

CHASTISEMENT, NOW AND AFTERWARDS

NO. 528

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Now no chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”
Hebrews 12:11.

LAST Sabbath morning we tried to show you how the uncleanness of sin is removed. [*Sermon #527, Volume 9, THE RED HEIFER*]. By the application of the blood of Christ *the guilt* of sin is cleansed. By the water which flowed with the blood from the side of Jesus *defilement* is taken away forever. Our work this morning is to consider the destruction of *the power* of sin. This is a work which rests in the hand of God the Holy Ghost, and is not comprehended under the head of justification, but of sanctification.

Beware, my brethren, lest you mix these two different things. It is in the sense of *sanctification* that the trials and afflictions of this life have the blessed influence of purging us from sin. It were a very great error to imagine that affliction ever cleanses us from the guilt of sin. For if we could be afflicted with all the pangs of the lost spirits in hell, and that forever, not a single spot of sin would be washed away by all our miseries and tears.

Nor are we saved from the pollution of sin by our *trials*. Our conscience must be purged from dead works by the blood of Jesus alone. If the wedge of gold which Achan stole were accursed, you might have thrust it into the fire as many times as you would, but it would have been accursed still. There were fiery serpents which bit the children of Israel. Their way was long, and their journey tedious, but yet I find that they needed the ashes of the red heifer, because that purification did for them what affliction could not do. No amount of affliction can avail, either to take away the guilt or the defilement of sin. It is in this sense that Kent sings,

*“With afflictions He may scourge us,
Send a cross for every day,
Blast our gourds, but not to purge us
From our sins as some would say.
They were numbered
On the scapegoat’s head of old.”*

Yet as we have said, if you separate between sanctification and justification, and make a clear distinction between the indwelling power of sin and the guilt of it, then you may clearly perceive the place which affliction holds. When the Holy Spirit acts as Christ’s representative, and sits as a refiner, His furnace is affliction. The trials and troubles through which we have to pass are the glowing coals which separate the precious from the vile. They are, through divine grace, the means of restraining and destroying in us the tremendous power of indwelling sin, until the day shall come when the blessed Spirit shall take away from us all corruption, and consequently, we shall need no more affliction.

Coming at once to the text, we shall notice, first, the *outward appearance of our trials*, or SORE CHASTISEMENTS. Secondly, *the result of our chastening*, or BLESSED FRUITFULNESS. And thirdly, *the characters benefited by these exercises*, or FAVORED SONS.

I. First, we have very clearly in the text, SORE CHASTISEMENTS.

1. Keeping literally to the words of the text, we observe that, *all which carnal reason can see of our present chastisement is but seeming*. “No chastisement for the present *seems* to be joyous, but grievous.”

All that flesh and blood can discover of the quality of affliction is but its outward superficial appearance. We are not able by the eye of reason to discover what is the real virtue of sanctified tribulation. This discernment is the privilege of faith.

Brethren, how very apt we are to be deceived by seemings! Why, to our senses, even natural things are too high for us. The world *seems* to stand still, and yet we know, without any faith, that it is always moving. The sun *seems* to climb the heights of heaven, and then to descend and hide himself in the west, and yet we are sure that the sun is fixed in his sphere. When the sun is setting, he *seems* larger than when he shone in his zenith, but we are well aware, in this case, that the seeming is not the truth, and that the sun is no broader at his setting than when he was shining in the highest heaven.

Now, if even in natural things *the seeming* is not the truth, and the appearance is very often false, we may rest quite sure that though affliction seems to be one thing, it really is not what it seems to be. Understand that all that you can know about trial, by mere carnal reason, is no more reliable than what you can discover by your feelings concerning the motion of the earth.

Nor, dear friends, are our seemings at all likely to be worth much when you recollect that *our fear*, when we are under trouble, always darkens what little reason we have. I remember one so nervous that when going up the Monument, he assured me that he felt it shake. It was his own shaking, not the shaking of the Monument, but he was fearful and timid at climbing to an unusual height. When you and I under trial get so afraid of this, and afraid of that, that we cannot trust the eyesight of the flesh, we may rest assured of this, that “things are not what they seem.”

Besides, we are very *unbelieving* and you know how unbelief is apt always to exaggerate the black, and to diminish the bright. When Giant Despair had put his victims into the castle, he was accustomed to beat them with a crab tree club. Some of us have felt the weight of that club—sore are its blows. Lying in that dungeon, Christian began to think whether it were not better to destroy himself, though, poor silly man, all the while the key of promise was in his bosom, and he needed not to have lain rotting in that dungeon for a single hour. We cannot, therefore expect with such a mischief-making propensity within us as our inclination to unbelief, that we can fairly judge what affliction means.

Added to this, over and above our unbelief, there is a vast amount of *ignorance*, and ignorance is always the mother of dismay and consternation. In the ignorant times in this country, men were always trembling at their own superstitions. If some old crone—perhaps some good old woman—sat by the fireside, they dreamed she had an evil eye. They thought that she might scatter plague among the sheep or mildew over the corn.

Afraid they were of the timid hare which crossed their path or of the raven croaking in the old oak tree. The air was full of omens and presages of ill. Even the insect that cried, “Tick,” as it scratched the old decaying post, was a warning of death. And candles, and coals, and all sorts of things alarmed them. It is just the same spiritually with us. We are ignorant of what God means, and so we say with Jacob, “All these things are against me,” with about as much reason for saying so as our unenlightened ancestors had for being afraid of these omens and signs.

We are profoundly ignorant, dear brethren, when we dream that we are most wise, and the best taught man among us, if he could compare the little that he does know with the tremendous mass which he does not know, would be surprised to find himself so great a fool. This mass of ignorance always becomes the fruitful parent of fears and doubts, and consequently our chastisements seem to be very sore to us.

Besides, dear friends, we are such *selfish* beings, and so fond of ease, and we are so unwilling to be cut and wounded with even God’s lancet. We feel so afraid, even of our heavenly Father’s hand if it should give us a blow, that our chastisements always seem to be more horrible than they are. You know, when a man resolves that he will endure an amputation, because he foresees that future good will come of it, even though it is a painful operation, he lies like a hero with scarcely a groan or a tear. But another, careful of his flesh and timid of himself, is frightened even at the sight of the knife, and cries out when but the very slightest incision has been made, and scarcely any pain has been felt.

So it is with many of us. We are so jealous of our own ease and pleasure, that the moment we even see the rod, we are frightened and alarmed, and at the very first stroke of it, before it has made the flesh to tingle, we think it is utterly unbearable, and that God intends to destroy us. What, then, with the clouds of fear, the dust of unbelief, the smoke of ignorance, and the mist of selfishness, it is little wonder that we do not perceive the truth and thus, “no chastisement *seems* to be joyous.”

2. The text shows us that *carnal reason judges afflictions only “for the present.”* “No chastisement *for the present* seems to be joyous.” It judges in the present light, which happens to be the very worst light in which to form a correct estimate. Suppose that I am under a great tribulation today—let it be a bodily affliction—the head is aching, the heart is palpitating, the *mind is agitated* and distracted, am I in a fit state, then, to judge the quality of affliction, with a distracted and addled brain? With the scales of the judgment lifted from their proper place, how can I sit and form a just idea of the wisdom of God in His dispensations?

At such times *old sins* come up and present passions become rebellious. How can I, when I have to contend with a thousand ancient sins, and present temptations—how can I sit down properly, and calmly, to judge what my affliction really is? I am compelled to judge of it only by a mere surface glimpse.

Besides, *Satan* very seldom forgets to roar on such occasions. That old cowardly villain seldom meddles with God’s people when they can skillfully handle the shield of faith. He knows that we are more than a match for him when we are resting simply upon our God. But if he can only see a distracted brain, and sin pressing heavily upon us, and a mind beclouded, then it is that he comes in a tremendous fury, and hopes to make a full end of us.

And if, added to all this, *God should hide His face* from us, and we would be in the dark. It is hard judging providences when it is dark, dark without and dark within, hell howling and earth shaking, while perhaps the wife is dying, the children weeping, property is flying, creditors are dunning, the mind vexed, and enemies slandering. When we,

*“See every day new straits attend,
And wonder where the scene shall end,”*

is it a fit time to judge of God? Ought we not at such seasons, like Aaron, to hold our peace because the word we shall speak is sure to be unwise? Had we not better bid carnal reason hold its decision, and wait for better times to come? “No chastisement *for the present* can seem joyous but grievous.”

3. This brings me to observe, that since carnal reason only sees the seeming of the thing, and sees even that in the pale light of the present, therefore brethren, *affliction never seems to be joyous*. If affliction seemed to be joyous, would it be a chastisement at all? I ask you, would it not be a most *ridiculous* thing if a father should so chasten a child that the child came down stairs laughing, and smiling, and rejoicing at the flogging? Joyous? Instead of being at all serviceable, would it not be utterly *useless*?

What good could a chastisement have done if it were not felt? No smart? Then surely no benefit! It is the blueness of the wound, says Solomon, which makes the heart better. And so if the chastisement do not come home to the bone and flesh, distil the tear, and extort the cry, what good end can it have served? It might even work the other way and be *hurtful*, for the child would surely think that the parent only played with it, and that disobedience was a trifle, if those very gentle blows were enough, with one or two soft, chiding words, to express parental hatred of sin. If but the *mockery* of chastisement were given, the child would be hardened in sin, and even despise the authority which it ought to respect.

My brethren, if God sent us trials such as we would wish for, they would not be trials. If they were chastisements that on the very surface seemed to be joyous, then they were no chastisements. They would still be the sweets, the harmful sweets which children like to eat, until they turn their stomachs, and are overtaken with sickness.

Let us here note, that no affliction for the present seems to be joyous, in two or three respects. It never seems to be joyous in *the object of it*. You know the Lord always takes care when He does strike His people, to hit them in a tender place. When He comes forth to the work of image-breaking, He always dashes in pieces the most favorite image first.

Look at David, how could the Lord have touched that man more to the quick than by touching him in his children? There is his daughter, Tamar, dishonored before his eyes. There is his son Ammon, who first commits incest, and afterwards falls by a brother's hand. There is a darling left. He has grown now to be a fine and comely person, there is not such another in all Israel—his hair is his glory. He is a man of great wit. He is his father's jewel. As you hear David cry, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for you! O Absalom, my son, my son!" You see most manifestly that the chastening Father never sends afflictions which are joyous. He always strikes that object which is nearest to the heart, in order that the heart *may* smart.

Nor is it, my brethren, joyous in *the force of it*. "Oh," we are apt to think, "if the trial had not been quite so severe, the temptation so strong—if the difficulty had not been so great I could have sustained it. But the north wind has come down against me. The Lord has broken me in pieces with a terrible hurricane." My dear friends, you must never expect to have the trial joyous in the force of it. God will put just so much bitters into the draught that they shall not tickle your appetite as some bitters do, but shall really fill you with loathing and real misery. He will do it efficiently and effectively in the force of it.

Again, no chastisement ever seems to be joyous as to *the time of it*. We always think it comes at the wrong season. "I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came," says Job. And David had a complaint somewhat of the same kind. "In my prosperity I said I shall never be moved. LORD, by your favor you have made my mountain to stand strong: you did hide your face, and I was troubled." The time of our afflictions, if it were left to our choosing—well, I suppose we should never have any at all—but if we must have them, and had to choose the time, then they would be joyous, and so would lose their very meaning.

Certainly, brethren, they are very seldom joyous as to the *instrument*. Hear David. "It was not an enemy; then I could have borne it." O yes, that is what we always think. "If it were not just that, I could have borne it. If I had been poor, I could have borne *that*, but to be slandered I cannot endure. To have even lost my wife—ah! it would have been a dreadful blow! But I might have borne it—but to have lost that dear child—how can I ever rejoice again?" Have not you sometimes heard brethren speak so, when they did not know what they said, for God had sent them the very best affliction they could have? He turned over all the arrows in the quiver, and there was not one which would suit to wound you with but the one He used, and therefore that one He fitted to the string and sent it with just as much force as was required and certainly no more. It all goes to prove this, that in no respect—neither in the object, nor the instrument, nor the time, nor the force of it, can an affliction ever seem to carnal reason to be joyous.

4. Nay, more, dear brethren, the text assures us in the next place that *every affliction seems to be grievous*. Perhaps to the true Christian, who is much grown in grace, the most grievous part of the affliction is this. "Now," says he, "I cannot see the benefit of it, if I could I would rejoice. I do not see why this trouble was sent to me. Instead of doing good, it really seems to do harm." "Such a brother has been taken away just in the midst of his usefulness," cries the bereaved friend. A wife says, "My dear husband was called away just when the children needed most his care."

And we say, "Here am I, laid aside upon a bed of sickness just when the church wants me, just when I proceeded most triumphantly in a career of usefulness." This is always grievous to the Christian because he cannot see, though indeed it ought not to be grievous on that account, since he should never *expect* to see, but should walk by faith, and not by sight.

You know, brethren, sometimes our afflictions come upon us like ferocious assailants. First of all they *impede* our running—we cannot serve God as much as we like while we are under affliction. We feel as if our usefulness has been greatly and grievously hindered by our bodily sickness or temporal

cares. “I could have given my whole heart, and both my hands to serve my God, if it had not been for these distractions.”

Nay, the assailant not only hinders us, but sometimes he cries, “*Stop!*” and we are obliged to stop altogether. There is a pulling-up time, the man tosses on his bed when he would be toiling in the vineyard. A sister sometimes has to be weeping at home when she would be comforting others’ hearts. We come to a dead standstill, and we are apt to say, “Is this joyous to me to have my feet fast in the stocks?” Sometimes the assailant even *knocks us down*, trials come so heavily upon us, that we cannot stand. Faith reels, hope dies, murmuring and discontent trip up our heels, and we say, “What! Is this joyous? Is there any good in this? Where can the benefit be of an affliction, which through the infirmity of my flesh drives me to evil, and develops the devil that is in me? Can there be any good in this?”

Nay, sometimes it not only knocks us down, but *wounds* us. Ah! there are many Christians who in their afflictions have received serious wounds, for they have spoken against the Lord, their impatience has prevailed, and much of their experience has turned out to be a mere figment. Nay, there are some Christians who are even killed by their affliction. I do not mean that the spiritual seed within them ever dies. God forbid!

But I mean that the joy and apparent life of their religion seem as if they had expired, and for a moment they cannot think they are Christians at all. They are led to think that they were never bought with blood, and never were in the covenant, for the blows of affliction have utterly killed them. Ah, my brethren, it is hard to see that such a trial is right. Things are grievous indeed when it comes to this point, when not only the temporal, but even the spiritual gets marred. When the fine gold becomes dim, and the glory departs. When the crown of beauty, once upon our head, is cast down in the mire, and we ourselves become like a wild bull in a net, kicking against the Lord, having our soul, not as a weaned child, but one that is weaning, petulant, and full of all manner of ill humors and bad tempers. And yet this is often the experience of God’s people, and therefore to them it is that it will always seem grievous.

5. But now let me add, and then I have done with the first head, that all this is only *seeming*. Do let me keep you to this, all this is only seeming. Faith triumphs in trial. When reason is sent into the background and has her feet made fast in the stocks, then faith comes in and cries, “I will sing of mercy and of judgment. Unto you, O LORD, will I sing.” Faith pulls the black mask from the face of trouble, and reveals the angel beneath. Faith looks up at the cloud, and says,

*“Tis big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on my head.”*

There is a subject for song even in the smarts of the rod. For, first, the trial is *not as heavy as it might have been*. Next, the trouble is *not so severe as it ought to have been*, and certainly the affliction is *not so terrible as the burden which others have to carry*. Faith sees that in her worst sorrow there is nothing penal. There is not a drop of God’s wrath in it. It is all sent in love. Faith sees love in the heart of an angry God. Faith says of her grief, “Why, this is a badge of honor, for it is the child who must have the rod,” and she sings of the sweet result of her sorrows, because they work her lasting good.

“Nay, more,” says Faith, “these light afflictions which are but for a moment do work out for me a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” So Faith sits down on the black throne, out of which she has expelled reason and carnal sense, and she begins, to the praise of divine wisdom, to lift up her voice in a joyous song. Well, brethren, that is the first point. I have been rather too long upon it, perhaps, but I could not help it.

II. We have spoken of sore afflictions—well, now, next we have BLESSED FRUIT-BEARING.

I want you to notice the word which goes before the fruit-bearing part of the text. “No chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous: *nevertheless*.” Now what does that mean? It gives me my first point under the second head, that this *fruit-bearing is not* natural—it is not the natural effect of affliction.

You will see a man take a mass of metal. It appears to you very pure and very beautiful to look upon. It is alloyed. He puts it into his refining pot, he heats the coals, he begins to stir it. You will say to him, “Why, what are you doing? You are spoiling that precious metal. Look how foul the surface is! What a scum floats up.” The natural effect of the fire is to make the scum show itself. A hand a skillful hand is needed, for the fire cannot do the refiner’s work, he himself must skim the base metal off the top.

Affliction only makes the sin rise to the surface, it makes the devil in us come up. It makes us, while we are boiling in affliction, worse than we were before. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, and of our blessed Lord and Master, when He sees it on the top, to skim it off. The affliction does not do us any good in *itself*. The natural fruit of affliction is rebellion. If God chastens me, can I love Him for that? Not naturally. If He smite me, for that can I yield Him homage? No, naturally I rebel against Him, and I say, “Who are You that You should smite me thus, and what have I done that I should be tormented by You?” To kiss the hand which smites is something more than natural, it is grace, and the apostle seems to hint at this, when he says, “Nevertheless.”

Oh, dear friends, no more could we be purged by affliction than could the sea be made pure by being stirred up with storm. I have sometimes looked at the waves when they seemed a delightfully pure blue and then, after a tremendous storm, the deep has been moved from the very bottom, and its waves are thick and foul with sand and seaweed. Trials breed discontent, anger, envy, rebellion, enmity, murmuring, and a thousand other ills, but God overrules and makes the very thing which would make Christians worse, to minister unto their growth in holiness and spirituality. It is not the natural fruit of affliction, but the *supernatural* use to which God turns it, in bringing good out of evil. Note that.

And then, observe, dear friends, that this *fruit is not instantaneous*. “Nevertheless.” what is the next word? “Afterwards.” Many believers are deeply grieved because they do not at once feel that they have been profited by their afflictions. Well, you do not expect to see apples or plums on a tree which you have planted but a week. Only little children put their seeds into their flower garden, and then expect to see them grow into plants in an hour.

I would have you look for *very* speedy fruit, but not *too* speedy fruit, for sometimes the good of our troubles may not come to us for years afterward, when, perhaps, getting into a somewhat similar experience, we are helped to bear it by the remembrance of having endured the like ten or twenty years ago. It is “nevertheless *afterward*.” The good of trouble is not generally while we are in trouble, but when we get out of trouble. Yet on the other hand, it sometimes happens that God can give us the jewels even before we leave Egypt, so that we can march out of the house of bondage with golden earrings hanging at our ears, and covered with all manner of ornaments. For the most part however, it is “nevertheless *afterward*.”

Well now, you will note in the text a sort of gradation with regard to what affliction does afterwards. *It brings forth fruit*, that is one step. That fruit is the fruit of righteousness, here is an advance. That righteous fruit is peaceable, this is best of all. First, affliction really does to the Christian, when the time comes, bring forth fruit. This is the object of Christ in sending it.

In His sweet prayer for the elect, He prayed that His people might bring forth fruit. He said, “Herein is my Father glorified, that you bring forth much fruit.” He assured them that every branch of the true vine that brought forth fruit would be purged, that it might bring forth more fruit. So far as this world is concerned, God gets His glory out of us, not by our being Christians, but by our being fruitful Christians. And the end and object of divine husbandry is to make our branches hang down with fruit. Blessed is that chastening which being fruitful in us makes us also fruitful.

It brings forth the fruit *of* righteousness—not natural, and therefore impure fruit, but fruit such as God Himself may accept—holiness, purity, patience, joy, faith, love, and every Christian grace. It does not make the Christian more righteous in the sense of justification, for he is completely so in Christ, but it makes him more apparently so in the eyes of onlookers, while he, through his experience, exhibits more of the character of his Lord.

Note again, that this righteous fruit is *peaceable*. None so happy as tried Christians, *afterward*. No calm more deep than that which precedes a storm. There is a lull in the atmosphere after the hurricane which is not known at other times. Who has not seen clear shinings after rain? God gives sweet banquets to His children after the battle. It is after the rod that He gives the honeycomb. After climbing the Hill Difficulty, we sit down in the arbor to rest. After passing the wilderness we come to the House Beautiful. After we have gone down the Valley of Humiliation, after we have fought with Apollyon, the shining one appears to us, and gives us the branch which heals us.

It is always “afterward” with the Christian. He has his best things last, and he must be expecting, therefore to have his worst things first. It is always “afterward.” Still, when it does come, it is peace, sweet, deep peace. Oh, what a delightful sensation it is, after a long illness, once more to walk abroad, though perhaps you are still pale to look upon, and feeble in body—you walk out of doors and breathe the air again. You can feel your blood leap in your veins, and every bone seems to sing out because of the mercy of God. Such is the peace which follows long and sharp affliction. Our enemies are drowned in the Red Sea, then is the time to go forth with timbrel and dance. Our sorrows have left a silver line of holy light behind them, and our spirit is as calm as a summer’s eve.

III. And now for the third point and that is, FAVORED SONS.

“Nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness in them which are exercised thereby.” I will venture to say this, that it does not yield peaceable fruit to everybody, nay, it does not yield peaceable fruit to every “son” either. It is not every Christian who gets a blessing from affliction, at least not from every affliction that he has. I conceive that the last words are inserted by way of distinction, and of real difference—“those who are exercised thereby.”

You know, brethren, there are some of the Lord’s children who, when they get a trouble, are not exercised by it, because they run away from it. They imagine and employ rash means of avoiding it. They use subterfuges in order to escape from it. They are not exercised thereby. Their Father holds the rod over them and they run away from His hand. Perhaps they get a tingling smart as they run, far worse than if they had stopped. They may get a sorry cuff from His hand, but they are not exercised by it.

There are others who, when under trouble, are callous and do not yield. They bear it as a stone would bear it. They learn the stoics’ art. The Lord may give or take away, they are equally senseless. They look upon it as the work of blind fate, not as the fruit of that blessed predestination which is ruled by a Father’s hand, and so they are like the bullock, which rather kicks against the pricks than yield to the driver. They get no benefit from tribulation. It never enters into them, they are not exercised by it.

Now, you know what the word “exercised” means. In the Greek gymnasium, the training master would challenge the youths to meet him in combat. He knew how to strike, to guard, to wrestle. Many severe blows the young combatants received from him, but this was a part of their education, preparing them at some future time to appear publicly in the games. He who shirked the trial and declined the encounter with the trainer, received no good from him, even though he would probably be thoroughly well flogged for his cowardice.

The youth whose athletic frame was prepared for future struggles was he who stepped forth boldly *to be exercised* by his master. If you see afflictions come, and sit down impatiently, and will not be exercised by your trials, then you do not get the peaceable fruit of righteousness. But if, like a man, you say, “Now is my time of trial, I will play the man. Wake up my faith to meet the foe. Take hold of God, stand with firm foot and slip not. Let all my graces be aroused, for here is something to be exercised upon.” It is then that a man’s bone, sinew, and muscle all grow stronger. We know that those who strive for the mastery, keep under their body, in order that they may come prepared in the day of contest, and so must the Christian use his afflictions, exercise himself by them to the keeping down of the flesh to the conquest of his evil desires, that he may be as strong as if his flesh were iron, and his muscles hardened steel.

You ask me, what in the Christian is exercised by affliction? Everything newborn in the Christian is exercised. The newborn seed is exercised by affliction and that filial spirit which springs from it. There

is sonship in every believer in Christ that is exercised. And the *spirit* of sonship and *the graces* of sonship all are tried. In fact, affliction, when it does us most good, exercises all the man, sets every power to work, strains his patience, tests his faith, proves his love, develops his fears, glorifies his hopes, and whatsoever other power there be in his spiritual manhood, it exercises all to the uttermost point, and it makes every part grow stronger and nearer to perfection, and so the peaceable fruits of righteousness are yielded to those “that are exercised thereby.”

Mark that distinction, because we are not all thus favored. We are all sons and shall all have to bear the trial, yet we may not all be exercised by it. Let us pray God to give us to be exercised by affliction when we do get it, that so we may possess the practical benefit of it.

I have done when I have added three practical reflections. First, *see the happy estate of a Christian*. His worst things are good things, his smarts are his joys, his losses are his gains. Did you ever hear of a man who got his health by being sick? That is a Christian. He gets rich by his losses, he rises by his falls, he goes on by being pushed back, he lives by dying, he grows by being diminished, and becomes full by being emptied. Well, if the bad things work him so much good, what must his best things do? If his dark nights are as bright as the world’s days, what shall be his days? If even his starlight is more splendid than the sun, what must his sunlight be?

If he can sing in a dungeon, how sweetly will he sing in heaven! If he can praise the Lord in the fire, how will he praise Him before the eternal throne! If even a thorn in the flesh only drives him to his God, brethren, where will the angel-convoy carry him? If evil be good to him, what will the overflowing goodness of God be to him in another world? Who would not be a Christian? Who would not know the transcendent riches of the believer’s heritage?

Secondly, *see where the believer’s hope mainly lies*. It does not lie in the seeming. He may seem to be rich, or seem to be poor, seem to be sick, or seem to be in health—he looks upon all that as the seeming. He notices that the thing seen is the thing that *seems*, but the thing that is believed is the thing that *is*. He knows that what his eye catches is only the surface, what his finger touches is only the exterior, but what his heart believes, that is the depth, the substance, the reality.

So, brethren, he finds all his joy in the “nevertheless afterward.” Sometimes he is in great trouble, dark trouble, and the devil tempts him, but he spells that word over and repeats it, “Never-the-less, I am very poor, but I shall, never-the-less, obtain heaven forever. I am very weak, but never-the-less, I shall be where the inhabitant is never sick. The devil has beaten me, I am on the ground, and he has his foot on my neck, and says he will make an end of me, but I have, never-the-less, eternal security in Christ.”

Never-the-less, not a grain—not an atom the less, in fact, he throws the never-the-less into an ever-the-more. He believes he shall have ever-the-more of bliss and so, looking to the afterwards, he rejoices in tribulation, for tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope. Why, the Christian often learns his best lessons about heaven by contrast. If a man should give me a black book printed in the old black letters, and should say, “You want to know about happiness, that book is written about misery, learn from the opposite,” I would thank him just as much for that as if the book were on happiness.

So the believer takes his daily trials and reads them the opposite way. Trial comes to him and says, “Your hope is dry.” “My hope is not dry,” says he. “While I have a trial I have a ground of hope.” “Your God has forsaken you,” says tribulation. “My God has not forsaken me,” says he, “for He says in the world you shall have tribulation and I have it. I have a letter from God in a black envelope, but as long as it came from Him, I do not mind what kind of envelope it comes in. He has not forgotten me—has not given me up—He is still gracious to me.”

And so the Christian begins to think about heaven, “For,” says he, “this is the place of work, that is the place of rest. This is the place of sorrow, that is the place of joy. Here is defeat, there is triumph. Here is shame, there glory. Here it is being despised, there it is being honored. Here it is the hiding of my Father’s face, there it is the glory of His presence. Here it is absence in the body, there it is presence with the Lord. Here weeping, and groaning, and sighing, there the song of triumph. Here death—death

to my friends and death to myself—there the happy union of immortal spirits in immortality.” So he learns to sing not of the seeming, but of the “nevertheless afterward,” with sweet hope, as his harp of many golden strings.

Lastly, brethren, *afterwards is just the point where the unconverted feel the pinch*. “Nevertheless afterward.” I walk round your gardens—you are rich. How beautifully they are laid out! What rare flowers! What luxuries! And as I look at them all, if I remember that you will die, I say to myself, “Nevertheless afterward. This poor man who has a paradise on earth can have no paradise in the world to come.”

Do I see you riding gaily along the street? You have abundance of wealth and honor, but you are without God, and without Christ. Then I see close behind you a grim executioner, bearing this motto, “Nevertheless afterward.” You wear a smiling face this morning, for though you have neither riches nor honor, still you are young, and have health and beauty, and are looking out on the pleasures of this world. I want you to take a telescope in your hand and look a little further—“*Nevertheless* afterward.” You are thinking about this present life, and hoping you will prosper in it, and hitherto you have not wanted any religion—you say you have been happy enough without Christ, and you dare say you will get on without Him, but I want you to remember, “*Nevertheless afterward*.”

When you come to die, when you stand before an angry God, when you rise amid the terrors of the day of judgment, when you have to meet the open book, and the burning eyes of the great Judge, when you hear the sentence, “Come, you blessed,” or “Depart, you cursed,” you will think of “Nevertheless afterward.”

I wish you would bring these eternal things before your mind, and reckon with your conscience concerning them. Soul, if your joy is in earth and your trust in self, you may spread yourself like a green bay tree, you may become as a bullock fattened for the slaughter, but nevertheless afterward, beware lest He tear you in pieces and there be none to deliver.

Believe in Christ. Trust your soul with Him, and then whatever is to come afterwards, whatever “Nevertheless afterward” may come, you may always be sure of this, that there is for you an eternal and exceeding weight of glory.

May my Master give you an interest in that “Nevertheless afterward,” and then I shall not fret, nor will you either, if you have to have an interest in the rod of the covenant which is for the present, at least in seeming, not joyous but grievous.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.