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BLESSED DISCIPLINE.

A Sermon

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“Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law; that thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked. For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance. But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it.”—Psalm xciv. 12—15.

THERE are times when the wicked seem to have things all their own way. This earth is not the realm of final justice; we are not yet standing before the Lord's great judgment-seat. God permits many things to be for a while in confusion. They who are highest with him are often lowest with men; and those for whom he has no regard seem to heap up the treasures of the world till their eyes stand out with fatness, and they have more than heart can wish. Let no child of God be astonished at this arrangement. It has often been so in the past, and it has been the great enigma that has puzzled the world. The children of God have also sat down, and looked into it; but it has been even to them a great deep which they could not fathom. They have sighed over it, but their sighs have not altered the facts. It is still true that often the wicked triumph, and the servants of iniquity delight themselves in the high places of the earth. The righteous need not wonder that they suffer now, for that has been the lot of God's people all along, and there have been certain times in human history when God has seemed to be altogether deaf to the cries of his suffering people. Remember the martyr-age, and the days of the Covenanters, who were hunted upon the mountains like the partridge. You must not wonder if the easy places of the earth are not yours, and if the sentinel's stern duties should fall to your lot. It is so, and so it must be, for God has so ordained it.

To comfort any of the Lord's children who have begun to worry themselves because things do not go with them as they desire, I have selected this text, and I pray the Lord to bless it to them.

No. 2,374.

I. First, I shall ask you to notice that GOD'S CHILDREN ARE UNDER TUITION.

Other children may run about, and take holiday; they may wander into the woods, and gather the flowers, and do very much what they like; but God's own children have to go to school. This is a great privilege for them, although they do not always think so. Children are not often good judges of what is best for themselves. No doubt we should like to play the truant, we should be very glad to put away our school-bags, and quit the school-house, and go out by ourselves, and wander at our own sweet will; but our heavenly Father loves us too well to let it be so with us. Because we are his children, therefore he will have us trained and prepared for that high destiny which awaits us by-and-by.

Note how this tuition is described in our text; the very first word concerning it is, "chastenest." "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest," as if the chastening were the primary part of the teaching, as if it occupied so large a share of it that it was put first: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest." In God's school-house the rod is still extant; *with the Lord, chastening is teaching.* He does not spoil his children; but chastens them, ay, even unto scourging, as the apostle puts it. His chastening is the most severe with those whom he loves best: "Whom the Lord tenderly loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Some of us know what it is to have this teaching by chastening. I have often told you that I am afraid I have never learnt anything of God except by the rod; and, in looking back, I am afraid that I must confirm that statement. I have forgotten some of the gentle lessons; but when they have been whipped into me, I have remembered them. I met with a friend, the other day, who said that it was the very reverse with him. He could not remember any benefit that he had ever gained by chastening, and he thought that all the good he had received from the Lord had come to him by tenderness and prosperity. I did not controvert with him about the matter, for the experiences of God's people may differ; but this I know, dear friends, that some of us have learnt much from the Lord's chastening rod.

For instance, we have learnt the evil of sin. "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." There are some sorrows that come evidently as the result of our own folly. We have to reap the harvest of the seed that we sow; and by this process we are made to see that it is an exceedingly evil and bitter thing to sin against God. This is an important lesson; I wish that more had thoroughly learnt it. I wish that some Christian professors had anything like a true idea of the exceeding sinfulness of sin; but I believe that instruction upon this point often comes from the chastening hand of God.

Our chastening teaches us the unsatisfactory nature of worldly things. We can easily become attached to the things which we possess. It is a very difficult thing to handle gold without allowing it to adhere to your fingers; and when it gets into your purse, you need much grace to prevent it getting into your heart. Even our children can soon

grow into idols, and our health and our comfort may make us forget God. I never knew affliction and trial make us do that; but when the gourds are taken away, then the sun shines on us. How often has God shaken all the leaves off our trees, and then we have seen the heavens which we never saw when all the leaves were green! By losing this, and losing that, we are made to feel that all the things which we possess perish in the using, and are such temporary joys that we cannot hope to fill our hearts with them.

Do we not also learn by affliction our own frailty, and our own impatience? We are wonderfully patient when we have nothing to suffer, as we are all great heroes and very courageous when there is no fighting to be done. We sometimes say to one another, "What a mass of faith that brother has! What a vast mountain of faith that sister possesses!" We are all almost inclined to envy them; but we remember the fable of the stag which had such magnificent antlers that he said to himself, as he looked at his fine figure in the water, "It is most absurd for us stags to be afraid of dogs. The next time I hear a dog bark, I will just toss him on my horns, and there will soon be an end of him." Yes, so he thought; but just then the baying of a hound was heard in the distance, and the boastful stag took to his heels, and ran as fast as the rest of the herd did. So it is often with those who seem to have great faith when they do not want it; but when they do need it, where is it? Stretch some men upon a bed of sickness for a week or two, and see whether they will be able to hector at the rate they now do. They would sing another song, I warrant you, if once they had such a twist of pain as some of us have had to endure, and the beads of perspiration stood on their brow while they tried to bear it. Ah, yes, we find how great our weakness is when first one thing is taken away, and then another, and the chastening hand of God makes the blows to fall thick and heavy upon us!

Do we not then learn also the value of prayer? I said to this friend to whom I have referred, "Did you not pray much more under your affliction than you did before?" "Oh, yes!" he replied; "I grant you that—

"Trials give new life to prayer."

Do we ever pray in such dead earnest as when everything seems to be sinking from under our feet, and our sweetest cups are full of bitterness? Then we turn to God, and say, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." I do not think that we ever pray with such fervour of supplication in our prosperity as we do in our adversity.

And then how precious the promises become! As we only see the stars when the shadows gather at night, so the promises shine out like newly-kindled stars when we get into the night of affliction. I am sure that there are passages of Scripture which are full of consolation, the depths of which we do not even imagine yet, and we never shall know all that is in them till we get into the deeps of soul-trouble which correspond with them. There are points of view from which scenery is to be beheld at its best; and, until we find out those points of view, we may be missing the sight of some of the most

beautiful objects in nature. God leads us one way and another by our chastisements to understand and prize his promises.

And, oh, dear friends, how should we ever know the faithfulness of God if it were not for affliction? We might talk about it and theoretically understand it; but to try to prove the greatness of Jehovah's love, and the absolute certainty of his eternal faithfulness,—this cometh not except by the way of affliction and trial.

I might talk on for ever about the sweet uses of adversity, and not exhaust the subject. You experienced people of God know even more than I do about this matter, for some of you have done business on deeper waters than my barque has yet ploughed; and yet, methinks, my keel has passed over the deep places of the sea of trouble, and there may be deeper depths before me still. I have probably said sufficient to prove to you that chastening is a divine way of instructing us. You will find that, if you want the most Christ-like saints, and the most deeply experimental believers, and the Christians who are best acquainted with the Word of God, you must look for them among those who are the most intimately acquainted with the fiery furnace and its burning heat.

If you read the text through, dear friends, you will notice that the rod is not without the Word. I call your special attention to that: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." The rod and the Book go together; the rod drives us to the Book, and the Book explains the meaning of the rod; we must have them both if we would be fully instructed in the things of God. *The Word of God is our school-book.* At first, it is our primer; and when we get furthest advanced in grace, it will be our profoundest classic; and all the way along it will supply us with our choicest poetry and everything else that we desire.

We look to the Bible for comfort when we are chastened; we turn over its pages, and seek to find a passage which fits our case, and ministers relief to our necessity. Have you not often done so? Why, this Book is something like the whitesmith's bunch of keys! Perhaps you have lost the key of your drawer, and you cannot get at your things. You send for the smith, and he keeps on trying different keys till at last he finds one that exactly fits the wards of your lock. So, if you keep on fingering away at the promises, you will come at last upon one that was made on purpose for your case. Perhaps your lock is one with very peculiar wards; you never could make out why it was shaped just as it is; but now that you have found the key that opens it, you understand that both lock and key were made to fit each other.

The Word of God is not only used at such times for comfort, but also for direction. How frequently you have been unable to see your way! You have wished that there was some prophet of God with the Urim and Thummim, that he might tell you what to do. The great guiding principles of God's truth, his law and his gospel, faith in him and in his providential care, have furnished you with a direction quite as clear as if some prophet had plainly told you what to do. You have sought the direction of the Word of the Lord when you have gone to enquire in his temple, he has answered you out of the

secret place of thunder, and you have known without doubt the way that you should take.

That, then, is the second use of the Word, first for comfort, and next for direction.

At such times, too, we have proved, dear friends, the power of the Word of God. When your vessel is sailing along very smoothly, the Word of God may grow to be a dead letter with you; but when the waves are rolling mountains high, and dashing over you, and you are soaked through and through, and fear that the deep will swallow you up, then you begin to test the promises, and to prove the power of the Word of God. When its inexpressible sweetness reaches your heart, then you can indeed feel that you have been taught out of God's Word. You see how the two things go together: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." O Lord, still use the rod if thou seest that it is necessary; but go on teaching us out of thy Word! We are slow to learn, and poor scholars at the best; but thou mayest yet make something of us.

That leads me to say that, according to our text, *God himself is our Teacher*. He is not satisfied with giving us a Book, and smiting us when we are inattentive to its teachings; but he himself teaches us. Was there ever a teacher so full of wisdom, a teacher who understood his pupils so well, a teacher so altogether master of the whole art of tuition? Was there ever a teacher so patient, so able to apply his lessons to the heart itself, so full of power to give understanding as well as to make the thing clear to the understanding when it is given? Happy people who have God to be their Tutor! Happy pupils, even though, when the school-bell rings, you have half a mind to stay away, and play with yonder children who do not belong to your school, yet happy are you if you are truly God's scholars. Even if, every now and then, your days are spent in weeping, and your lessons are so badly done that they bring the rod upon you, yet are you happy children. "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law."

So much, then, for our first head.

II. Now upon our second point I will say a little, and only a little. We have had God's children under tuition; now let us think of God's CHILDREN EDUCATED. The Lord has chastened and taught his child for this purpose: "That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked." "What!" you ask, "chastened to give us rest? It is usual for chastening to break our rest." Yes, I know that it is so with other chastenings; but in very deed this is the way in which God gives rest to his people.

First, *we learn to rest in the will of God*. Our will is naturally very stubborn; and when we are chastened, at first we kick out, like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; but by degrees we feel that we *must* bear the yoke. We then go a little further, and we feel that we *ought* to bear it, even though God should lay upon us anything he pleases, and we should feel it very galling. By-and-by, the yoke begins to fit our neck, and we come even to *love* it. I do not suppose that many of us will ever get like Samuel Rutherford, when he said that he began to wonder which he loved best, Christ or his cross, for

the cross had brought him so much blessing that he was quite in love with it. No, we have not reached that point yet, so that we love our cross ; still, we can say this, that we have learned that it is—

“ Sweet to lie passive in his hand,
And know no will but his.”

If we struggle against God's will, we only increase our sorrow. Our self-will usually lies at the root of our greatest griefs. Give way, and thou hast won ; yield to God, and thou hast obtained the blessing thou dost desire. The bitterness is gone out of thy grief when thou consentest to be grieved if God will have it so.

We make advances in our spiritual education when *we learn to rest after our afflictions*. When any trouble is over, great delights often come to us. It is with us as it was with our Master ; he had been with the wild beasts ; worse still, he had been tempted of the devil ; but angels came, and ministered unto him. There is, to a believer, sometimes, a wonderfully clear shining after the rain. Perhaps there is no happier period of life than the state of convalescence, when the sick man is gradually recovering his former strength after a long illness. So God gives surprising peace to his people when he takes away their troubles, but he also gives them a great measure of peace in their troubles. Thus, for another lesson, *we learn to rest in adversity*. The Lord chastens us in order that we may learn how to stand fast, and bear up bravely while the trouble is yet upon us.

I have often had to notice the singularity of my Lord's loving-kindness and tenderness to myself in the time of need. I do not say that it is singularity for him, for he is often doing it ; but the singularity lies in the fact that the Lord does it when nobody else could or would do it. He gives us comfort when nobody else is either willing or able to render any comfort to us. This very afternoon, I have had a remarkable instance of how good cheer is sent to me by my gracious God just when I most need it. I was heavy and sad at heart, and there came to my door, to see me, a foreign gentleman, an officer of considerable rank in the Italian army. He spoke to me in very good English, but I cannot tell you all that he said to me, though it was most cheering and kind. I asked him why he should come so far to see me. He spoke of me as though I were a great man, and I assured him that he was quite mistaken, for I was nothing of the kind. As we walked along, and talked, he said, “ But you are the greatest man in all the world to me.” “ Why is that ? ” I asked ; and he answered, “ I was a Catholic, and a bad Catholic, too. I did not rightly know anything about the Lord Jesus Christ, and I was fast becoming an infidel ; but I met with a sermon of yours in Italian, by reading it I was brought into the light and liberty of the gospel ; I found the Saviour, and I felt that I must come, and tell you about it.” Then he further cheered and encouraged my heart by letting me see how much he knew of our Lord Jesus, and he had learnt it all from nothing but the Bible itself, which he had read after being guided to it by a stray sermon of mine. “ Well,” I thought, “ my Master sends this man all the way from the south of Italy to come just at this particular time, when I was sorely needing just such a comforting

message." Why should he do so? Only that he likes, when his children have to take bitter medicine, to give them a piece of sugar after it. Therefore, my brother, be you willing to take your medicine, else there may come a sharp chastening with it. Oh, for grace so to suffer, and so to endure, that we may just give ourselves up into the hand of the ever-blessed One, and thus he will perfect in us the tuition of his wonderful Word! Then shall it be true that the Lord has taught us to rest even in the days of our adversity.

Much more might be said upon this part of my subject, especially about learning to look beyond this present life; but I have not the time or the strength to say it.

III. I must now go on to the third point, which is, that God's CHILDREN ARE STILL DEAR TO HIM. We have thought of them at school, chastened and instructed, and we have seen them learning a few lessons. Now let us notice how dear they are to their Lord at all times, for the text says, "The Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance."

First, then, *the Lord will not cast off his people*. Sometimes you are cast down; but you are never cast off. Sometimes others cast you off; but the Lord will not cast off his people. Sometimes you are cast into the furnace; yes, it may be so, but in the furnace you are not cast off. Metal put into the furnace is not thrown away; had it been worthless, it might have been left on the heap with the slag; but it is put into the furnace because it is of value. When you are put into the furnace, and into the greatest heat that can be obtained, it is that the Lord may take away your dross, and purify you for his service.

"In the furnace God may prove thee.

Thence to bring thee forth more bright;

But can never cease to love thee:

Thou art precious in his sight:

God is with thee,

God thine everlasting light."

"The Lord will not cast off his people." Lay hold of that precious assurance. Even if Satan should come, and whisper to you, "The Lord has cast thee off," do not believe it; it cannot be. The devil has his cast-offs, but God has no cast-offs. Sometimes he takes the devil's castaways, and makes them to be the trophies of his mighty grace; and when he has done so, they are his people, concerning whom the psalmist says, "The Lord will not cast off his people."

Then, further, *the Lord will not forsake his people*, for it is added, "Neither will he forsake his inheritance." He chose them to be his inheritance, he has bought them as his inheritance, and he will never forsake them. Still shall you be supported by the Lord, but never forsaken by him; still shall you be owned by him, but never forsaken. Still shall you be kept, defended against all comers, and preserved to be the Lord's own people, for he will not forsake his inheritance.

I do not feel as if I need say much more upon this theme; but it is enough for me, I think, just to remind you of those precious words of our great and gracious Father, which are many times repeated in his Word, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," and leave them

with you, his children. Take them, and feed upon them. God give you to know the full comfort of them!

IV. So I shall close with this fourth point, GOD'S PEOPLE WILL BE RIGHTED IN THE END: "Judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it."

Just now, *judgment has gone away*. It has gone up to its own land; judgment is within the veil, but there are reasons for its absence from us. Judgment has gone away, perhaps, that it may try the faith of God's people. The Lord does not to-day strike down the profane, nor slay the hypocrite, as he might if he dealt with them in strict justice. Judgment has gone out of the world for a while, though it watcheth and recordeth all things. It is gone partly for our trial and testing, that we may learn to trust an absent God and Saviour. Judgment is also gone away in order that mercy may be extended to the ungodly, that they may live, and that they may turn to God; for he willeth not the death of any, but that they may turn unto him and live. Judgment has gone up to the throne for a while until the wicked shall have completed the full measure of their sin, "until the pit be digged for the wicked." Not yet is the iniquity of the Amorites full; and judgment has gone away and will stay away until it is.

Do not be in a hurry, child of God; the Lord has timed his absence. Harken to this next word: "*Judgment shall return unto righteousness.*" You shall hear the trumpet soon; you shall hear the sound of that blast, "the loudest and the last," telling you that the day of the great assize has come, and that the Judge has arrived, to right all wrongs, to punish all iniquity, and to reward all virtue, and all true, faithful service. "Judgment shall return." We cannot tell how long it will linger, but it will return. Christ will come again. As surely as he ascended into heaven, he will so come in like manner as he went up. He shall judge the earth in righteousness, and his people with his truth. Behold, he cometh! And when he comes, judgment shall return unto righteousness.

And what then? *Judgment shall be welcomed by the godly*. When it comes, "all the upright in heart shall follow it." The chariot of righteousness shall lead the way, and all the people of God shall follow it in a glorious procession. Then shall they receive their Lord's commendation, "Well done, good and faithful servants." They shall follow it, as they wear their golden crowns, nay, as they cast them at the foot of the throne, saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power." Saints will follow the chariot of judgment, coming forth from their concealment, and shining as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. They shall come from the places where slander has banished them, and show themselves again, and God shall be glorified in them. Now you who love the Lord, be not in a hurry to have all this fulfilled. Leave your cases in the dear hand of him who will ere long judge all righteously.

I have done when I have reminded you that he is accursed who has never felt the chastening hand of God, or sat at his feet to learn of him; but he is blessed indeed who yields himself entirely up to be the disciple of the Lord. May it be so with every one of you, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

Let us read this evening the ninety-fourth Psalm, and may the Spirit of God instruct us while we read it!

Verse 1. *O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.*

God is the God of justice; and when iniquity and oppression prevail, it is natural that his people should call upon him to come forth out of his hiding-places. Sometimes, when oppression and iniquity and error prevail, it seems as if God had hidden himself away. Hence the prayer of the psalmist, "O Jehovah, the God of recompences (or revenges, as the margin has it), shew thyself."

2. *Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.*

As one who is about to strike a heavy blow lifts himself up, to increase the force of the stroke, so the psalmist prays to the Lord, "Lift up thyself, thou Judge of the earth. The proud are lifted up; lift up thyself. They boast; they glory; Lord, show them how great a God thou art in the defence of righteousness; lift up thyself, thou Judge of the earth."

3. *LORD, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?*

That question, "how long?" uttered twice over, sounds a little like howling; and sometimes God's saints get so dispirited that they cry unto God, and weep and wail before him until their wailing becomes almost like howling: "Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked triumph?"

4, 5. *How long shall they utter and speak hard things? and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage.*

Their words are heavier than stones; and when they hurl them at the Lord's people with cruel intent, they do great mischief: "They utter and speak hard things. All the workers of iniquity boast themselves." It seems to be the mark of the righteous that they are humble and lowly, and the mark of the wicked that they are boastful and proud. They have nothing of which they ought to boast; yet they do boast very loudly. Pride is ingrained in our evil nature; and the more there is of sin in us, the more there is of boasting by us.

6. *They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless.*

Do you wonder that the psalmist prayed, "O God of vengeance, shew thyself"? Can you see the fatherless robbed, and the widow and the stranger oppressed, without feeling your indignation burn? He who is never indignant has no virtue in him. He who cannot burn like coals of juniper against evil does not truly love righteousness. The psalmist was not a man of that sort; he was righteously angry with the wicked, who slew the widow and the stranger, and murdered the fatherless.

7. *Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it.*

They were practically atheists; for, if they had a god nominally, they regarded him as a god who did not observe sins, a blind deity, a god who took no note of evil. Do you not think that this is the prevailing religion of to-day? Are there not many who say, "Jehovah shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it"? God is not in all their thoughts; he is to them a nonentity, not the Omniscient Jehovah, and hardly even a person, but a kind of secondary power or a feeble force, an unknown something or other not of much account: "Jehovah shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it."

8. *Understand, ye brutish among the people :*

When a man turns away from God, he casts off his manhood; he ceases to be a man, and becomes like a brute, a boar, for so this expression might be read, "Ye boars among the people."

8, 9. *And ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?*

Did the Lord make men's ears, and put them near the brain in the very best place for hearing, and shall he not himself hear? The argument is overwhelming. God gave us ears, and made us hear; is he deaf himself?

9. *He that formed the eye, shall he not see?*

God makes all eyes; is he without eyes himself? The supposition is an absurdity. It needs only to be mentioned to be held up to ridicule: "He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?"

"Shall he who, with transcendent skill,
Fashion'd the eye and form'd the ear;
Who modell'd nature to his will,
Shall he not see? Shall he not hear?"

10. *He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?*

Whole nations were driven out of Canaan to make room for Israel. Many other nations have been crushed, doubled up, utterly destroyed, on account of their sin. Everybody who reads history knows that this has been the case, so the psalmist argues, "He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct?" He that executeth judgment upon heathen nations, can he not deal with sinful man, and with single individuals? He that broke the power of Persia, and Assyria, and Greece, and Rome, will he not punish guilty men when they dare to set themselves up as oppressors of his people?

10. *He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know?*

Our translators finish the question by putting "Shall not he know?" but those words are not in the original, and they are not at all necessary to the argument. It is as if the psalmist broke off his utterances abruptly, as much as to say, "It is of no use arguing with you fellows," or else as if he said, "Finish my sentence yourselves; I put the truth so clearly before you that there is no escaping from it." "He that teacheth man knowledge:" if God has taught men all that they know, does not he himself know all that is to be known? The psalmist does not say so much as that in words; but he leaves us to draw that as the only inference from what he says.

11. *The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man,*

God knows not only men's words and acts, but their thoughts also. God knows thoughtful men, the best sort of men, when they are at their best, when they are thinking; and what does God think of the thoughts of man?

11. *That they are vanity.*

Yet people talk about the thoughtful men of the age, and want us to bow down and worship their thoughts. This boasting about man's thoughts is only like the cracking of rotten sticks: "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity."

12. *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law;*

Here is the truly blessed man; not the boaster, not the infidel, not the proud thinker, but the divinely-chastened man. He is sore through the chastening of the Lord, his bones are full of pain, his heart is heavy, and

his home, perhaps, is a place of torture to him; but still it is true that he is a blessed man: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law."

13. *That thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit be digged for the wicked.*

Christ has gone to prepare heaven for his people; it is a prepared place for a prepared people. So is it with the ungodly and their eternal inheritance, it is a prepared place, "prepared for the devil and his angels," and when men make themselves like demons, and so are ripe for hell, then is the pit ready to receive them.

14. *For the LORD will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance.*

If any of you are deeply troubled, I counsel you to get a hold of this promise. Perhaps it seems to you as if two seas of sorrow had met around you, and that you were in a whirlpool of trouble; then I say again, lay hold of this text, and grip it firmly: "Jehovah will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance."

15, 16. *But judgment shall return unto righteousness: and all the upright in heart shall follow it. Who will rise up for me against the evildoers? or who will stand up for me against the workers of iniquity?*

Well, David, you may ask the question; but we cannot tell you who among your fellow-men will stand up for you. It sometimes happens that God's people are left without an earthly friend; their case is so hard, their cause involves so much question, so much shame, perhaps, that nobody will stand up for them. If this be your trying condition just now, listen to the psalmist's testimony:—

17. *Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence.*

If it had not been for God, he would not only have had no hand to help him, but not even a voice to speak for him. He might not have suffered quite in silence, because he would have himself spoken; but what he would have said would only have made the matter worse. What would he have said if he had broken the silence?

18. *When I said, My foot slippeth;*

"It is going, it is gone; my foot is now slipping,"—what then?

18. *Thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.*

God is grand at holding up his people in slippery places, and not only in slippery places, but when their feet actually do slip. When they think that they are gone, they are not really gone. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." "Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

19. *In the multitude of my thoughts within me—*

"I cannot collect my thoughts, they will not be gathered into orderly array, they rush to and fro, there is a multitude, a mob of them." It is good to have thoughts, but sometimes you may have too many of them; and they may come helter-skelter, blasphemous thoughts, perhaps, despairing, proud, unbelieving, all sorts of thoughts: "In the multitude of my thoughts within me"—

19. *Thy comforts delight my soul.*

"Comforts which thou dost bring me, comforts which arise from thoughts of thee, the comforts of the Comforter, the comforts of the God of all comfort, 'thy comforts delight my soul.'" You must often have noticed that troubles seldom come alone; if you get one trial, you will probably have a whole covey of them. It very rarely happens, I think, to any one of us to have a lone sorrow. In another place the psalmist says, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts; all thy waves and thy

billows are gone over me." It is so with some of us at this time ; we have a multitude of troubled thoughts within us. But have you also noticed that God's mercies do not come alone ? They come in flocks ; the psalmist says, "Thy comforts"—not merely one comfort, but a great host of them,— "Thy comforts delight my soul, they not merely sustain me, and keep me alive, but they delight my soul. God never does anything by halves ; when he gives us comfort, he does it thoroughly. The Lord's flowers bloom double ; he gives us not only comfort, but delight : "Thy comforts delight my soul."

Now the psalmist turns to God in prayer, and says :—

20. *Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which frameth mischief by a law ?*

Oh, how strong are the wicked ! They think they can have everything all their own way, that they can make what laws they like, and crush out anything that they despise. Yes, there are many thrones of iniquity, but God has no fellowship with them ; and if God has no fellowship with a throne, that throne will tumble down, God will not uphold it. The day will come when he will no longer tolerate its iniquity, and then one blow of his mighty right hand shall shiver it to atoms.

21. *They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood.*

Agreed about nothing else, they all agree against Christ and against the holy seed : "the soul of the righteous." They would blot out the righteous from under heaven if they could.

22. *But the LORD is my defence ; and my God is the rock of my refuge.*

I commend these expressions to all believers ; let them treasure them up. "My God." Ah, you must personally appropriate God to yourself if he is to bless you ! Another man's God is nothing to you unless you can also say, "My God." When you have said, "My God," you have uttered the grandest words that human lips can frame. If God be yours, all things are yours, earth and heaven, time and eternity.

"My God is the rock of my refuge." You are on the rock ; you are in the rock ; you are behind the rock ; you must be safe now.

23. *And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity,*

That is the punishment of sin. It seems strange that it is so, but sin is the punishment of sin. When a man has once sinned, it is part of his punishment that he is inclined to sin again, and so on *ad infinitum*. "He shall bring upon them their own iniquity."

23. *And shall cut them off in their own wickedness ;*

It needs no fire nor worm to torment the ungodly ; their own wickedness itself is fire, and worm, and pit without a bottom, and the hell that endeth not.

23. *Yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off.*

"Surrounded by his saints, the Lord
Shall arm'd with holy vengeance come ;
To each his final lot award,
And seal the sinner's fearful doom."

God save us from being of that company ! May we all be numbered with his people for ever and ever ! Amen.