlightened; so the end of the severest chastisements will convince them, that the providence of God was more benign and propitious than they could imagine. "His ways are as far above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts, as the heavens are above the earth." This point is applicable to us.

## **MOTIVES to Persuade us to this Duty of Resignation**

(1.) By way of reproof for our unsubmitive behaviour in afflictions, our uncompliance with the divine disposals. Some are in a secret

discontent at God's afflicting providence; and this raiseth the memory of former mercies, and takes away the relish of present mercies; as the sweet showers of heaven that fall into the sea are turned into its brackish taste: such neither enjoy God nor themselves. What egregious folly and vile ingratitude is this! All we have, is from his most free favour; and shall we peevishly slight his benefits, because our desires are not gratified in every respect? Others are moved with anger and vexation for the evils that befall them: as the red hot iron under the blows of the hammer casts abroad fiery sparks; so their stubborn fierce spirits, when afflicted, break forth in expressions of impatience and displeasure. They count it a base abjectness of mind, a despicable pusillanimity, to humble themselves under God's judgments, and with contrition for their sins to implore his clemency. "The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve, the timorous and weak creatures: but when the heavens roar, the lions thunder back again." Thus strong and stubborn sinners, when they feel the effects of God's anger, are raging and furious in their passions and expressions. "The foolish man perverteth his way, his most grievous sufferings are the fruits of his sins, and his heart fretteth against the Lord as the inflicter of them." Prov. 19:3. This is a high indignity to God, and an injury to themselves. For a vile creature, a base guilty wretch to murmur and storm against God's righteous judgments, argues a prodigious forgetfulness, both of its dependance and obnoxiousness to the divine tribunal. It is said of the adherents of antichrist, "That they were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over the plagues, and they repented not to give him glory." Rev. 16:9. Infinite insolence! Such obstinate souls the prince of darkness possesses as his peculiar dominion; they have more need of conversion than consolation. Besides, by impatience and vexatious fretting, they exasperate their pains, turn the rod into a serpent, vipers into dragons; and God's mighty hand is more heavy by their resistance.



Bold expostulations irritate his anger, rather than incline his mercy; the wilful man never wants woe. "With the froward," saith the psalmist, "thou wilt show thyself froward," Psal. 80. or, as it is rendered in the margin wrestle. The strongest sinner is not a match for the Almighty; if his anger excite his power, how easily, "how sudden are they destroyed without remedy? Stubborn impatience under the inflictions of God's righteous providence, is the nearest step to final ruin. Others are so dejected and broken with afflictions, that their continuance in the world is but a living death: every thing entertains their grief, and the best means afforded for their reviving and comfort are ineffectual. Sorrow flows into despair, they lament and languish as if their case were hopeless and remediless. The fountain of this black stream, is a superlative esteem and affection to inferior things: and what is reserved for the blessed Creator? If a temporal loss be the most afflicting evil, it is a sign that God was not valued and loved as the chiefest good. The difficulty of receiving consolation, shows the necessity of their being afflicted: the language of such resolved sorrow is, "They have taken away my gods; and what have I more?" The sole objects of their felicity are removed, and they refuse to be comforted; as if no less sacrifice were due to the remembrance of their loss, but life itself. What a disparagement is this of the divine excellencies? "Are the consolations of God small to us?" Is not his love able to compensate the loss of a frail, mutable, mortal creature? Cannot he please and satisfy us without the fruition of one earthly comfort? This dejection of spirit is equally undutiful as uncomfortable; our griefs are sometimes as vain and as guilty as our joys; there is a tincture of disobedience in our tears; for we are commanded "to mourn as if we mourned not, for the fashion of the world passeth away;" and we at once break his law and our own peace. Our disobedience in this is aggravated, as being contrary not only to the authority and sanctity of the Lawgiver, but to his loving-kindness and compassion. Ah, the miserable blindness of human

minds! and the more miserable, because voluntary. Who is more deservedly unhappy than one that sits upon the bank of a river, and yet is tormented and dies with thirst? The clear, fresh stream passeth before him, allures and invites him, but he will not stoop to drink; this is the case of those who neglect and refuse the spiritual consolations in the gospel, John 7:38, 39. that are compared to the flowing rivers of living water, for their cooling, refreshing quality. They meritoriously and actively bring trouble to their souls; their passions are the instruments of their misery. He that is his own executioner, has no excuse of dying; he is justly, because wilfully miserable.

Consider also what a reproach is cast upon Christianity, that so many virtuous heathens in great afflictions, were in some measure supported by the precepts of human wisdom; and that christians, to whom there is revealed from heaven, that an eternal state of glory and joy shall be the reward of their patient sufferings, remain utterly disconsolate. I will single out one example. Stilpon the philosopher, when his city was destroyed, with his wife and children, and he escaped alone from the fire, being asked whether he had lost any thing? Replied, "All my treasures are with me," justice, virtue, temperance, prudence, and this inviolable principle,\* not to esteem any thing as my proper good, that can be ravished from me: his mind was erect and steadfast under the ruins of his country. And others upon lower and less generous considerations, have born up in their sufferings. How do such examples upbraid us, that their twilight excels our noonday brightness? If common cordials raised such courageous spirits in them, shall not the waters of life, the divine strong comforts of the gospel, fortify us to bear all sufferings with a valiant resignation to the good will of God? Can the spirit of a man, by rational principles sustain his infirmities, and cannot the spirit of God, the great comforter, support us under all troubles? What a blot

is this to religion? Those who will not be comforted, will not be christians; by the same holy spirit who is styled the comforter, we are the one and the other. If the precious promises of the gospel do not alleviate our sorrows, it is not from infirmity, but from infidelity. It is an incredible miracle, that a person can be in reality a christian, and not capable of consolation; as if eternal life were not purchased by Christ for his people, or the present sufferings were comparable to the future glory; or the possession of it were to be obtained after a thousand years of hard trial: but if it were delayed so long, that sensible duration should sink our spirits; for the misery that passeth with time, is not of moment with respect to the blessedness that is established for ever.

(2.) Let us be excited to transcribe this divine lesson (so full of excellency and difficulty) in our hearts and lives. It is easy in speculation to consent to the reasonableness of this duty, but how hard to practise it, and to bear not too sensibly such evils as are incurable here? A deliberate, universal, constant subjection to God's will, though contrary to our carnal desires and interests, how rarely is it to be found among those who in title and profession are his servants? In active obedience, some will readily perform some particular commands, but withdraw subjection from the rest; they seem to make conscience of the duties of piety, but neglect righteousness; or else are just in their dealings, and careless of devotion. Some are liberal, but irreconcilable; they will give for their honour, but forgive no contempt or injury; and as the dividing living twins destroys them, so the life and sincerity of obedience, that consists in the union and entireness of its parts, is destroyed by dividing our respects to some commands, neglecting the rest. And in "passive obedience," many will submit to lighter and shorter afflictions, but if an evil comes that nearly touches the heart, or that remains long without redress, they become impatient, or so dejected as to neglect their

duty. I shall therefore superadd to the former arguments, wherein the necessity, the equity, and the policy of our dutiful resignation to God's providence is clearly set forth, some other motives and directions, that may be useful and effectual for this end.

## **The Example of Christ in His Sufferings**

1st. Look frequently to Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith: the divine wisdom, to reform the world, assumed the human nature, and expressed in a holy conversation upon earth, a living copy of his precepts, to direct us in the various parts of our duty; and because the exercise of humility, self-denial, and the rest of the suffering graces, is so difficult to our frail and tender nature; he ascended the cross, and instructs us by suffering, to suffer with his affections, leaving us his example, as the best lecture of our duty; his sufferings concern us not only in point of merit, but conformity. We can never enjoy the benefit of his passion, without following his pattern. His example is the rule of the highest perfection, and we are under the greatest obligation to imitate and honour him who is our sovereign and Saviour, to whom we owe our redemption from everlasting misery, and the inheritance of glory. It is the apostle's advice to the afflicted, "to consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, that ye be not wearied, and faint in your minds." Heb. 12:3. The deduction is with greater force to make us humble and patient; if we consider,

(1.) The infinite dignity of his person. He was the eternal and only Son of God, and descended from the throne of his majesty, divested himself of his robes of insupportable light, that concealed and manifested his glory to the angels, Psal. 104. and was obedient to the death of the cross. What are the highest and best of men to him?

Were it not extremely unbecoming and undutiful for a subject to refuse obedience to a just law, if the king that made the law should voluntarily observe it, and reserve no other advantage to himself, but the honour of enacting it? Our Saviour did not stand upon the dignity and liberty of his person, being equal with God, and our king, but entirely complied with the law, and shall we complain of its rigour?

(2.) The greatness of his sufferings. They were incomparable as to their value, so in their degrees. He endured the equal extremities of infamy and torment, that are so contrary to the inclinations of mankind. He was crowned with a cruel diadem of thorns, scourged, spit upon, derided, crucified: insensible nature, as if capable of understanding and affection, was disordered in its whole frame at his death. The heavens sympathized in eclipses of the sun, in the darkness of the air at mid-day, as midnight, the earth quaked with deep tremblings, and the rocks were rent asunder. And the sufferings of his soul from the incensed justice of God were inconceivably great. What is the worst we suffer, either immediately from God, or instrumentally from men to his bitter passion? Our sufferings are but superficial shadows of misery, compared to his deep sorrows.

(3.) His sufferings were most undeserved: for he was the holy one of God, his conception without the least taint of sin, his life of strictest purity, and complete obedience to the divine law. We may read the process of our sins, and understand their guilt in his passion. "He was made sin for us," (a sacrifice to atone the divine displeasure) "who knew no sin." As David when guilty of adultery and murder, was fired with disdain at the relation of an incompassionate rich man, killing the single lamb of his poor neighbour, and sparing his own numerous flock; and when the prophet unveiled the parable, and surprised him with that piercing reproach, "Thou art the man!"

he presently by that fiction in another, was convinced of his own true guilt, and was extremely afflicted in the sense of it: thus we are apt to conceive indignation against the murderers of our Saviour, the apostate apostle, the malicious priests, the unrighteous judge, the bloody soldiers: but conscience (as a true Nathan) may charge us to have been in that wicked conspiracy against the Lord of glory, for our sins condemned and crucified him.

And as our sins were the impulsive cause of his sufferings, so our good is the effect of them. He suffered the death of the cross, that his blood might be our ransom, his ignominy the purchase of our glory, his torments the merit of our blessedness, his death the seed of immortal life to us; but we suffer the just punishment of our own sins.

(4.) His willing obedience, divine patience, and invincible constancy in suffering for us. In his distress, the whole army of heaven were in readiness for his protection and rescue, upon the least signification of his will: "If I prayed to my father, he would send me twelve legions of angels." Nay, he had the springs and keys of the divine power in his hands, and could by a word have destroyed his enemies; but he "freely gave himself for us;" and without resistance, without complaint took up his cross. Now our Saviour, who had the fulness of the spirit, communicates to us the first fruits of it, faith and love, humility and patience, peace and joy, to support us under affliction.

(5.) Consider the excellent reward of his sufferings. He was abased below men, and is advanced above all the angelical orders, and is the eternal argument of their praises: never were suffering so grievous, never was issue so glorious. "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despised the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the majesty on high." Heb. 12:2. Now our blessed Saviour

hath promised, "To him that overcomes, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Rev. 3:21. Unfainting perseverance in our duty, shall be rewarded with the glory of our Redeemer. And is not the prospect and expectation of this sufficient to confirm our minds, and make us patiently bear the greatest afflictions?

## **The Examples of the Suffering Saints in All Ages**

2dly. The consideration of the suffering saints in all ages, is a powerful persuasive to patience. Thus the apostle James directs christians, "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience." Jam. 5:10. And we have great encouragement from hence, if we consider;

(1.) That those who are of most precious account with God, and highly favoured by him, are usually exercised with sharp afflictions. The singularity and greatness of a calamity exasperate the sorrow, when it is apprehended as a sign of extraordinary guilt in the afflicted, and of severe displeasure in God that sends it; but prevent trouble that ariseth from that apprehension, the scripture records the heavy afflictions that happened to God's chosen servants and favourites. Moses, whom God honoured with the most condescending and familiar discoveries of himself, was tried by long afflictions. David, a man after God's own heart, was a long time hurled to and fro by tempestuous persecutions from his unjust and implacable enemies. Isaiah, who was dignified with such heavenly revelations, that his describing the sufferings of Christ seems rather

the history of an evangelist, than the vision of a prophet, was sawn asunder.

(2.) Their nature was as frail as ours, their afflictions as cutting and sensible, yet how patiently and courageously did they endure the most cruel sufferings?

(3.) We have the same blessed comforter to assist us as they had, the Holy Spirit. He that is styled the spirit of power, infuseth a holy magnanimity to bear the heaviest sufferings. Now it is the apostle's inference from the history of the saints under the Old Testament, some of whom died martyrs, and others lived martyrs, by their constant and generous suffering various evils for divine truth: "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Heb. 12:1. The metaphorical expression, "a cloud of witnesses," imports a numerous company, and is by some of the ancients interpreted as an allusion to the benefit we receive from the natural clouds, that refresh the air, and screen us from the scorching heat of the sun. The allusion is too subtile and strained, but the benefit is real; for the admirable examples of their patience and courage are powerful to refresh sorrowful spirits, "We are encompassed with them as a theatre." There is no kind of affliction, and no part of our duty, whereof there is not presented to us some example for our encouragement and imitation. It is also worthy of observation, that christians have a special obligation, encouragement, and assistance to bear afflictions with cheerful spirits, above the believers of the Old Testament. For under the Mosaic dispensation, outward prosperity, riches, honour, victory, long life, were the open expressions of God's favour, promised by the terms of that covenant, as rewards to obedience. Yet even then, some of the most excellent saints were



illustrious examples of patient suffering afflictions. But in the gospel God hath declared, that his design is to train up his children by sufferings, for their future happiness; that "through many tribulations they must enter into the kingdom of God." And we find the truth of this by manifold experience, from the first ages of the christian church. St. John, by revelation, "beheld a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, that stood before the throne, and before the lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands: and they all came out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Rev. 7:9. Now since the cross is an appendix to the gospel, we should with more prepared minds submit to it. Besides, if believers then, who enjoyed only star-light, less clear discoveries of the glorious world to come, were so patient and constant in suffering for the truth; how much more should we be animated in our troubles, to whom the "Sun of Righteousness" appears, revealing life and immortality by the gospel? If they who were partakers of the Holy Spirit in lesser degrees, were supported; should not christians that receive the graces of the Spirit in richer abundance, be more comforted?

## **All Creatures Obey the Will of their Creator**

3dly. All creatures obey the will of the Creator; all the lower rank; "fire and hail, snow and vapours, and stormy winds fulfil his word." Psal. 148:8. The sun stood still till Joshua had completed his victory; it started back to confirm the faith of Hezekiah. Nay, sensible creatures will contradict their own natures at God's command. The ravens fed Elijah, and the lions spared Daniel. And creatures of the superior order exactly fulfil his will. "The angels that excel in

strength, do his commandments: hearkening to the voice of his word." Psal. 103. They do not usurp upon his royalty, nor make use of their power to deny subjection to his pleasure. Now if the inferior creatures, who are under less obligations, and cannot understand their duty; if superior creatures that excel us in nobility of nature, and dignity of state, perfectly obey God; should not their example strongly incite us to submit to his will?

## **It is our Most Glorious Perfection, to have our Wills United to the Divine Will**

4thly. It is our most glorious perfection, to have our wills united to the divine will. In heaven grace is in its exaltation, the spirits of just men are made perfect by their compliance with the divine will that absolutely governs there. A private will that compounds with God upon sordid capitulations, that excepts against doing or suffering what is distasteful and harsh to the carnal part; how unreasonable, how degenerate and base is it? But when the will is obedient, enlarged, and uniform with God, it is ennobled. If our slow-paced thoughts could conceive things as easily, suddenly, and clearly as the angels do, our minds would be in the highest elevation:\* and is it not a more valuable and desirable perfection to will as God does, than to understand as the angels?

Besides, patience has a special eminence above other graces, and advances a christian to the highest honour and perfection that is attainable here. All graces are of the same divine extraction, and have the same general effect upon the soul: they come from God, and produce a godlike temper and disposition: but they are distinguished by their objects and operations: some are heroic, exercised about great things, and produce more noble actions: others are humble,

and conversant in meaner things, and their operations are less eminent. As amongst the birds, the eagles fly aloft, and only stoop for a great prey: the bees fly from flower to flower, and extract a little dew, but it is all honey. It is the counsel of St. James to the afflicted, "let patience have her perfect work," in bearing afflictions, though heavy and continued, "that you may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." A singular perfection and encomium is attributed to patience, in that the trial and exercise of it is the most difficult part of our duty, and without it we can neither obey the commands, nor obtain the promises of the gospel. Patience is the truest fortitude, and draws forth other divine graces in their excellent activity. What the temper is to material weapons that are blunted or broken in the combat without it, patience is to other graces, their strength is derived from it. This was the most glorious perfection of Christ's obedience; "for it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Heb. 2. Patience is not only defensive armour, but has noble operations. When our Saviour was nailed to the cross, and was the mark wherein all the poisoned arrows of rage and malice were received, he seemed only to suffer, yet even then performed the most divine exploits, and obtained the most glorious victory; he reconciled God, disarmed the law, subdued satan, broke the gates of hell, destroyed death, and rescued us miserable forlorn captives. Upon this account Chrysostom breaks forth in rapturous expressions, that our Saviour suffering on the cross, was more glorious than in his creating the world. Thus the patience of a christian, which in appearance is only a quiet bearing affliction from God, yet produceth many blessed effects: a believer, while he feels the weight of God's hand, incessantly seeks his face with the most ardent affections. He doth not murmur against the displeasure of God, but mourns bitterly that he hath deserved it. He surrenders himself to the divine displeasure, which is the purest act

of obedience. He subdues his unruly passions, which is a more noble victory than the achievements of the most celebrated conquerors. It is true, the power of grace is very conspicuous in resisting pleasant temptations, the pernicious attractives of the senses and carnal appetites; but more in the battles of patience, by how much it is more easy to nature to be content without unnecessary and superficial pleasures, than to endure oppressing and painful evils. I will produce an instance in both kinds, recorded in scripture, for the veneration and imitation of all. The first is that of Joseph, whose unspotted chastity was discovered by rejecting the impure desires of his master's wife. Three powerful tempters joined to draw his consent, solitude, youth, and solicitation; solitude with its silence, is often more persuasive to the commission of sin than the strongest eloquence; because there being none that sees, takes away the shame of being seen in guilty and foul actions. Youth is violent in its appetites, and needs no entreaties to induce it to gratify them: the sensual fancy reigns, and has such a ravishing power upon the will, that to corrupt nature the temptation is irresistible, and without divine strength, an instance of overcoming it, would be as rare as a phoenix in the world. Besides, Joseph was her slave, and was tempted by entreaties mixed with inticements from a superior, that (like a bow that draws strength from its bending) by making a show of subjection acquires a double empire. But he had a reverence of his invisible observer and judge: "how shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Now that Joseph in the flower of his age, was not imboldened by solitude, nor excited by concupiscence, nor poisoned by the breath of the basilisk, was an admirable effect of divine grace. He preserved his sincere and constant innocence, as the sun its undefiled lustre in the midst of all the feculent exhalations that ascend from the earth.

The other instance is Job, whose victorious grace in the comparison, is more glorious than that of Joseph; for as the lapses of those who by terrors and torments violate the law, are less culpable, and more excusable, than of those who by sensual allurements transgress the divine commands, the human nature being capable of such\* dolorous impressions as infinitely exceed all the pleasures of sense; and consequently the yielding for fear of vehement pains and extreme evils, is less voluntary than what proceeds from the love of delights; so proportionably that virtue is more eminent that remains firm, and preserves us in our duty, notwithstanding the batteries of extreme evils, than that which preserves us by flight from the deceitful sensitive good.

The Holy Ghost has given us a particular narrative of Job's troubles, and his behaviour under them: the loss of a great estate was but a preparative for worse calamities; his ten children were all destroyed in a day; his body was covered with ulcers; his wife, that in this desolate condition was only left to alleviate his sorrows, unspeakably increased them; yet under this heavy weight of miseries, he did not express one unbecoming complaint. His patience exceeded all the pains of his body, and griefs of his mind. Who loves God so ardently in his prosperity as he did in his afflictions? Like flaming torches, that reversed, the flame ascends with more force to heaven. St. Austin admiring his invincible temper, says, that Job half dead on the dunghill, was stronger than Adam, when immortal in paradise; for with indignation he repulsed his wife, who was satan's instrument to tempt him to despair and blasphemy. How graceful and amiable a spectacle is a patient saint? He attracts the eye and heart of God himself. What an honourable testimony proceeded from his mouth, concerning Job, to vindicate his sincerity from the malice of the accuser? "Hast thou seen my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth?" Job 2:3. Unparalleled saint! who endured

such a succession of tragical events with humility and submission! The active holiness of his prosperous life is not recorded with that note of eminency and admiration, as his patient sufferings, for which he is universally crowned with the praises of the saints in all ages. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job!" He is a spectacle that draws the regards of all, more famous for his patience than his misery. It is the saying of the Platonic philosopher, take away from the life of Hercules, the tyrants he suppressed, and the fierce beasts he slew, his travels and combats wherein his courage was exercised and appeared, and you lessen his virtue, the hero is lost: he that in the opinion of the heathen world deserved a deity; and is crowned with stars in heaven, will not have a spark of glory on earth to preserve his fame alive ill memory. Thus, take away from Job the Chaldean and Sabeian robbers, the shower of fire that consumed his estate, the whirlwind raised by infernal spirits, that destroyed his children, his diseases, and his cruel wife, the exercises of his insuperable patience, and the honourable remembrance of Job is lost. If the prince of darkness had not tried all his arts and strength to overcome him, and had not been foiled in his attempts, his graces had not been so illustrious. St. Peter declares, "that the spirit of glory, and of God, rests upon suffering christians." They are the temples of the Holy Spirit, the eternal Deity, wherein he displays his divine virtue and glorious power. In short, God usually conducts his people to the sublimest degrees of grace and glory by suffering; the more they are tried and refined, the brighter their crown will be.

## **It is our Felicity Quietly to Resign our Wills to the Will of God**

5ly. It is our felicity quietly to resign our wills to the blessed will of God. Patience, considered as a moral virtue, frees us from many

sorrows and vexations that are supervenient to an affliction, and are caused merely from the distemper, and unquiet disorderly agitations of our own passions. Nature instructs a dog by licking his wound to heal it, a lively emblem of the healing operation of discreet patience to the afflicted spirit. Patience lines the yoke, and makes it softer and more easy to us. Besides, an humble and full submission to the will of God, as the rule of goodness, brings down the peace and joy of paradise into our souls. The glorified saints are raised above all disasters and troubles; nothing can disturb the serenity, or stain the purity of their state: from this principle of perfection and felicity, that God's will is always accomplished, to which their wills are entirely subordinate, in obedience to his authority, and by their proper inclination. As the waters which in the creation God transported above the heavens, are not moved as those here below by the furious agitation of the winds, but as if they were of a celestial nature, have the same regular motion with the heavens. The angels, whose zeal for the honour of God, and love to the souls of men is incomparable, yet they see the rebellion of his subjects, whereby his glory is obscured, and the final destruction of rebellious sinners, without the least diminution of their felicity, because they always acquiesce in the divine will, that orders all things for the best end. And so far as our wills are complying with the divine will, we enjoy a tranquillity of mind, which afflictive accidents cannot disquiet. St. Austin describes blessedness to consist in the accomplishment of our desires, and in having only regular desires: now a saint whose will is absolutely resigned to God's will, has a foretaste of blessedness here; for whatsoever happens to him here, is from God's will that approves or permits it, and herein he finds satisfaction. What a pure undisturbed pleasure springs from this consideration, that the wisdom and love of God chooseth always what is best for us? This will make us contented in every state; even when our condition is not correspondent with our natural desires, our desires are graciously

accorded with our condition. What expensive industry has been used to procure the fancied philosopher's stone, that changes all metals into gold, which if obtained cannot make us happy? For as the natural heat of the body does not proceed from the clothes, but from the body that warms them: we see persons in the fit of an ague shake with cold, though covered with furs: so true felicity doth not proceed from the outward condition, but from the temper of the mind. The rich often want content in the confluence of all things, and are often disquieted with the fears of losing their possessions: but acquiescence in the divine disposal always brings satisfaction to the soul. It is an inviolable treasure that cannot by the most violent evils be taken from us.

I shall annex two considerations more, to show how our felicity is promoted by our patient sufferings.

1. It is a blessed assurance of our election by the most free and unchangeable love of God. The apostle tells afflicted christians, "that whom he did foreknow, he did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first born among many brethren." Rom. 8:29. If we suffer with his divine patience, with his humble and holy affections, it is a clear and certain evidence that we are appointed to reign with him. If we bear the image of our suffering Saviour in our earthly state, we shall bear his glorious image in the heavenly. The well-grounded hope of this is very comfortable in the greatest afflictions, and will encourage us to persevere in humble sufferings. For if his sovereign pleasure has ordained us to eternal life, how just is it that we should with an entire and resigned submission yield up ourselves to the conduct of his wisdom, as to the ways by which we shall obtain it?



2. By a filial submission to God's chastisements, we have a blessed testimony of our adoption. It is the apostle's comfortable inference, "if ye endure chastisements, God dealeth with you as with sons;" that is, if without murmuring or fainting, if with that respect and subjection that is due to the high and holy providence of God, then we may be assured of his paternal relation to us, and "his rod comforts us," as the strokes of it are an argument of his care and love to us. From hence proceeds inexpressible and peculiar consolation to afflicted christians: the same affliction as to the matter and circumstances, may be upon humble meek sufferers, and refractory stubborn sinners, "that kick against the pricks, but are distinguished by the intention of God. They are sent to the humble, as corrections from the wise love of a father, who dearly regards their souls; to the obdurate, as vengeance from the righteous severity of a judge. Upon the humble they fall as soft as a shower of snow; upon the other as the storm of fiery hail upon the Egyptians; and the issue of them is as different as heaven and hell.

Lastly, This sharp discipline continues but during our minority here; when we arrive at the state of perfection we shall not need it: and this life is but a short transition to the next world. What comparison is there between a few years, and the Volume of eternal ages? It is the consolatory of the apostle, "the time is short, let those that weep be as if they wept not." Within a little while afflicted saints shall ascend to the region of blessedness; and no cloud of sorrow, no shadow of fear, no darkness of anxiety, can reach so high to darken and disturb their felicity: "weeping can endure but for a night, and joy comes in the morning" of the everlasting day. "For a moment have I hid my face from thee, but with everlasting kindness will I receive thee, saith the Lord." Isa. 5. Death is the last step out of mortality and misery. "Be ye also patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draws nigh." Jam. 5.

# **DIRECTIONS how to perform this duty of resignation**

To these motives I shall add some directions for the performance of this hard duty.

**Direct. 1. A steadfast faith in the divine providence and promises, will compose the soul to a quiet submission to God's pleasure in the sharpest troubles.**

All things are under the intimate inspection, the wise conduct, the powerful influence of his providence. This is one of those prime, universal, rich truths, from whence so many practical consequences are derived. By virtue of it we may infallibly conclude, that all things that come to pass, are disposed in the best season, and best manner, for the best ends. If we were admitted to the council of state above, and understood the immediate reasons of every particular decree, we could not be more infallibly assured of the wisdom and goodness, the rectitude and equity of his dispensations, than by this universal principle, that is applicable to all events, as light to every colour, that what God appoints is best. That we may feel the blessed influence of it more effectually, let us consider that divine providence extends to the whole creation: it is infinite, and overruling all things. God is pleased to represent it in scripture, according to the narrowness of our capacity: as Elisha contracted himself to the stature of the Shunamite's child, applying his mouth to his mouth and his hands to his hands. 2 Kings 4. Thus it is said, "He rides upon the heavens," to signify his absolute power in ordering all the motions of the most high, vast, and glorious part of the visible universe. "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names." The stars are the brightest and most active parts of the vast region above us,

and are called the host of heaven, with respect to their number and order. God is their general; and though they seem innumerable to our senses, yet the multitude is exactly known to him, and yields ready and entire obedience to his pleasure. From whence the psalmist infers, "Great is the Lord, and of great power, his understanding is infinite." Psal. 147:5.

There is nothing in the lower world exempted from the empire and activity of God's providence. He is unmoveable, and moves all; invisible, yet appears in all. The most casual things are not without his guidance. "A man drew a bow at a venture," 1 Kings 22:34. without express aim, but God directed the arrow through the joints of Ahab's armour, that penetrated to the springs of life. The minutest and least considerable things are ordered by him. A sparrow does not fly or fall without his disposal. It is not an hyperbolical expression of our Saviour, but an absolute truth, "that all the hairs of our head are numbered, and not one falls to the ground without his licence." Mat. 10. The voluntary and most indetermined causes of things are under his conduct. The hearts of men even of kings that are most absolute and unconfined, are in the hand of the Lord, he turns them according to his pleasure; as the streams of water are by several trenches conveyed to refresh a garden, by the skilful husbandman.

Sin, that is the most disorderly thing in the world, is not only within the compass of his permission, but is limited and disposed by his providence: and such is his goodness, that he would not permit it, if his power could not overrule that evil, for a good that preponderates the evil. And all afflictive evils, by his own declaration, are the effects of his just and powerful providence. "Is there any evil in the city, and I have not done it?" His providence is comprehensive and complete; no unforeseen accidents in the freest and most contingent things, no involuntary obstruction in the most necessary things, can break the

entireness, or discompose the order of his providence. "The Lord is in heaven, he doth whatsoever he pleaseth in heaven and in earth, in the sea, and all the deep places." How exactly and easily does he manage and overrule all things? The whole world is his house, and all the successive generations of men his family; some are his sons, and by voluntary subjection; others his slaves, and by just constraint fulfil his pleasure. It was the saying of a wise king, instructed by experience, that the art of governments was like the laborious travel of a weaver, that requires the attention of the mind, and the activity of the body; the eyes, hands, and feet, are all in exercise: and how often is the contexture of human counsels, though woven with great care, yet unexpectedly broke? So many cross accidents interpose, so many emergencies beyond all prevention start up, that frustrate the designs and hopes of the most potent rulers of this world. But God disposes all things with more facility than one of us can move a grain of sand: the government of the world has a less proportion to his infinite wisdom and uncontrollable power, than a grain of sand hath to the strength of a man. His counsel shall always stand; all second causes depend upon him in their beings, their agency and influences. Nothing is executed in this visible kingdom below, but by express order from his invisible court; and all occurrences are made use of for the accomplishing the designs of his electing mercy, in the glorification of his saints. Now all that is comfortable and reviving, is contained in this principle. If his providence reaches to the birds of the air, and the lilies of the field, much more to the saints, in whom he hath a propriety; and such is his condescending love, and inconceivable benignity, that he styles himself by the most endearing relation, "their God." They are the prime part of his vigilant care. It is St. Austin's affectionate ejaculation,\* "O omnipotent goodness, that so particularly regardest every one of us, as if the sole objects of thy tender care, and all of us as single persons!" The sun applies its quickening influences for the production and growth of a single plant

as particularly as if there were no other things in the world to receive them; yet at the same time it passes from sign to sign in the heavens, changes the scenes of the elements, produces new seasons, and its active and prolific heat, forms and transforms whatsoever is changed in nature. This is a fit resemblance of the universal and special operations of divine providence; what a strong security doth this give to a christian in the midst of all trouble in this corrupt and changeable world? How will it clear the mind from those miserable perplexities, and quiet those improvident, precipitant passions that so often afflict the afflicted? Whatever evils befall the saints, are with the knowledge, the will, and by the efficiency of God, materially considered; and is he defective in wisdom, power, or goodness, that what he does, either might or ought to be better otherwise? Indeed, sometimes the special ends of his afflicting providence are in such deep obscurity, that our line is too short to fathom, and the manner how God shall result from evil is unknown; but then we may conclude with evidence, it is for the best. When Cesarius a primitive saint was arguing in himself, how that scripture could be true, that the earth was founded on the waters; how the more weighty element should not sink, and be overwhelmed by the other: he stopped the course of his thoughts by this reflection, "I forgot myself when I said to God, how can this be?" † And admires that which he could not comprehend. For inferior reasons we often pray, that particular evils that are near, may be prevented; but if they overtake us, we may be satisfied that they are appointed by his supreme reason and everlasting counsel. As in a concert of music, the parts are not formed when they are sung, but were composed before by the skill of the musician, and every part assigned convenient to the voices of the persons. Thus the various conditions and passages of our lives were so disposed by the sovereign wisdom of God from eternity, and as most fit for us. Whether the evils proceed more immediately and entirely from his hand, or by the intercurrent of second causes; it is

equally certain they come by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Our Saviour answers Pilate, "thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above." All the afflictive evils that proceed from the malice of men, and increase their guilt and judgment, are ordered by his providence, for the spiritual and eternal good of his people; this consideration will prevent much sin and trouble that the best men are liable to in their perturbations and passions. There is nothing more exasperates an afflicted mind than the apprehension that one unjustly suffers,

*Leniter ex merito quicquid patiare ferendum est:*

—*Quæ venit indigne pœna dolenda venit.*

A righteous punishment even nature consents is to be received with meek submission; but to be patient under unjust persecutions, not to be provoked by injuries and enemies, is one of the hardest things in the world. If by a flash of lightning, or by a shower of rain, we are blasted or wet, we endure it patiently; but if one throw wildfire or water on us, we resent the indignity with anger and vexation. Now, if we in our deliberate thoughts consider, that God not only permits, but sends all the evils we most unworthily suffer from men, and that he commands our quiet, humble behaviour under them; nay, that he will overrule all so as the issue shall be blessed, what tranquillity and acquiescence will it produce in the sharpest dispensations of his providence? But on the contrary, exclude providence out of the world, and the mind is involved in darkness with all its terrors. Atheism is the gulf of impiety and infelicity. "None says, where is God, my maker, that gives songs in the night," that converts poisons into remedies, the sadest evils into means of the best good, and our afflictions into consolations. He that lives without God in the world, if he loseth what he superlatively loves, or falls under an incurable

evil, has no other remedy but a resolution to endure it as well as he can: and he is extremely miserable that has no joy here, nor hopes of it hereafter, not the encouragement of a happy issue to bear it patiently.

In conjunction with the belief of God's providence, our belief of his promises, that his truth is unchangeable, for the performance of them, is requisite to preserve the afflicted spirit in a calm and submissive state. A present evil strikes the imagination and senses in another manner than a future spiritual good. Now "faith is the substance of things hoped for," &c. Heb. 11:1. it makes invisible things to be the greatest realities to the soul; the steady reliance upon the divine attributes engaged them to fulfil his promises, and is of an invincible efficacy to strengthen the soul in every distress. "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee." Psal, 84. His uncontrollable power governs all the orders of creatures, and the honour of his truth is so sacred, "that heaven and earth shall pass away without the failing of any good thing promised to his people." Faith assists patience; as the blood that is a natural balsam, flows to the wounded part to heal and consolidate it. These graces are inseparable, and are recorded with special observation, as the fountains of courage under sufferings. "Here is the faith and patience of the saints; and we are directed to follow them who through faith and patience have inherited the promises." Rev. 13:10. Other graces are engaged in the christian combat, and strive for victory, but faith and patience are crowned. And to support us in great troubles, a firm affiance in the divine promises belonging to us, is of infinite moment. "I will greatly rejoice, and trust in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God." Isa. 61:10. The general apprehension of God's mercy is ineffectual to support us: and to claim a title in him without a real evidence, is vain. But a regular trust, an applicative faith, in conjunction with our sincere performing the conditions of the

promises, is to a christian, like the sacred locks of Samson's hair, whilst they remained, he was invincible; but when cut off, he became weak as other men. Our comforts rise and fall according to the stronger or weaker degrees of our faith: Peter walked firm upon the waves till he doubted, and then began to sink. One of the sorest and most dangerous temptations of the afflicted is, that they are out of God's favour. The mourning veil darkens the eyes of their minds, that they cannot see his compassionate countenance, they cannot reconcile his gracious promises with his providential dispensations; the good things he hath prepared for hereafter, with the evil he sends here. As Gideon complained to the angel, "If God be with us, how comes all this evil to us?" And the spirit of darkness takes the advantage of great troubles to tempt sad souls to despondency, as if they were utterly forsaken of God. If this temptation prevail, "if the heavens be as brass, and the earth as iron;" if no influences descend from above, and there be no springs below; if divine and human comforts fail, there remains nothing but desperate sorrow.\* St. Austin, to repel this temptation, introduceth God answering the afflicted and discomfited; "Is this thy faith? Did I promise temporal prosperity to you? Were you made a christian for this, that you might flourish in this world?" The faith of our adoption is confirmed by his corrections. If they are profitable to us, if we are refined not hardened by the fiery trial, we have a clear testimony of our interest in him. "I will bring them through the fire, and they shall be refined as silver and gold is tried; and they shall say, the Lord is my God." Zech. 13.

Briefly, let us strengthen our faith of the glorious state, and our title to it, and it will make us firm against all the violent impressions of adversity; it will produce a joyful exultation even in the afflicted state. The christian that with steadfast faith and attentive consideration looks on the inestimable infinite felicity, is regardless



of all things in the world, in comparison with it. Sacred history reports of Saul the persecutor, who was transformed into an apostle, that a sudden light from heaven of that excessive brightness encompassed him, that he was struck blind, and saw no man: this may be easily and justly applied to every sincere believer in a moral sense: the first effect of the spiritual light that shines in the eyes of his mind, and discovers unseen eternal things, is to darken his sight of the things that are temporal: even the greatest things here are not of such moment, as to allure or terrify him from prosecuting his blessed end. Saint Peter declares of persecuted christians, "That believing, they rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." 1 Pet. 1:8. The martyrs dearly embraced the cross of Christ, and prized the thorns of his crown, more than all the roses of pleasure, than all the diadems of earthly dignity, in expectation of the blessed reward.\* Tertullian wrote to the noble confessors of Christ that were imprisoned in Africa, "How willing would we change our prosperity with your precious miseries?" If weak nature be sensible of your hard restraint and sufferings, take flight by your thoughts to paradise. The persecutors cannot lay fetters upon your spirits, but when you please you may ascend to the kingdom of God, where you shall reign for ever. In the mean time counterpoise the darkness and straitness, the loathsomeness and sufferings of your prison, with the light and amplitude, the riches and abundance, the joy and glory of the celestial kingdom which no words are significant enough, or worthy to express. A saint whose blessedness is in heaven, cannot be made utterly unhappy by afflictions on earth.† He will serve God with as much love and as good a will, when poor, despised, disconsolate, as in a flourishing condition; and with this peculiar satisfaction, that his sincerity is then most evident: for the service that is without respect to a present salary, a temporal interest, is not base and mercenary. Besides, that obedience is more eminent and acceptable that is with sufferings, and the reward shall be answerable to our obedience. One

draught of the river that makes glad the city of God above, can sweeten all the bitterness of the world. In short, the christian's hope is in the apostle's expression, "The anchor of the soul sure and steadfast, that enters within the veil;" it is fastened in heaven, confirmed by the fidelity of God's promises, and the prevailing intercession of Christ, and secured to us in the midst of all the turbulent agitations in the wide sea below. Hope makes us not only patient but joyful in all our sufferings. A christian encouraged by the blessed hope, comes with joy to death, as the door that opens to the kingdom of glory, and immortal blessedness.

**Direct. 2. Let God be the supreme object of our esteem and affections;** and whatsoever evils we sustain, will be made light and easy to us. The apostle assures us, "That all things," even the most afflicting, "work for the good of those that love God." Rom. 8:28. That heavenly affection is not only the condition that intitles us to that promise, that by special privilege makes all the evils of this world advantageous to the saints; but it is the qualification by which it is accomplished. By love we enjoy God, and love will make us willing to do or suffer what he pleaseth, that we may have fuller communion with him. In God all perfections are in transcendent eminence, they are always the same and always new. He gives all things without any diminution of his treasures: he receives the praises and services of the angels, without any advantage or increase of his felicity. By possessing him, all that is amiable and excellent in the creatures, may be enjoyed in a manner incomparably better than in the creatures themselves. His infinite goodness can supply all our wants, satisfy all our desires, allay all our sorrows, conquer all our fears. One beam of his countenance can "revive the spirit dead in sorrow, and buried in despair." The prophet Jeremy in the desolation of his country, supports himself with his interest in God: "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." Lam. 3:24. The expression signifies the

truth and strength of his affectionate choice of God as his chiefest good, what loss can make a christian poor, whose treasure is above? What danger anxious, whose heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord? What disaster unhappy, whose blessedness is in heaven? What death can destroy him, whose life "is hid with Christ in God?" Deprive him of all the contents of this world, yet by communion with God, heaven descends to him, or he ascends to heaven, where God is all in all: the blessed reward is not reserved wholly till hereafter. Divine joy is not deferred till our entrance into the celestial kingdom: there it is a refined joy from all mixture of sorrow; it is infinitely increased; there spiritual joy meets eternal joy; but it begins here: the gracious soul has a taste and sight "how good the Lord is," as an earnest of the fulness of joy in heaven. Hope brings some leaves of the tree of life, to refresh us with their fragrancy; but love of its fruits to strengthen us. As transplanted fruits, where the soil is defective and the sun less favourable, are not of that beauty and goodness as in their original country; so heavenly joys in this life are inferior in their degree to those of the blessed above, but they are very reviving. "In the multitude of my thoughts within me, thy comforts delight my soul." Psal. 94:19. It is the triumphant exultation of the prophet; "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." Hab. 3:17, 18. He supposeth himself in extremity, utterly destitute not only of the refreshments, but supports of life; yet he knows how not only to be patient and contented, but joyful in the most forlorn condition. Joy is an affection proper to the happy state. "In the day of prosperity rejoice." And in his deepest affliction he had such a felicity in the favour of God, that no external want could diminish. The tree of life brought forth fruits for every month; our blessed Redeemer, typified by it, has consolations for the most

deplorable and desolate condition. If he says to the afflicted soul, I am thy salvation, and within a little while thou shalt be with me for ever in glory, it sufficeth. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. It is the most affectionate counsel of the apostle. These are not inaccessible heights of religion, and points of perfection, to which none can arrive, unless extraordinary saints; but are the experimental practice of humble sincere christians, that say with the psalmist, "Whom have we in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth we desire besides thee." The guilty principle of vexatious discontents and immoderate griefs under outward losses and troubles is a false judgment; that God without the world is not sufficient for our complete felicity: who, unless a person distracted and foolish, would say that the magnificent feast of Ahasuerus, that was prepared to show the riches and glory of his kingdom, was mean and poor, because there was not set before the numerous guests in dishes of gold, grass and acorns, the food of brutes? It is equally folly to imagine that God, who is an infinite good, suitable to the spiritual immortal nature of the soul, and all-sufficient to fill the vast capacity and desires of our angelical faculties, the understanding and will, by his glorious perfections; that God, I say, cannot make us happy in his love, because our lower animal faculties, our senses, have not in our communion with him what is pleasing to their carnal appetites. The spouse in the canticles is represented as a "Lily among thorns," encompassed and oppressed with injurious enemies, yet she breaks forth in triumphant joy, "I am my beloved's, and he is mine;" by an irrevocable donation she gave her heart to Christ, and reciprocally he gave himself to her; she despised all inferior things and rested in his love as her sole felicity. In short, none are concerned to lose the weak light of a candle at noon-day, when the sun pours forth a deluge of light to illustrate all things; and the soul that enjoys the propitious presence of God, is satisfied therewith when lower comforts fail.

**Direct. 3. Let us moderate our valuations and affections to thing below.**

This is a Consequence of the former; for if the heart be full of God, it will not admit any inferior object to rival him in his throne. If we consider the vast distance between the perfections of the Creator, add the faint reflections of them in the creature, our respects and love should be accordingly. Reason, authority, example, experience, convince us that all things below are empty vanities: it is restless folly to seek for happiness here, and, to borrow the language of the angel, "to seek the living among the dead." If our felicity be from the light and warmth of creatures, how easily is it quenched, and we are in irrecoverable darkness? When there is exorbitant love, and dissolute joy in the possessing, there will be extreme and desperate sorrow in losing. One irregular passion feeds and maintains another. The heart is disposed to contrary extremities, and passes from the fire to the frost: the unequal spirit swells or sinks, according to the outward condition. It is the wise advice of the apostle, "that we rejoice as if we rejoiced not,"\* and then "we shall weep as if we wept not." Afflictions are intolerable or light, according to our apprehension of them; an indifferency of temper to the things of this world, disposeth to self-denial universally, as God is pleased to try us. This was the holy and happy temper of David, "Surely I behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother, my soul is even as a weaned child:" Psal. 131. indifferent to manage a sceptre or a sheep-hook, according to God's pleasure. If we can deny ourselves, we shall humbly yield to God. If we can sincerely say, "Not our wills," we shall readily repeat our Saviour's submission, "But thy will be done."

**Direct. 4. A prudent forecast of possible evils as future to us, arms us with patience to sustain them.** Since man was expelled from the terrestrial paradise, and is below the celestial, he is

liable to innumerable afflicting accidents. His condition here is like an open sea, so voluble and inconstant, so violent and furious: sometimes the ships are raised upon the top of the waves, as if they sailed in the air; and sometimes plunged into the waters, and ready to be swallowed up: such frequent changes happen in our passage to eternity, and it is mercifully ordered so by the divine wisdom, that We may so use the world, as not to abuse it and ourselves, by overvaluing and affecting it. It is a contemplation of Theodoret, that the sun and moon, the most glorious luminaries of heaven, and so beneficial to the earth, would be honoured as deities, if they always appeared with the same invariable tenor of light: and therefore God wisely disposed of their motions, that at the revolution of certain periods they should suffer an eclipse, that the ignorant world might be convinced they were but parts of nature, appointed for the service of man, and are not worthy of divine honour. Thus we see that often the brightest and fullest prosperity is eclipsed to convince us by the miserable changes in this world, that the best estate of man is altogether vanity, and that these things are utterly insufficient to make us happy, and are not worthy of the chief regard and affection of our immortal souls. To set our hearts on them, is to build on the sand, and to expose ourselves to ruinous falls by every storm. A sudden blast overthrows the fabric of fancy, our conceited happiness in the enjoyment of perishing things. Our greatest comforts may occasion our greatest afflictions: "The glory of a family may occasion the grief of it." Now the consideration of the mutable nature of things here below, keeps the heart loose from them, fortifies us with proper thoughts to bear evils that happen, and prevents disappointments, that is an aggravating circumstance of our troubles, and a great vexation to the mind. The Israelites when transported from the land of Canaan to Babylon, felt the rigours of their captivity the more sensibly, in that they were confident in their term and state in that land, as their permanent inheritance: to be expelled from so rich a

country wherein they promised themselves rest, was a high degree of their misery.

There is indeed a prevision of evils that may befall us, that has torment, that anticipates and exasperates misery. Fear, that gives the signal of approaching evils, often brings more terror than caution, and like a timorous sentinel by a false alarm, astonishes rather than prepares the mind to encounter with danger. Our Saviour strictly forbids such perplexing apprehensions of future evils, as most unbecoming christians, who are under the perpetual providence of their heavenly Father. "Take no thought for the morrow, the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself." Mat. 6:34. But on the contrary, to be secure in our prosperity, as if we should always enjoy a favourable course of things, as if our most flourishing comforts did not spring from an earthly original, and might be suddenly blasted, or easily cut down, is to lay ourselves open to surprising disorders and perplexities, when evils befall us. It is the wise counsel of St. Peter to believers, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as if some strange thing happened to you:" 1 Pet. 4:12. for unexpected adversity falls upon the soul in its foil weight, and suddenly overthrows it. Uncomfortable accidents strike to the heart, when it is not armed to receive the blow: whereas the remembrance of our frail and fickle state, makes us less troubled in afflictive changes, because prepared for what may happen to us.

**Direct. 5. Serious and mournful reflections upon our guilt, and what we deserve from divine justice, is both a motive and a means to suppress impatience and indignation, and to allay inordinate grief in our sufferings.** We are directed by the wise preacher, "in the day of adversity consider:" it is a proper season to review conscience, "to search and try our ways," to take a sad and serious examination of our lives. If God should exact the

rigid score of our debts, and make us as miserable as we are sinful, yet there is the greatest reason to justify him, and accuse ourselves; much more when our punishment is far below our deserts.

Humility is the mother of meekness, they are graces of the same complexion and features. Our Saviour, in the order of the beatitudes, first declared, "blessed are the poor in spirit," that have a low conceit of themselves, as nothing in spirituals, and worse than nothing in sin; as empty of all that is holy and good, and compounded of all evil: and "blessed are those that mourn," in a sense of their sins; and then, "blessed are the meek:" and these are very congruously joined, for meekness is a disposition inseparable from the other. He that duly considers himself to be a wretched creature, a worthless rebel, and is humbly and sorrowfully affected for his unworthiness, his passions will be subdued; and as melted metal receives any form, so he patiently suffers what God inflicts. A "broken heart" is an "acceptable sacrifice" to God, Psal. 51. and implies a tender sense of sin, as the offence and dishonour of the holy and gracious God, in allusion to a broken bone, that has an exquisite sense of any hurt: and it may be extended to signify a heart that is compliant and submissive to God's will, in allusion to a horse that is broken, and easily managed by the reins of the rider. Contrition for sin is always joined with resignation to the chastising providence of God.

Besides, Godly sorrow will lessen natural sorrow. Sin first deserves our grief, and the sharpest accents of our lamentation should be placed upon it; and the more sensible we are of it, the lighter will affliction be to us. As the opening a vein stops by revulsion, a flux of blood in another part; so the turning the stream of sorrow from affliction to sin, is a powerful means to make it cease: there is health in the bitterness of physic, and joy in the depth of this sadness. Briefly, repentance inclines the heart of God, and opens his tender



compassion to the afflicted. We have an admirable example of this in the case of afflicted Ephraim: upon his penitential complaint, the expression of his grief and shame for his sin, God graciously answers, "is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord." Jer. 31:20. When the relenting sinner is covered with tears, the great Comforter descends, and brings healing to the troubled waters: this advice is more necessary for the afflicted, because usually the strokes of providence are properly a reproof and correction for sin; the application of a corrosive implies that some corrupt matter is to be discharged: God is provoked by their neglects, and though love cannot hate, it may be angry; and without renewing their repentance, and recovering his favour, their afflictions are very uncomfortable. It is extremely sad to feel the sting of a guilty conscience within, and the displeasure of God without. The burden is heavy and oppressing, that is laid upon a wounded back. It is therefore our best wisdom and duty, "to search our hearts and try our ways," that we may discover what is the procuring cause of our troubles, "and turn unfeignedly to the Lord." This will endear afflicted souls to God, and incline him to afford gracious supports to them. It is true, sometimes our sufferings are designed for trial, especially when they are for righteousness sake. Counterfeit coin, though with a fair stamp and inscription, is discovered by the fire; thus mere titular christians, specious hypocrites, are made known by persecutions: but true substantial gold endures the fire without loss, and the more it is tried, the more it is refined. Thus the true christian, whom neither the gain of the world, nor the loss of life can remove from the steadfast owning of the holy truth, has a clear manifestation of his sincerity. And it is a peculiar favour and honour, when God calls forth his servants to the hardest trials for his name's sake; it is the noblest way of service, a special conformity to the Son

of God, more glorious than the resembling his power in doing miracles. In this the saints here have a capacity of serving God above the angels; for the obedience of the angels is always joined with their happiness, but the obedience of the saints here, is often attended with adversity, and is more valuable to them upon that account: as a soldier of courage and generosity, when he is chosen from the rest of the army for some bold exploit, values the choice of the general, as a signal mark of the esteem of his valour and fidelity. "To you it is given, not only to believe, but to suffer for Christ's sake." This is just matter of joy. Innocence, with the faithful companion of it, a good conscience, makes our sufferings from the rage and violence of men, to be comfortable. There may be a feast within the house, when a storm of hail rattles upon the tiles. But it is sometimes so ordered by divine providence, that the evils we suffer are of a mixed nature, partly chastisements, and partly trials. This was the case of the believing Hebrews, to whom the apostle directs his counsel; Heb. 12. their persecution was from the unrighteous Pagans, for a cause purely religious; but it was permitted by the righteous God, as a punishment for their sins. And here the divine wisdom and goodness is admirable, that the same affliction is instrumental for the purifying of his servants from sin, and the advancement of his glorious gospel. The first and most immediate effect of his discipline, is the humbling and sanctifying them, to prepare them for his love, by which they are fortified to bear courageously the worst evils for his sake.

**Direct. 6. Apply the mind to consider the blessings we receive, as well as the evils we endure.** Whilst the intense thoughts are fixed upon the cross, the soul is racked with inward tortures, but did we turn our eyes upon our enjoyments, and the comforts that are interwoven with our troubles, it would be a means not only to compose us to patience but thankfulness. The apostle

directs us "to trust in the living God, who giveth all things richly to enjoy." 1 Tim. 6:17. In the poorest and lowest state of life, we have many favours and effects of his rich bounty; and it is the ignorance of our deservings and of our enjoyments, that causeth discontent and murmuring under our troubles. Particularly, this consideration will be effectual to repress the discontent that is apt to kindle in our breasts, upon the sight of the different dispensations of providence; that some are exempted from the current adversities of the world, and live in ease and pleasure, whilst we are deprived of many outward comforts. Suppose a sick person in extreme poverty, were received by a rich and liberal lord into his house, and convenient food, and precious medicines were provided for him, without his desert, or possibility of retribution; would he be so foolish and insolent, as to complain of unkind and unworthy usage, because some others in the family have a more plentiful table and richer habit allowed them? On the contrary, let us look down to those who are below us: how many are poor and miserable in the want of all things needful for the support of life? How many are under tormenting pains, or in desperate sadness, and have no taste and comfort in their abundance? How many are fallen into deep misery, and that aggravated by the afflicting memory of former happiness? How many are surrounded by their cruel enemies, and see no refuge, no sanctuary for their escape, but a necessity of perishing? And can we pretend a better title to the mercies of God, than our fellow worms? Our original is from nothing and our works are sinful: that we are not so desolately miserable as others, when equally guilty, is from the rich goodness of God, and should make us thankful.

Add further; let the most afflicted saint in the world compare his condition with that of the most prosperous wicked persons, and the comparison will be effectual to endear God to him, and quiet his passions under sufferings.

The good things of this world, in their abundance, variety, and excellence, cannot make a sinner truly happy: the miseries of this life in all kinds and degrees, cannot make a good man utterly miserable; nay, they are inestimably more happy in their sufferings, than the wicked in their prosperity. Manna rains from heaven while they are in the wilderness; supports and comforts are from the love of God shed abroad in their hearts; and their present afflictions are a seed of eternal joy, to qualify and prepare them for the joy of heaven. Our Saviour, from whose judgment we receive the true weights and measures of things to regulate our esteem and affections, declares his disciples, when under the sharpest persecution of the tongues or hands of their enemies, under disgrace, calumnies, tortures and death, even then he declares them "blessed, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to them;" and heaven is such a transcendent blessedness, that the lively hope of it, as the reward and end of our afflictions, makes us blessed here: and the most prosperous sinners are by the same infallible rule, miserable here; for the irresistible, irremediable misery that is ordained and prepared for them in hell, they would deceive themselves with the paintings of happiness, with an airy imaginary happiness: whilst the senses are filled, the soul is empty: but they shall not long enjoy the ease of their ignorance and security; the world can do no more to make them happy, than if one should compound and temper a draught, and give it to the poor and miserable, that induces sleep and pleasant dreams for a few hours, but when they awake they are still poor and miserable. Our Saviour pronounceth a woe to the rich and full, "to those that laugh now, for they shall weep and mourn:" their false deceitful felicity, will end in real misery. It is\* St. Austin's question, who would not prefer grief with a sober mind, before the jollity of a phrenzy? Who would be a merry mad-man? for he is only happy in his fancy, and fancies himself so, only because he is distracted: and according to the rules of true wisdom, the worst estate of a saint, when lamenting and

languishing under troubles, is more eligible than the best estate of a sinner, when triumphing in prosperity.

**Direct.** 7. Lastly, frequent and fervent prayer to the "Father of mercies, and God of all consolation," is a blessed means to support the spirit, and make it humble and obedient to the afflicting providence of God. It is divine counsel, "is any afflicted, let him pray." It is prayer opens the heart, and carnal grief breathes out; prayer opens heaven, and divine joy flows into the soul; the King of glory keeps no state, there is always easy access to his throne, and his ears are always open to his humble suppliants. His most gracious nature inclines him to sustain us in our dejections. We have a powerful plea from his compassions to encourage our prayers in great troubles. "He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer." The most glorious attribute of the Spirit, "the Comforter," is most useful and beneficial to afflicted suppliants: affliction is the season, and prayer the sphere of his activity. That our prayers may prevail, these following rules must be observed.

## **The Properties of Acceptable Prayer**

(1.) They must be addressed with an humble trust on the mercies of God, that incline him to relieve and sustain the afflicted. Thus St. James directs the afflicted, "to ask in faith, nothing wavering." Jam. 1:6. We read in scripture of his bowels, the light of his countenance, his melting eye, the soft, serene, compassionate expresses of his most gracious nature towards his suffering people. He doth not esteem himself more honoured with the glorious, titles of our Creator and King, than with the amiable endearing name of our father; and with a confidence becoming that relation, we are directed by his divine Son to make our requests to him. It is recorded of Augustus\* the

emperor, that when one presented a petition to him in a timorous and shy manner, that generous; prince, whose humanity was equal to his dignity, was moved with displeasure, as if it had been a tacit reproach that he was of an untraceable fierce nature. Thus it is a disparagement of God's benignity and clemency, when we pray to him in a diffident manner: he is more pleased in doing of us good, than we can be in receiving it. Indeed, if the promises of God did not encourage our hopes, we should not presume so much of his affection, as to lay the burden of our cares and sorrows on his arms; but heaven is not fuller of stars to enlighten the darkness of the night, than the scripture is of precious promises for the refreshing the disconsolate. When the church complained, "the Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me:" Isa. 49:14, 15, 16. what assurance does he give of his most tender and unchangeable love to her; "can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands:" if he cannot forget himself, he cannot forget his people, it is his dear title, "God that comforts those who are cast down." 2 Cor. 7.

Add to this, the interest of the saints in Jesus Christ, who ever lives to make intercession for them. None is more tenderly inclined to mercy, than he that has suffered misery: and he felt our sorrows, that he might afford relief and succour to us. Whilst our Saviour was upon the earth, and was followed by a multitude of diseased miserable persons, virtue went out of him, and healed them all: and since his ascent to heaven, has he withdrawn that universal healing virtue, and left us under irremediable and unmitigable sorrows? Did his compassionate eye regard all that were afflicted, and are we now out of his sight? Then such was his indulgent humility, that although he could have performed the cure by a word, yet he readily offered to

attend a sick servant; "I will come and heal him:" and now he is raised from his humble state on earth to the throne of heaven, does he disdain to extend his merciful hand for our relief? No, his heart and love is the same in heaven as upon the earth. It is true, he is exempted from all passionate frailties, all afflicting affections that are inconsistent with the felicity and glory of his kingdom: but he still retains the same solid love, the same godlike compassion, the same ready will to support and deliver his people in misery. Nay, if the change of his state could have made any in him, it could be no other than what is recorded to the immortal honour of Vespasian,\* by one that had experience of his royal bounty; that the raising him to the imperial throne made no alteration in his breast, but that his power was enlarged equal to his will of doing good. Our Saviour in his exaltation at the right hand of God, has all power, equal to his infinite love, that is suitable to the permanent relation between him and the saints: he is their head, and they his members: and was there ever such a miracle, or rather monster in nature, that the head the most eminent part, the seat of all the senses, did not resent a wound made in the foot the lowest and most servile part of the body? Does it not presently express its real complaints? For the natural union of the parts communicates the sense of the pain suffered by any to the whole. And such is the spiritual union between the divine head and his members, that from heaven he rebuked the cruel persecutor of the saints, in language expressing the union of charity between himself and them: "Saul, why persecutest thou me?"\* He does not say, why persecutest thou my saints, why my servants, but "why me?" Though he is not capable of any sorrowful sense, yet his affections are quick and vigorous to his people. If it were possible that his joy, wherewith he is infinitely blessed, should be increased, it would be in the effusions of his goodness to afflicted christians, "let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." How heavy

soever the calamities are, let them not sink our spirits into despair, but raise them to nearer approaches to the God of consolation.

(2.) The prayers of the afflicted must be always with submissive deference to the will and wisdom of God, as to the manner, the degrees, and time of his delivering them. Afflictions are not peremptory and immutable dispensations, but conditional, for holy and good ends, and we may humbly pray for their removal. It is no resisting of providence, to address to the divine majesty with frequent and fervent requests, that he would please to take his chastising hand off from us. Upon David's humble prayer, the destroying angel was commanded to cease; in the midst of judgment mercy interposed, "it is enough." But, we are apt to be impatient in our troubles, and by hasty impetuous desires of ease and deliverance, disturb our tranquillity and offend God. As those who are diseased with a rheumatism, being worse in the night than the day, impatiently long for the rising sun to dispel the oppressing humours, and cheer their spirits: so in our afflictions we impatiently renew our requests, "Lord, how long? Lord, make haste;" not reposing ourselves on his wisdom and goodness, who will do what is best for us. God is both our father and physician, and when the corrupt humours are purged away, will give cordials and restoratives to his afflicted children. The prophet tells us, "he that believes, makes not haste;" he doth not by undue means seek to remedy his evils, nor passionately and unquietly solicit the accomplishment of the promises, before the season appointed by the divine decree: for that is to desire that his mercy should be displayed to the prejudice of his immutability; but humbly waits God's pleasure.

(3.) Let the main desires of the afflicted be for divine grace, (which is never more necessary and useful than in troubles) that they may glorify God, and obtain their eminent end, the salvation of their souls



by them. We are often very ardent in our prayers for trivial things, neglecting the most necessary and important. As if a prisoner loaded with irons should passionately entreat, that his chains should be gilded, not loosed. How many spend their zealous affections in praying for temporal things, wherein their happiness does not consist. One of the reasons why God heaps upon rebellious sinners the good things of this life, is to instruct us how despicable they are in his account, things to be thrown away, as he seems to do. And he often refuses the petitions of his servants concerning temporal things.\* When Pelopidas interceded with Epaminondas the wise governor of the Thebans, for the freedom of a base fellow that for some crime was committed to prison, he denied his request; and presently released him upon the desire of a vile harlot: and gave this reason, it was a favour not worthy the dignity of Pelopidas, but suitable to the quality of such a petitioner.

And sometimes we pray for things dangerous and hurtful to our souls; and it is becoming the providence and love of our heavenly father, to deny our ill-counselled desires. Let us therefore be more intent and importunate in our petitions, that our afflictions may be rather sanctified than removed. We have neither understanding nor strength, how to order ourselves, how to bear and improve great afflictions, St. Paul declares, "I have learned in every condition to be content." By the revelation of the gospel, and the Holy Spirit's teaching that all his earthly troubles should end in the heavenly glory, he was instructed in that science of the saints. We are therefore directed, "if any man want wisdom," that is, how to manage himself patiently under afflictions, "let him ask it of God, who gives to all liberally and upbraids not." Jam. 1. If afflictions are sore and sudden, it is very hard to compose and support the spirit. The passions are servants of sense, rather than obedient to reason, and by their first violent motions surprise the mind, and overcome it

before it perceives the assault; he that is not a master, is a slave to them. Or suppose no angry resistance, no impetuous passions in the afflicted breast, yet the heart bleeds inwardly, and faints away. David had natural courage to encounter a lion, yet he was so disconsolate in his troubles, that he was fain to argue against his sadness; "why art thou cast down, O my soul? why art thou disquieted within me?" Psal. 42. And having raised his drooping spirits, yet he relapsed to his first faintness, till by supplies from God he was confirmed in hope of deliverance. The apostle implores the glorious power of God, that the Colossians might be "strengthened with all might, unto all patience, and long-suffering with joyfulness." Col. 1. We should sink under heavy sufferings or be tired with the length of miseries, without his immortal strength. But if the power of God assist a weak spirit, it will be finally victorious over all the evils of the world. How many martyrs of the tender sex, who would naturally tremble at a drawn sword, yet by divine support despised the tormentors, and all the instruments of cruelty? In them was an imitation of that miracle of divine power, when the three children walked in the midst of the flaming furnace, untouched by the fire. God is styled "the God of patience and consolation." It is his sole prerogative to comfort the afflicted: "I, even I, am he that comforts you." The woman in the gospel, that had a bloody issue, no human art could afford her aid and relief: and when her estate was wasted on the physicians, and her strength by her disease, she came to our Saviour and by touching the hem of his garment was presently healed. Thus the afflicted spirit, whom no worldly things are able to support and make joyful, finds everlasting comfort in God. He satisfies the soul with his love, and establishes this persuasion, "that all things shall turn for the best to his people." Now by prayer the divine power and favour is engaged for our support and deliverance. How many psalms of David begin in tears, and end in triumph? In his great exigency, when ready to be swallowed up by his enemies, he dispatched a flying prayer to heaven

for relief; "Lord, take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help:" and the Almighty appeared in arms for his rescue. And he recounts another blessed experience of the efficacy of prayer; "in the day when I cried, thou answeredst me; and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." Psal. 138. The affliction was still incumbent, but did not overwhelm him; which was a more gracious testimony of God's love, than if it had merely been taken away. It is said of the distressed, "they looked to him, and were lightened." Psal. 34:5. It is the perfection and propriety of the saints in heaven to see the glorious face of God without veil or shadow; but here some rays of his quickening countenance comfort his afflicted servants, while they lift up their eyes and hearts to his sanctuary, a joyful light breaks forth, that leads them out of the dark labyrinth of their troubled thoughts. If the saints remain disconsolate, it is not for want of mercy and power in God to refresh their sorrows, but from neglecting to improve their interest in him, and deriving spiritual comforts from his fulness, by humble believing prayer. When the disciples were surprised with a storm in the sea of Tiberias, they toiled with hard labour to save the ship that was like to be overwhelmed by the waves; but all in vain, till by their cries they waked our Saviour, who was asleep in the ship. "He lifts up his head and the proud waves presently sink; he speaks a word of command, and the boisterous winds are silent; and a great tempest is changed into a great calm."\* This may fitly represent the afflicted state of a christian, their passions swell into a storm, they are ready to be overwhelmed with troubles, but it is because Christ sleeps in them; they have his presence as if they had it not; but earnest constant prayer will awake him, and his propitious presence will secure them from shipwreck, and make their breasts the true pacific sea, and bang them safely to the blessed eternal shore.

Briefly; God teaches us to profit by our afflictions, and this affords matter of joy and thanksgiving. The psalmist declares, "blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, and instructest out of thy law." The divine teacher gives a right understanding of sufferings, for what end they are sent, and teacheth by the voice of the rod to obey his ward. He instructs us in our duty with the clearest convictions, and infuseth gracious dispositions suitable to his doctrine. He gives directing light, and a seeing eye to perceive it; he presents heavenly encouragements, and prepares the heart to receive them. Now what St. Paul speaks of the cross of Christ, is applicable to the crosses of the saints: "God forbid that I should glory but in the cross of Christ, by which the world is crucified to me, and I to it." The cross of Christ made the Jews and Pagans to despise and reject the gospel, esteeming it to be gross folly to expect a glorious immortal life, from one who was ignominiously put to death; yet that was the great argument of the apostle's triumphant joy, because he felt the virtue of it to unbind the charms of the world so admired by carnal eyes. He looked upon it with the same disaffection and disregard, as one that is near expiring; it appeared in his eyes rather as a loathsome object, than with amiable qualities.

And if the cross of a christian be the means of internal mortification, if thereby this vain deceiving world be rendered contemptible to him, and his affections are inflamed to things above, he will find cause to glory in tribulation. To conclude this argument:

There is no affliction how great soever, though with respect to natural means unremovable and unmitigable, yet if it be sanctified by divine grace, a christian even while he is so afflicted, has more cause of joy than grief, more reason to bless God for it, than to repine and complain. "In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." 1 Thess. 1:5. He turns

afflictions into benefits, and our affectionate praises are due upon that account.

-----

## MONERGISM BOOKS

The Great Duty of Resignation to the Divine Will in Affliction by William Bates, Copyright © 2020

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By downloading this eBook, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions September 2020. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, Oregon, 97068