

Faith of Our Fathers

[A WEEKLY INSTRUCTION FOR YOUNG AND OLD.]

OF OUR HAPPINESS IN THIS LIFE, IF WE KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS.

(5) Another thing which contributes exceedingly to alleviate and sweeten the afflictions of the just, is the special assistance that Almighty God gives them to support them in all their distresses. The Scripture displays this to us in different points of view—(1) That God is in company with them in their tribulations, to help them under them, and to deliver them. "He shall cry to Me," says Almighty God, "and I will hear him: I am with him in his trouble, I will deliver him and I will glorify him" (Ps. xc. 15). "When he shall fall he shall not be bruised, for the Lord putteth His hand under him" (Ps. xxxvi. 24). "The Lord is nigh to them that are of a contrite heart, and He will save the humble of spirit. Many are the afflictions of the just, but out of them all will the Lord deliver them. The Lord keepeth all their bones, not one of them shall be broken" (Ps. xxxiii. 19). "Behold the eyes of the Lord are on them that fear Him, and on them that hope in His mercy; they deliver their souls from death, and feed them in famine" (Ps. xxxii. 18). "Thus saith the high and the eminent that inhabiteth eternity, and His name is holy, Who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Is. lvii. 15). (2) That He is always ready to hear their prayers and grant them their petitions; thus, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the just; and His ears unto their prayers . . . the just cried and the Lord heard them, and delivered them out of all their troubles" (Ps. xxxiii. 16). "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me" (Ps. 1, 15). "I sought the Lord and He heard me, and He delivered me from all my troubles. Come ye to Him and be enlightened, and your faces shall not be confounded; this poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear Him; and shall deliver them" (Ps. xxxiii. 5). (3) That He turns their affliction into joy and gladness. "We have passed through fire and water" (says David to God, "and Thou hast brought us out into a refreshment" (Ps. lxx. 12). "How great troubles hast Thou shown me, many and grievous? and turning Thou hast brought me to life, and hast brought me back again from the depths of the earth. Thou hast multiplied Thy magnificence, and turning to me Thou hast comforted me" (Ps. lxx. 20). Nay, "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, Thy comforts have given joy to my soul" (Ps. xciii. 19). "For Thou art not delighted in our being lost; because after a storm Thou makest a calm, and after tears and weeping Thou pourest in joyfulness. Be Thy name, O God of Israel, blessed for ever" (Tob. iii. 22). Witness Job, Joseph, Daniel, the three children, Susannah, and others without number. How many grounds of comfort has the just man in the consideration of these truths, to support him under his troubles, and make them easy to him in the internal man, yea even to make him happy in his mind within, which is the only real happiness, though without, and in the eyes of the world, he labors under many tribulations? But as for wicked men in their tribulation, "The countenance of the Lord is against them that do evil things, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth" (Ps. xxxiii. 17). To these God says, "Behold I will set My face upon you for evil and not for good" (Jer. xlv. 11). "For evil doers shall be cut off . . . yet a little while and the wicked shall not be: and thou shalt seek his place and shalt not find it . . . because the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the Lord, presently after they shall be honored and exalted, shall come to nothing and vanish like smoke" (Ps. xxxvi. 8, 20).

(6) Lastly, what in a particular manner supports the just man, in the day of tribulation, and not only alleviates the weight of his afflictions, but even makes them matter of joy and gladness to him, is the knowledge he has of the many and great advantages which they bring to the soul, and that they are sent by the fatherly hand of his good God, on purpose to procure him these advantages.

Q. 10. What then are the ends which God has in sending afflictions and crosses upon His faithful servants in this life?

A. Some of the principal ends which God has in sending tribulation upon His own servants, and which in a particular manner contribute to alleviate their burden and comfort them under their afflictions, are these following:

(1) To try them; that is, to see whether or not they be sincere and earnest in His service; whether they serve Him for any present interest of their self-love, or for His own sake, and because it is their duty and eternal interest to do so. Thus when God praised Job's virtue, Satan said, "Doth Job fear God in vain? Hast not thou made a fence for him and his house and all his substance round about; and blessed the works of his hands, and his possession hath increased on the earth? But stretch forth Thy hand a little and touch all that he hath; and see if he curseth Thee not to Thy face" (Job i. 9). Upon this, leave was given to Satan to try Job; which was done by the most severe afflictions: under all which, Job gave proof of the sincerity of his virtue in the most convincing manner, for "In all these things Job sinned not with his lips, nor spoke he of any foolish thing against God" (verse 22). Instead of that, he blessed and praised God for all his sufferings, nay, he carried his fidelity so far, that when his friends were insulting over him, he said, "Although He (God) should kill me, I will trust in Him" (Job. xiii. 15); and in another place he says, "He has me tried as gold that passeth through the fire: my foot hath followed His steps. I have kept His way, and have not declined from it" (Job. xxiii. 10). So also when the angel Raphael discovered himself to the good old man Tobias, whose severe trials had been no less remarkable than his virtuous works and piety; he said to him, "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptations should prove thee" (Tob. xii. 13); and his noble behaviour under these temptations is most remarkable, for when he was deprived of his sight the Scripture says: "Now this trial the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him, that an example might be given to posterity of His patience, as also of holy Job. For whereas he had always feared God from his infancy, and kept His commandments, he repined not against God because the evil of blindness had befallen him; but continued immovable in the fear of God, giving thanks to God all the days of his life; for as the kings insulted over Job, so his relations and kinsmen mocked at his life, saying "where is thy hope, for which thou gavest alms and buried the dead? But Tobias rebuked them, saying, "Speak not so, for we are children of saints, and look for that life, which God will give to them that never change their faith from Him" (Tob. ii. 12). Hence the Scripture saith, "The furnace trieth the potter's vessels; and the trial of affliction, just men" (Eccus. xxvii. 6), for, "as silver is tried in the fire, and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts" (Prov. xviii. 3). "Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Eccus. ii. 5). So Abraham was tempted, and being proved by many tribulations, was made the friend of God. So Isaac, so Jacob, so Moses, and all that have pleased God, passed through many tribulations, remaining faithful" (Judith viii. 22). Now this consideration is a vast consolation to the servants of God amidst their severest affliction; for even if among men like ourselves, the love we have for a friend, or the desire we have of approving ourselves as attached to those whose praise or esteem we court, makes us even love to have an opportunity of showing the sincerity of our regard for them, though it be through sufferings and dangers, how much more must a sincere love of God, and the desire of showing our fidelity to Him, sweeten every trial or affliction we have to undergo for His sake? especially when we know that though our earthly friends may not be sensible of what we suffer for them, or not put a just value upon it, or not be able to reward it, our heavenly Father well knows everything we undergo for Him, is perfectly sensible of the real value of it, and will reward it not only to the full of what it deserves in His sight but superabundantly, yea infinitely above what we can conceive or imagine: "afflicted in a few things," says His holy word, "in many they shall be well rewarded, because God hath tried and found them worthy of Himself; as gold in the furnace He hath proved them, and as a victim of the holocaust He hath received them, and in time there shall be respect had to them.