

A Basket of Fragments

Part VIII

[Robert Murray M'Cheyne](#)

Robert Murray M'Cheyne (1813-1843), the pastor of St Peter's, Dundee, died in his thirtieth year, and in the seventh of his ministry. His epitaph describes him as a man who "walked with God," and who was "honoured by his Lord to draw many wanderers out of darkness into the path of life."

A Basket of Fragments is a selection of sermons first published five years after M'Cheyne's death. The sermons were put together from the notes taken down by hearers during his ministry "without the least view to publication." One advantage of this is that, as the editor of the first edition wrote, "they bring before us those extemporaneous pleadings with sinner in which few so greatly excelled." The sermons are indeed stamped with eternity; they are the expression of one upon whose heart the weight of perishing sinners pressed; they are the yearnings of one who was "deein" to the folks converted.

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"The Improvement of Affliction"

Job 34.31, 32. "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have born chastisement. I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

This world is a world of trouble: "Man that is born of woman, is of few days, and full of trouble." "We dwell in cottages of clay, our foundation is in the dust, we are crushed before the moth," Job 4.19. This world has sometimes been called "a vale of tears." Trials come into all your dwellings; the children of God are not excepted; there is a need be that you be in many temptations. "Count it not strange when you fall into divers temptations, as though some strange thing happened unto you." If this be so, of how great importance is it, that you and I be prepared to meet it. The darkest thunder cloud only covers the heavens for a time. "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement. I will not offend any more: that which I see not, teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."

From these words, I would desire to show you the right improvement we should make of affliction and the meetness of inquiring into God's reasons of affliction.

I. The threefold improvement of affliction.

1. Verse 31, "Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement. I will not offend any more." The first improvement of affliction is submission. It is the temper of one who justifies God: "I have borne chastisement." This was the feeling of Daniel in the midst of the affliction which God brought on Israel. This is shown in Daniel 9.7, 8, "O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces," etc.; verse 14, "Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth; for we obeyed not his voice."

You will notice, in the 9th chapter of Nehemiah, and the 33rd verse: "Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right but we have done wickedly." The same thing you will notice in the 26th of Leviticus, 40th verse: "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they have trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me." And then the middle of the 41st verse: "If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity," etc.; to the end of the chapter. God here says, if they accept of the punishment of their iniquities, he will remember them. Now, this is the first improvement you should make of the affliction. How different is this from many of you; you do not accept of the punishment of your iniquities; your heart rises against God. 1. In your thoughts. 2. In hard words. The man begins to blaspheme God; he says God is a tyrant? Could God not have spared my child? This is what is spoken of at the pouring out of the fifth and sixth vials. These are their words in hell; when God pours out his wrath, they will blaspheme him. There is still a third way, and that is in your actions. Your words are not only against God, but your actions are against him. If I could lay bare your hearts, you would see such complaining, such anger against God, that you would see the truth of what I am saying. Remember, it is right to learn contentment. What right have you to complain? What right have you to challenge God's dealings with you? If little children were to take upon them to decide upon the proceedings of both houses of Parliament, what would you think of it? And what right have you to challenge God's government? We should say, with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

2. The second improvement of affliction is humble inquiry into God's meaning: "What I know not teach thou me." This is the proper improvement of affliction. This is the way in which Job himself received his trial. Job 10.2: "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me: show me wherefore thou contendest with me." The same you will notice in the 23rd chapter, 3rd verse: "O that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he will put strength in me. There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge." You will notice that Job was to be made acquainted why God dealt thus with him. The same was the case with Joshua, 7th chapter, 6th verse: "And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the even-tide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content and dwelt

on the other side Jordan! O Lord, what shall I say when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies? For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land, shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?" When affliction came, Joshua waited for an explanation. This also seems to have been the case with the apostle Paul when he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Brethren, the opposite of this is very common among you. When God sends affliction into an ungodly family; when God takes away a child, or lays a father on a bed of affliction; do they inquire at God why he did it? Ah, you despise the chastening of the Lord. Brethren, it is a fearful thing not to ask God's meaning in affliction. It is his loudest knock, and often his last. The same thing happens with God's children. You have been loving some idol ? some secret sin ? some secret lust, and God afflicts you. Do you ask an explanation? The same thing takes place in a church. The members are unholy, etc. Then, perhaps, he afflicts it as he did Laodicea. Do we seek an explanation? Ah, no! This is what this town should do in its poverty.

3. There is a third improvement of affliction, that is, the forsaking of sin, "I will not offend anymore." "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." God's great design in affliction is to make you forsake your sin: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy," Prov. 28.13. This was God's way with Manasseh: so it should be in all affliction. God afflicts you that you may cast away your sin; you will not hear his voice of mercy; you will not hear his voice of love; but he brings you under the rod, in order to bring you into the covenant. How often does it to the contrary? I have seen a drunkard afflicted, and he went deeper into sin ? farther away from God. "Ephraim is a cake not turned." There are some among you that remind me of an aged tree that has been struck with lightning, and now stands stript of its leaves, a monument in the earth. So are many of your families. I tell you, brethren, if mercies and judgments do not convert you, God has no other arrows in his quiver.

II. The meetness of inquiring into God's reasons of affliction.

1. It is meet, because it is God that is dealing with you. This affliction in your family, this affliction with yourself, is from God. "Who hath hardened himself against him, and hath prospered?"

2. It is meet, because this is God's meaning in your affliction. God's meaning is, to save the unconverted, and to sanctify his own. I believe that every time the sun shines into your dwelling, it is meant to make you turn unto God; and it is the same with affliction. It is meant to make you turn to him; or if you be a child of God, every affliction is meant to make you cast your idols to the moles and to the bats, and to turn to God.

3. It is meet, because God can destroy. You know, brethren, that the same hand that afflicts can destroy. The same hand that kindled the burning fever in your breast, can kindle up the flames of hell for you. Amen.

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