

SPIRITUAL CONVALESCENCE

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*“And I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.”
Zechariah 10:12*

ACCORDING to our own natural conceit, we are very strong—it is as hard for us to part with our belief in our own strength as with our trust in our own righteousness. It is a very painful cut which severs us from confidence in ourselves. But when the Spirit of God performs that most needful operation, then we discover that our supposed strength is utter weakness and that our righteousnesses are but filthy rags.

If our eyes have been opened to see ourselves as we are in God’s sight, we know that we are weak as water, and that from us, unassisted by divine grace, there can never come any good thing. Our past experience might have been sufficient to teach us this lesson. The feeble way in which we have performed any duty that devolved upon us, the sad manner in which we have met any temptation that assailed us, the impatient and murmuring spirit in which we have endured any affliction that has come upon us—all these must have shown us that, even after we are renewed by divine grace, though “the spirit indeed is willing,” yet “the flesh is weak.”

And though to will is present with us, yet how to perform that which is good we find not. We are not now like a stone which lies on the ground and cares not to stir, but we are like a bird with a broken wing, which longs to soar into the clearer air above the clouds, but which is quite unable to reach that higher atmosphere. We know something of our weakness, but we probably do not yet know how weak we are, and I suppose it will be one of our life lessons to learn by experience how great our weakness is.

Perhaps some of you have been discouraged by the consciousness of your weakness, and in looking forward to the future, you have been greatly distressed. You are anticipating some important duty for which you feel quite unfit, or it may be that the shadow of some impending trial is just beginning to fall upon you.

Possibly you have come to the verge of the valley of the shadow of death, and you know that the way to the celestial city lies through it, and you intend to press through it—but you are half afraid of what will happen to you there, for you know how weak you are.

And perhaps, just at this juncture, Satan may have whispered in your ear, “It is no use for you to try to get through. You have started on a wild-goose chase and see how you limp already. Your arm is so weak that you will be no match for the giants you will have to fight. Give it up, man—how can a poor timid creature such as you are ever pass by the lions’ dens and the mountains of leopards? Such weaklings as you are should not go on pilgrimage—leave that task to those who are stronger and braver than you are.”

Well, if such a temptation as that has come to you, the message of the text is peculiarly timely to you. It does not deny that you are weak—it implies that you are—it would not have you for a moment forget your weakness, it even reminds you of it. There would be no necessity for this promise if you were strong. “I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.”

There are three things for us to notice in the text. First, *divine strengthening promised*. Secondly, *Christian activity predicted*. And thirdly, *both blessings divinely guaranteed*.

I. First, then, is DIVINE STRENGTHENING PROMISED—“I will strengthen them in the LORD.”

Observe *the discrimination of the promise*, or what is not promised in it. It is not said, “They shall have no work to do. I will take them out of the vineyard in the middle of the day, and bid them sit down in the cool arbor, and rest and refresh themselves.” No, there is no such promise as that. The Lord does not say, “I will take you away from your labors,” but “I will strengthen you, so that you will be able to perform them.”

I do not remember any promise that the waters of trouble shall be dried up. But you all remember this one, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.” I have no recollection of any promise that the fires of trial shall be quenched, but the Lord has said, “When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

If you had not to trudge along the pilgrim way, if you had not to carry your cross and fight for the crown, you would not need this promise. The Lord would not strengthen you in order that you might sit still, or put “the everlasting arms” beneath you so that you might lie down in blissful laziness. Oh, no! But as you are bidden to “put on the whole armor of God,” you may be certain that there is stern fighting before you—and as the Lord promises to strengthen you, there must be no relaxation of watchfulness and no cessation of activity on your part.

So, Christians, seek the promised strength, for you are sure to need it. Seek it now, for you may need it tonight. Seek to get as much of it as you can, for when you have the most of it that you can get, you will find that you will need it all.

Then notice, next, *the comprehensiveness of the promise*—“I will strengthen them in the LORD.” You may view this promise in many different lights. Perhaps you have fallen into such a state of despondency that you question your interest in Christ, possibly you have almost begun to doubt the veracity of your God or His faithfulness to His promise.

Well then, in your case the promise of the text will apply to your faith. Come to God at this moment and say, “Lord, You have said, ‘I will strengthen them.’ Will you not graciously strengthen my faith which is now like a reed shaken by the wind, so that it shall become like an oak of the forest which fears not the stormiest wind that blows?”

Or it may be that your hope has grown dim—you cannot see afar off, you cannot—

***“Read your title clear
To mansions in the skies.”***

Well then, take this promise to the Lord and ask Him to fulfill it to you. He will give you some heavenly eye-salve and as soon as your eyes are anointed with it, your vision will become clear and strong—and you will be able to see the land of far distances where in due time you shall arrive and “see the king in his beauty.”

Possibly it is your courage that has declined. The fear of man has ensnared you—you cannot now face a hostile multitude as you once could—indeed, you are half ashamed to go back to the home where you are laughed at because of your religion. You are not now inclined to nail your colors to the mast. You would rather sail away to some peaceful shore than remain to fight the foe. O my brethren and sisters in Christ, plead this promise, “I will strengthen them,” for so shall you get your courage renewed until you, who are now timid as a deer, shall become bold as a lion.

Is it your zeal that is flagging? Do you who once gloried in being in the thickest of the fight, now try to hide away among the baggage? Then pray to God to restore to you your former fervor and devotion to His cause, and pleading this promise you shall surely get your heart’s desire.

The promise is such a comprehensive one that it not only includes the strengthening of any special part of our spiritual being that is weak, but also the thorough restoration and strengthening of the entire spiritual constitution. Lord, I would be made strong, not only in the hands of my faith, but also in the

feet of my obedience. I would be so strengthened in the vitality of my spiritual life that my eyes should be able to see much that is now invisible to me, that my ears might hear the music of Your matchless voice, that my heart might dance at the sound of Your name, and that I might be like Elijah when he girded up his loins and ran before King Ahab, because he heard the sound of an abundance of rain—the promise of those welcome showers which the Lord was about to pour down upon the thirsty land.

But we must not forget *the provision that is made for the fulfillment of this promise*. “I will strengthen them in the LORD.” We know that it is the Holy Spirit’s work to strengthen believers and I trust that many of us have experienced His mysterious operations.

We have sometimes felt so despondent that we did not know what to do—and then, though perhaps we had not been specially engaged in prayer, and had not been up to the house of God to worship, all of a sudden our spirits have become elastic as we have felt some precious promise applied with power to our soul, and the burden which threatened to bow us down to the earth has become light as a feather, and we have stood upright and rejoiced “with joy unspeakable.”

There is no grief which the Holy Spirit cannot allay. That divine Comforter knows so well how to get at the secret springs of our sorrow and to put the comfort right into the spring itself, that there can never be a grief which can elude Him, or which can baffle His skill.

Usually, however, the Holy Spirit is pleased to work by the use of means. And you know, dear friends, how often you have been strengthened in this way. What a strengthening cordial is prayer! When you have gone to cast your burden upon the Lord, many a time you have gone upstairs groaning, but you have come down singing.

Oftentimes you have received strengthening through this blessed Book. When you have opened it, your eyes have been full of tears, but as you have lighted upon some precious promise that has exactly met your case, your tears have all vanished and your soul has been filled with joy. God has spoken to you through His Word and so you have been strengthened.

Or you have come up to the house of the Lord and you have found something there that has strengthened you. I know that many of you find spiritual food in the services here on the Sabbath—but by the time that Thursday night comes round, your soul is very hungry and you are well-nigh famished. But the Holy Spirit graciously applies the Word to your heart and you go out to meet the trials and engagements of the week feeling strong through the strength you have received from heaven.

Yes, the Master is pleased, in the assembly of His saints, when we break the Bread of life, to feed the multitude to the full, and they go away refreshed. This is specially the case when we gather around the table of our Lord. I wish that all the saints would meet for communion on every “first day of the week.” I cannot conceive it to be possible for them to meet thus too often.

As for myself, unless sickness keeps me away, I find it most helpful to come to the Lord’s table every Lord’s day, for although we believe neither in transubstantiation nor in consubstantiation, yet there is a very real sense in which we do spiritually eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man and so become “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.”

Nor are the means of grace the only channels by which we are spiritually strengthened. Christian society will often produce the same blessed results. Some Christians live too much alone. It is true that there is an evil of an opposite character, for some professors spend far too much time in one another’s houses, wasting precious hours in idle gossip and chatter.

But brethren and sisters in Christ ought to find opportunities for profitable conversation concerning their Lord and His work at home and abroad. Some of us might derive great benefit from the Christian experience of those who are older than we are, or who have been more deeply taught in the things of God. While others of us might be able to impart some spiritual gift to those who are less favored than we are. In the olden days, “They that feared the LORD spoke often, one to another.” Let this good practice be revived, for thereby, depend upon it, many will be strengthened in the Lord.

Still, dear friends, the best way of obtaining a renewal of spiritual strength is by getting near to Christ, and keeping near to Him. He who lays hold of Christ has grasped “very God of very God.” He

who can come so close to Christ as to lay his head upon Christ's bosom and say, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth," must grow stronger and stronger every moment that he is in the immediate presence of his Lord.

We grow in grace as we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The clearer view we have of Christ, the firmer confidence we have in His faithfulness and His power to save, the stronger will our spiritual nature grow and the more like our Lord shall we become. They who live near to Christ must derive strength from Him. Having waited upon the Lord, they shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

Before I pass from this point, I should like to emphasize the words of this part of the text. There are not many of them, but they are all significant—"I will strengthen them." You cannot strengthen yourselves and your minister cannot strengthen you—it is God who first gives you spiritual life and then sustains it by His grace. In fact, He is Himself, as David says, the strength of our life. It is still true that power belongs to God and that power He imparts to all as He pleases.

Note, too, that He says, "I will strengthen them *in the LORD*." They are not strengthened in themselves—there is no Christian who grows stronger through the force of his own personality, but he derives more and more strength from the Lord—he learns how to draw continually from the inexhaustible supplies of omnipotence and so is himself strengthened in the Lord.

Perhaps someone says, "I have been a Christian for thirty years, but I am not spiritually any stronger than I was when first I knew the Lord." No, nor will you be any stronger if you live for another thirty years unless you depend upon God to strengthen you. Is anyone here more able than in the past to live by faith upon the Son of God and to drink deeper draughts from the fountain of infinite fullness? Then it is clear that, in your case, my brother or sister, the promise of the text has been fulfilled, and you have been strengthened in the Lord.

Now lay the emphasis on the divine, "I will." "I *will* strengthen them in the LORD." This promise was true more than two thousand years ago and it is just as true today. It has been fulfilled many thousands of times since then, but it is just as full of force, as when it was first given.

Suppose I take a note to the Bank of England and get five pounds for it? That note will be cancelled and I cannot get the cash for it a second time. But it is not so with God's promises. You may take a promise to the Bank of Heaven in the morning and cash it, as it were. And you may take the same promise in the afternoon and cash it again. And you may take it again at night, and once more get the full value for it. You may have pleaded that promise when you were a young man of twenty, but it is just as true now that you are an old man of eighty. And to the very last moment of your life you shall find that the promise shall be fulfilled in your experience. "I will strengthen them in the LORD."

Note, too, the comprehensiveness of the promise. The Lord does not say, "I will strengthen them up to such and such a point," but it is implied that the strength will be sufficient for all their needs. So it will, my brother or my sister—"As thy days so shall thy strength be." You shall always have strength enough, but you shall never have any to spare. If you had any superfluous strength, you would only do mischief with it. But you will have all that you really need.

When you come to the last river, you may feel, "If there is another river after this to be crossed, I shall be unable to cross it," but there is not another and your strength shall fail when you have no more need of it, but not before. Your strength shall be like the widow's oil—so long as there were any empty vessels, the oil kept on running—but as soon as her son said to her, "There is not a vessel more," the oil stayed. And until your life's task is complete, the Lord will strengthen you.

The manna kept falling until the children of Israel entered Canaan and the manna of grace shall keep on falling into your heart until you shall enter the heavenly Canaan. Wherefore be of good courage, brethren and sisters in Christ, for you shall have just as much strength as you will require, for your Lord's promise concerning you is, "I will strengthen them in the LORD."

II. I must speak but briefly upon our second point which is, CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY FORETOLD. "They shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD."

How strangely some people read their Bibles and how wickedly they pervert its plainest teaching! They learn that salvation is all of grace and then they say, “Therefore, as it is all of grace, we need not do anything at all. It is God which works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure, so we can leave the working out to Him also. God begins this work of grace, God carries it on, and God completes it, so we can be as careless and indifferent as we please.”

If they do not actually put their thoughts into words, this is practically what they think. They seem to imagine that divine grace is an excuse for human laziness, but I have never yet found any passage of Scripture to warrant such an assumption as that. Certainly our present text does not support that idea—“I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name.”

According to the lazy system, it ought to read, “I will strengthen them in the LORD, and they shall be carried to heaven in a sedan chair,” for that seems to be some people’s notion of how they are to get there. May our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth ere our preaching shall ever lead our hearers into such a state of spiritual slumber as that!

Our doctrine may be as high as the Scripture warrants us in teaching, but we shall never find there any ground for the infamous deduction that, because God works in us, we are to lie inert as if we were logs or stones. Oh, no! That is not His will concerning us, for the apostolic injunction is, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

So true Christians are to be active—“They shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD.” Christianity has its meditative side, it has its passive stage, but these are the necessary preparation for an active life. A devout contemplation of the doctrine of divine sovereignty will be like the underlying rock which supports the good rich mold of holy gratitude and love which yields an abundant harvest both to God and man.

True Christians delight in sacred activity. In that respect, they are like the angels of God, “that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.” And like the glorified saints above, who “serve him day and night in his temple.” A life of Christian activity down here is a fitting prelude to a life of heavenly activity up there.

The best Christians are those who serve God the most. Ask the gardener which is the best apple tree in the garden and he will tell you that it is not the one which has the best shape, but the one which yields the most fruit. And he is not the best Christian who occupies the highest position, or who talks the most about divine things, but it is he whose life is most fruitful in good works to the glory of God.

Further, *Christian activity is, as far as it is possible, incessant*. This is implied in the phrase, “they shall walk up and down,” as though they were never to be inactive and certainly never to be idle. The true Christian, when he is in a healthy spiritual state, has always some good work on hand—something on the anvil, or something heating in the fire, or something cooling in the water—something that he is planning for the future, something that has yet to be completed, or something that is just finished, and ready to be presented to God—a prayer to offer, a hymn to sing, the sick to visit, the poor to relieve, the ignorant to instruct.

He advances from one duty to another while he is about in the world and serves his God there. And when he gets home, he still serves his God by gathering his family and servants together for prayer. As Satan is represented as a restless spirit continually going to and fro, walking up and down in the earth, so is it with the true Christian—he is constantly traversing the world, not seeking to do evil, but like His Master, going about doing good.

The expression, “they shall walk up and down,” also implies *variety of service*. They shall not only walk *up*, they shall also walk *down*. There are some departments of Christian service that we like and others that we do not like. Many would far rather glorify God by preaching to hundreds or thousands from the pulpit than by lying alone in the chamber of affliction.

Some like to serve God in what they regard as a respectable sort of way, but they do not care to work for Christ in the back slums, the cellars, or the attics. But true Christians will be just as willing to go

down as to go up. We must be ready to go anywhere and to do anything for Christ. It is just as great an honor to be employed in Christ's scullery as to serve Him in His temple.

If He allows us to wash His feet, even with our tears, let us count that as high a privilege as to anoint His head with oil. Happy is that servant who shall be permitted to kiss his Master's feet, but equally happy should he be who is bidden to unloose the latchet of His shoes. It should be a matter of no moment to us whether we go up or down so long as we are doing our Lord's will.

But do not forget to notice that *all is to be done in God's name*—"they shall walk up and down in his name." It is JEHOVAH who is speaking here and it is in His name, under His authority, at His command, and to His praise and glory that all our service is to be rendered. It is all to be done as unto the Lord, and not unto men.

I rejoice that so many, whom I am now addressing, are occupied in various forms of Christian activity—and I hope that each one of us who loves the Lord will continue thus to walk up and down in His name until He calls us to serve Him in the upper sanctuary.

III. Now I close by briefly reminding you that BOTH THESE BLESSINGS ARE DIVINELY GUARANTEED. "I will strengthen them in the LORD; and they shall walk up and down in his name, saith the LORD."

Perhaps some Christian brother or sister here is thinking sorrowfully, "I can never be made strong enough to serve God as I would like to serve Him." But my dear friend, here you have a triple guarantee from the Lord Himself. Here is the divine "I will" of omnipotent grace. The divine "they shall" of consecrated free agency and the divine "saith the LORD" of Infallible faithfulness. What more can you want?

Is not God's declaration of more value than the oaths of all the men who ever lived? Would you not sooner rely upon His divine assurance than trust to anything that you can see? Possibly you say that you would, but I am half afraid of you. When things go very pleasantly with you, it is easy for you to believe—but it is another matter when the sun has set, it is very dark and there are no stars to be seen.

O beloved, seek to have a faith which can trust God as well in the dark as in the light! What a grand life that man leads who lives upon whatever is guaranteed to him by, "Thus saith the LORD"! He never gets any poorer, because, "Thus saith the LORD" never fails him and he never needs to get any richer for, "Thus saith the LORD" is all that his spirit can possibly crave.

Here is one of the promises which is guaranteed to us by, "Thus saith the LORD"—"All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." That is enough for me. I will take that promise and plead it at the throne of grace, and I know I shall not be sent away empty. Will you not, dear friends, do the same with the promises in our text?

You need supernatural strength for the service to which your Lord has called you and here He has promised it to you. "Thus saith the LORD" is surely sufficient for you. So, seeing this divine seal attached to the promise, do not be slow to secure the fulfillment of it, but tonight, before you retire to rest, seek the strength you need from the Strong One and then, on the morrow, go forth and walk up and down in His name.

But there are some here, I fear, who never think of God's promises, and that is a strange and sad state for anyone to be in. To one who has been brought out of nature's darkness into God's marvelous light, it does seem amazing that anyone can live without a thought of God and His many exceeding great and precious promises. It is most extraordinary that an immortal being, created by God, can be content to go on from day to day and from year to year without any care about pleasing his Creator.

But if anyone here is feeling, "Oh, I wish that I could get to God! I would not for all the world have Him as my enemy, and I long to know how I can come to Him." I am thankful that you feel like that and I am glad that I am commissioned to tell you the way to come to Him. "No man cometh unto the Father but by me," said Christ. "There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Look first at the crucified Christ lifted up upon yonder tree, for—

*“There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee.”*

Trust Him as your Mediator, your Advocate with the Father, and you will find that God will then receive you for Christ’s sake, He will strengthen you in the Lord, and you shall walk up and down in his name, and by and by, you shall dwell with Him forever. God grant it, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

HEBREWS 12:1-17

May the Spirit of God graciously instruct us while we read this chapter! You know that in the eleventh chapter, the apostle has pictured the ancient worthies and their victories. Imagine that you see them mounting in their chariots of fire up to their seats in heaven. Behold them going from the mouths of lions, from the deserts, and mountains, and dens and caves of the earth, up to their glorious thrones on high where they recline in ease and honor.

The apostle then introduces us to a racecourse in which he represents all these conquerors as sitting upon seats all round the course, watching those who are about to run. And thus he begins—

Verses 1-2. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* [See Sermon #2037, The Rule of The Race]

It was no excitement to run if there were no onlookers. The spur to the racers and wrestlers in the Grecian games was found in the eyes of those who gazed, in the clapping of their hands, in the shouting of their applause, as well as in the prizes that awaited the winners.

Behold, my brethren, even our most private acts are looked upon by the millions of eyes of the great cloud of witnesses. Angels tell the news of how we run the great race and they rejoice when we prosper. Let us “run well” because so many are looking at us, and just as the Grecian runner stripped himself of his clothes before he started, so “let us lay aside every weight”—the weight of sin, the weight of care, the weight of grief, the weight of worldliness, and everything else that might hinder us.

Above all, let us beware of that sin which, like a trailing garment, might entangle our feet and trip us up, for if we fall, our opponent will certainly win the prize. Look well to that sin to which you are the most liable. We all have some besetting sin—let us especially be on the watch against that. While we keep all the wall with diligence, let us set a double guard at the most vulnerable point.

“And let us run with patience” or “endurance.” There is to be a combination of the active and passive in the Christian—he must be able to endure and yet be able still to work. “Let us run with patience”—run when we are out of breath, run when our bones ache, run when the prize seems to be further off than ever, and to be hidden from our eyes, run when the hot sun makes us thirsty—still “let us run with patience the race that is set before us,” for it is he that endures unto the end who shall be saved—not merely the starter in the race, for there are many who begin, and who begin not in the power of the Spirit of God, and who therefore do not persevere unto the end.

By this sign shall the true children of God be known, that they run with endurance unto the end, “looking unto Jesus.” As the wife of the Persian nobleman said, when her husband asked her what she thought of Darius, that she had not looked at him, she had no eyes for any man but her husband—so the Christian has no eyes for any but Christ—“looking unto Jesus”—keeping his eye always upon Him and so running the Christian race.

Jesus is here delightfully called “the author and finisher of our faith.” In most of the arts, there is a division of labor—one man begins and another completes—there is scarcely anything that is completed

by one man. But the stupendous work of our salvation was not only commenced, but it was also completed by the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Let us look unto Him then. This will help us to persevere unto the end because He persevered to the end.

2. *Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

It was this joy that made Christ strong to endure in the day of His sorrow, and joy must make you also strong to endure unto the end. He had the joy of anticipated victory. It “was set before him,” and so He “endured the cross, despising the shame.” He ran with a heavy cross on His back and yet He ran faster than you or I have run—He ran because He had more joy than we have.

So, my brethren, let us live in the joy of heaven, let us live in the joy of ultimate victory—and this will enable us to bear all the toils and trials of our present life.

3. *For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds.* [See Sermon #1073, A Honeycomb]

Luther says, “When I think of what Christ suffered, I am ashamed to call anything that I have endured, suffering for His sake.” He carried His heavy cross, but we only carry a sliver or two of it. He drank His cup to the dregs and we do but sip a drop or two at the very most. “Consider him.” Consider how He suffered far more than you can ever suffer, and how He is now crowned with glory and honor—and so you are to be like Him, descend like Him into the depths of agony, that with Him you may rise to the heights of glory.

4-7. *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

Here is a little variation in the subject. First we have the trials which come from the world—these we are to endure looking to Christ for grace to enable us to overcome them. Now we have the trials which come from God and here nature becomes an assistant to grace. We are reminded that children have to be chastened and therefore, if we are the children of God, we must expect to be chastened by Him.

Note, in the fifth verse, the two evils of which we are in danger—either of despising God’s chastenings or else of fainting under them—either of thinking too little or too much of them. Happy is the Christian who ever takes the middle course, and never despises the chastenings of the Lord, nor ever faints under them.

Note, in the sixth verse, that we are to expect sharp blows from God’s chastening hand. That word “scourgeth” is a strong word—“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” The scourge was ever a most severe form of punishment.

God will not spare His children when they need to be chastened—they shall have some blows as hard as He can well lay them on, that is to say, as hard as such a loving heart as His will permit Him to give. They shall have such blows that each one of them shall have to cry out, “I am broken in sunder, my heart is smitten and withered like grass.” And this is to be the treatment for every son whom God receives—not for some of them, but for all. “He scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

8. *But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

He does not say, “then are ye aliens.” He is speaking about those who profess to be the children of God, writing concerning those who claim to be members of the Lord’s family, and he stigmatizes with one of the most dreadful of names those who may escape without chastisement. But brethren, who among us would have the pleasure of carnal ease if with it we are to have the shame of spiritual illegitimacy?

9-10. *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure;*

There was, possibly, much of their own temper mixed with their chastisements. They let off their wrath upon us sometimes by the medium of chastisement, but God never chastens His children merely out of anger.

10-12. *But he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.* [See Sermon #528, Chastisement—Now and Afterwards] *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;*

Let not your service to God slacken. Lift up to God that which was idly hanging down through despondency. Let not your prayers grow weak through grief, but strengthen the feeble knees.

13-15. *And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:* [See Sermon #2902, Holiness Demanded] *looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;*

For, alas! under the means of grace, there are many who “fail of the grace of God.” They get something that they think is like grace, but it is not the true grace of God, and they ultimately fall from it and perish. What we need is to have unfailing grace and power so to hold on that, at the last, we may inherit the crown of life, but for this we must look diligently, for the best of us has good cause to suspect himself, and in church fellowship, we ought to be very watchful lest the church as a whole should fail through lack of the true grace of God, and especially lest any root of bitterness springing up among us should trouble us, and thereby many be defiled.

16. *Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.*

Those who seek the pleasures of the flesh rather than the pleasures of a higher world are here put side by side with Esau. Now Esau sold the right to his future heritage for a present mess of pottage—and many there are who do something very like that—sell their souls for a little Sunday-trading, or for a little carnal company, a little of that fool’s mirth which is like the crackling of thorns under a pot. They are willing to damn themselves to all eternity because they cannot bear the jeers and sneers of a ribald world. O brethren, let us not be like them or like Esau!

17. *For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.*

He never repented of his sin, but only of the consequences of it. He never sought pardon of God, but only sought to inherit the blessing. And there will be many, who have lived for this world, and loved it, who, when they wake up in another world, will begin to seek the blessing, but they will be rejected. This may happen even in this world.

If they only seek to die the death of the righteous and seek not the pardon of their sin, they shall hear the Lord say to them, “Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded: but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh.”

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