

Light Affliction and Eternal Glory

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"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." 2 Cor. 4:17, 18

From the cradle to the coffin, affliction and sorrow are the appointed lot of man. He comes into the world with a wailing cry, and he often quits it with an agonizing groan. Well is this earth called "a vale of tears," for it is wet with them in infancy, youth, manhood, and old age. In every land, in every clime, scenes of misery and wretchedness everywhere meet the eye, besides those deeper griefs and heart-rending sorrows which lie concealed from all observation; so that we may well say of the life of man that, like Ezekiel's roll, it is "written within and without, and there is written therein lamentations, and mourning and woe." But this is not all. The scene does not end here. We see up to death, but we do not see beyond death. To see a man die without hope is like standing at a distance, and seeing a man fall from a lofty cliff: we see him fall, but we do not see the crash on the rocks below. So we see a man die, but when we gaze upon the lifeless corpse, in the case of him who dies without an interest in Christ, we do not see how his soul falls with a mighty crash upon the rock of God's eternal justice. After weeks or months of sickness and pain, the pale, cold face may lie in calm repose under the coffin lid, when the soul is only just entering upon an eternity of woe.

But is it all thus dark and gloomy both in life and death? Is heaven always hung with a canopy of black? Are there no beams of light, no rays of gladness, that shine through these dark clouds of affliction, misery, and woe that are spread over the human race? Yes; there is one point in this dark scene out of which beams of light and rays of glory shine. It is as if looking up in a dark and gloomy night, when the heavens gathered blackness, we saw all at once the clouds rent asunder, and the cross of Christ hung up in the sky, from every point of which beamed forth rays of unspeakable glory. So it is with the saints of God as they journey through this vale of tears: they are afflicted like other men, their fellow sinners and fellow mortals, and often a larger portion of affliction falls to their lot than to those whose portion is in this life. By these sufferings and sorrows they are bowed down with grief and trouble, and all is dark and gloomy without and within; but a ray of light falls upon their soul; they look up, and they see a once suffering Jesus, now sitting at the right hand of the Father, and around his glorious throne they view a band of immortal spirits, who have come out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Those are the great "cloud of witnesses" to the love and faithfulness of a covenant God, who seem to speak from heaven to earth and say—"Brother, suffer on! The cross before the crown; the cup of wormwood and gall, the baptism of suffering and blood, before the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore." They are thus encouraged "to run with patience the race set before them, looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of their faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The Apostle, in the words before us, would thus cheer us onward, and show unto us why we should, not only with all

patience but all joy, endure the sufferings that God may think fit to lay upon us in this time state. He unravels this deep mystery of present suffering; he solves that dark enigma which has perplexed so many saints of God, which filled Job with confusion, set Asaph in slippery places, and made Jeremiah curse the day of his birth. He stands forth, as a heaven-taught interpreter, to explain the dealings of God; as a divinely-commissioned ambassador, he unfolds the counsels of the King of kings, and proclaims aloud to the suffering church of Christ, in words full of peace and blessedness—"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

In opening up, with God's blessing, the spiritual meaning of these words, I shall

I.—*First*, show how our affliction, in this time state, is but *light*, and endures, speaking comparatively, *but for a moment*.

II.—*Secondly*, what *the blessed fruit* of this light affliction is—that when sanctified by the Spirit and grace of God, it "*worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*."

III.—*Thirdly*, *how* it does this; viz., in two ways: first, by enabling us *to look not* at the things which are seen, that are temporal; and secondly, by enabling us to *look at the things which are not seen, which are eternal*.

I.—"*Our light affliction, which is but for a moment*." That little word "*light*" may not exactly express the present

feelings of your heart. You may feel, on the contrary, that your afflictions are very far from being light. They press you down to the very ground; they are just now exceedingly heavy; and sometimes they bow down both body and soul into the dust. Nor does the other expression of the apostle seem to suit your case; for instead of your afflictions being "but for a moment," they have already been spread over many months or years; and it seems at times, from their peculiar character and nature, that they must continue to be spread over the remainder of your life. But neither our feelings nor our forebodings are to be taken as proofs of how the matter really stands. We must receive God's testimony, which is and ever must be infallibly true, and not take the testimony of our feelings or fears, which is necessarily fallible and usually false.

But let us cast our eye a little more closely upon the afflictions that God's saints are especially called to endure, for it is of believers that the apostle speaks. It is *their* afflictions which are light, and endure but for a moment; it is *their* griefs and sorrows which "work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And these afflictions, by way of clearness, we may divide into two leading classes. There are, *first, temporal* afflictions—those trials and sorrows more peculiarly connected with a time state, which the children of God have in common with all mankind; and there are, *secondly, spiritual* afflictions, which, as connected with the work of grace, are necessarily confined to the family of Christ.

i. As men, fallen men, partakers of flesh and blood, heirs of that sad legacy of sin that Adam left to all his ruined race, and living in a world of sorrow and woe, we must needs have our measure of those temporal afflictions that were entailed upon all the posterity of our first parent. Looking at those,

then, in a broad and general light, we may distribute them into various classes: such as bodily afflictions, family sorrows, providential trials. In fact, every suffering of body or mind that the sons of men are subject to by reason of the fall, comes in its measure upon the heads of God's children. And as the Lord, for wise reasons, sees good to lay the heaviest weights where they are most needed, temporal afflictions, generally speaking, fall in larger measure upon them.

1. How many of the saints of God, and some of them dear friends of my own, are at this moment lying on *beds of affliction and languishing*. Nor do I know scarcely a Christian whose soul is really thriving before God, who has not some measure of bodily affliction. In fact, it seems almost needful that we should have a certain measure of it. I myself for many years have had a large experience of bodily affliction, which has been one of my heaviest crosses, and has cut the very sinews of all that worldly happiness and pleasure which healthy men seem to enjoy. I, therefore, not only well know its nature, but I trust also in some measure its necessity, and the profit it communicates to the soul when sanctified by the grace of God. We are such foolish, giddy creatures that we are hardly fit to be trusted with health. It is like putting an inexperienced rider upon a high tempered spirited horse: he is unable to control the animal which he bestrides, and a heavy fall that may cripple him for life may be the consequence of his getting upon its back. When we are in vigorous health and strength, the blood seems to bound through every artery and vein; we are full of high spirits, life, and animation. It seems as if there was abundance of happiness in the world all around us, in the sun and sky above us, in the fields and flowers beneath us, in the balmy breath of spring that blows upon us. To breathe, to live, to move, to walk, all are pleasurable for their own sake, when

the body is in strong, vigorous health, the appetite good, the spirits buoyant, and air and exercise exhilarate and delight the animal frame. It is said of the pure air of Australia, that it is a delight even to breathe it. Thus we should delight in life for what life is and has, be content with breathing earthly air, and, left to ourselves, should make our Paradise below the skies. To overthrow this heathenish sensuality, this godless love of living; to put a bitter into every natural sweet; to lay a daily cross upon the shoulder (for if health be the greatest temporal blessing, the want of it must needs be the greatest temporal misery); to drop gall and wormwood into the cup of life, the Lord sees fit in most cases—for we cannot lay down a rigid rule—to lay affliction upon his children, and in very many cases to give commission to illness and disease to invade their earthly tabernacle. By this they learn that the happiness of animal health, which after all, is but the happiness of a bird or a butterfly, is no more to be theirs; that this avenue of pleasure is for ever shut against them; and that a fallen body has for them its pains and sorrows as well as a fallen soul. Thus the world is marred to them, with all its pursuits and pleasures; they see nothing below the skies really worth living for, or capable of affording happiness; and when, under all the pain and languor of their afflicted tabernacle, they find the Lord near and dear to their heart, sanctified illness is proved to them far better than unsanctified health, and pain of body a far less evil than pain of conscience.

2. *Family afflictions* form another frequent source of grief and sorrow to those that love the Lord, and whom the Lord loves. Many of the most eminent saints of God have had to drink of this most bitter cup in a large measure. What afflictions of this nature befell David! How he, if possible, would have given his own life for that of his rebellious son Absalom—so deeply did he feel his death, and as Joab reproached him,

would sooner have lost all his armed host than that one beloved idol. How arrow after arrow from the same quarter pierced also the tender heart of the patriarch Jacob! Every shaft that quivered in his bosom came tipped with some family sin, or some family sorrow. It needs must be so more or less with most. Our earthly happiness is much derived from our families. We love our wives, we love our children; they are dear and near to us, a part of ourselves; and these ties, so tender and so close, form a main part of the sweetness that is in any earthly lot. That we may not, then, set up these family idols as our household gods, nor cleave too closely in affection to them, it needs must be that gall and wormwood should be dropped into this cup, lest it prove too sweet; lest we love our wives, children, relations, and friends too dearly; lest they usurp the place of God, and by becoming idols, link and fetter us down too closely to earth. Entangled in these silken ties, we should grow more and more attached to life; and in proportion as these fibres of sin and self entwined themselves more closely round our heart, would they eat out the life of God, and drain away all our spiritual strength and vital sap. As, then, to save the oak, the ivy is cut down, so the axe must fall to sever these too ensnaring, these too tender ties: and as they become cut or loosened, more room seems made for the things of eternity—more room for the Lord Jesus Christ, and for those spiritual affections to expand and grow, which, as drawn up by the Sun of Righteousness, spread themselves upward to that heaven where he is, and whence they came down.

3. Many, again, of the Lord's people are heavily weighed down with *poverty*. God has chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, as knowing that "love of money is the root of all evil," and therefore mercifully cuts the root to prevent the evil. Poverty starves a good deal of self-indulgence by denying the means; and thus the poor are cut off from the

gratification of many "foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" by the very want of means possessed by the rich to gratify them. Still, if poverty has its blessings, it has its miseries, and under them many who fear God deeply groan.

ii. But these temporal afflictions (though the Lord often makes them very heavy to his children, whose feelings are tender, and who often, through unbelief and fear, misread his mind in sending them) are all light compared with those of a *spiritual* nature, and which, as such, are of course peculiar to the saints of God. What is loss of health, of family, of friends, of property, to the hidings of God's face—to guilt of conscience—to distressing fears as to the reality of the work of grace upon the soul—to anticipations of that tremendous wrath of God which is revealed in a broken law? What are all the temporal afflictions that may be heaped upon one's head compared with the frown of the Almighty, the arrows of his wrath, the touch of his weighty hand, or dismal forebodings of sinking for ever beneath his offended justice and most terrible displeasure? An arrow in the conscience, shot by the unerring bow of God, will make a man truly and deeply miserable until it be extracted by the same hand that inflicted it. The wound that God's Spirit gives can only be healed by the balm that God's Spirit applies. Spiritual griefs weigh heavy; heart sorrows sink deep; distress of mind and guilt of conscience penetrate into every recess of the soul. And they have this peculiar ingredient in them which makes their stroke so bitter—that they all seem but foretastes of heavier and deeper woes to come, and that without hope or help, relief or end, through a miserable eternity. Let afflictions of a temporal kind be heaped upon your head: they cannot *always* last; they must sooner or later come to a close, and if not before, they must cease with the ceasing of natural life. But anticipations of God's terrible

displeasure—fears lest you should die without hope and sink into everlasting despair: this is truly overwhelming when it falls upon the conscience as a dreaded or almost certain reality. What aggravates the feeling of all these dismal fears so much is the terrible conviction that when temporal trials come to a close, eternal sorrows only begin.

But besides this, there are many and various spiritual afflictions which are consistent with a good hope through grace; nay, with a sweet assurance of coming off more than conqueror; but these I cannot now enter into, as I have scarcely begun with my text. I therefore pass on to show how they are "light."

iii. But how can the apostle call them "light?" We do not feel them so. Does the man of God write here with the pen of the Holy Ghost, when he so contradicts our feeling and experience? Is he describing the sorrows and sufferings of the saints in their right colours when he says they are light? How can they be light if I feel them heavy? so reasons our heart. But the Holy Ghost, we may be well assured, makes no mistake here. He describes things as they really are—as they are in God's sight, which must be right—not as they are in our view or apprehension, which may be, and usually is, altogether wrong.

But let us see if, with God's help and blessing, we cannot cast some ray of gospel light upon this expression, and not merely assent to it upon the apostle's authority, but set to it also the seal of a living, gracious experience.

1. First, look, then, at *your deserts*. See what you have merited by your disobedience—how you have brought yourself under the curse of God's righteous law. Take a retrospect of your past life. Cast up the sins that you have

committed from the time that early reason dawned—sins of infancy, of boyhood, of youth, of manhood; sins before the Lord was pleased to enlighten you by his Spirit and call you by his grace. Take a review, next, of your slips and falls since you were called—think how you have sinned again and again against light and conscience, love and blood. What ingratitude, rebellion, pride, self-righteousness, carnality, and worldliness you have been guilty of! What lusts you have harboured—what feelings of envy, jealousy, and wrath you have indulged, even against the saints of God! Look at the poor returns you have made to the Lord for those temporal favours which he has bestowed so abundantly upon you, and the still poorer returns for the spiritual mercies which he has so kindly heaped upon your head. Put them into one scale and all your afflictions, both temporal and spiritual, into the other. Are your afflictions heavy *now*? Weigh your deserts against your afflictions: then examine the scale and see whether your afflictions are heavy or light. "No," say you; "I am satisfied now; if I had my afflictions doubled, trebled—aye, I might go on and say increased a hundred fold, all, all would be lighter than my deserts; all, all infinitely less than my sins committed against a holy God merit at his hands!"

2. But again, look at the word "light" in this point of view: compare your sufferings and afflictions *with the torments of those who are lying for ever beneath God's terrible indignation*. Listen to the groans, the cries, the blasphemies of the damned in hell! Compare your afflictions with theirs. Have you a good hope through grace? Has the Lord Jesus Christ ever been made precious to your soul? Do you ever believe that you shall be with him in the realms of eternal bliss? Compare your afflictions, though they may be heavy in themselves, with what the lost are now enduring in the realms of eternal woe. Are your afflictions heavy now?

3. Again: compare your afflictions and sufferings *with those of the Lord Jesus*. Was *your* back ever mangled with stripes? Was *your* head ever crowned with thorns? Were nails ever driven through *your* feet and hands? Did *you* ever hang upon the cross amidst the taunts of jeering foes, the forsaking of disciples, the hiding of God's face, the withdrawing of the light of the sun, and the sins of millions charged upon your head with all the wrath of God due to them? Did *you* ever sweat great drops of blood? Was *your* soul ever bowed down within you, so that you were baptised as Jesus was with a bloody baptism, and drank the cup of suffering from him to the last dregs? Look at the suffering Jesus! Behold the Lamb of God in the garden and on the cross! Where are your sufferings now? A little bodily pain; a little languishing in a morning; not quite so much money as you would like; a child afflicted; a husband, perhaps, more a trial than a comfort! Do you mean to compare these afflictions with the sufferings and sorrows of the God-Man? Viewing then, the matter in this light, can you now say that your afflictions are heavy? Well may the apostle say "our light affliction!" Yet his were not light. Read the catalogue (2 Cor. 6. and 11.):—the perils he endured by land and sea; the times he was shipwrecked, scourged, stoned, cast into prison, besides all his spiritual griefs and sorrows! Yet he could say, looking to them all, "our light affliction!"

iv. But were it ever so heavy, he stills says it is "*but for a moment*." What is time compared to eternity? A drop compared to the ocean; a grain of dust compared to the world in which we dwell. These are insufficient comparisons. Time and eternity never can be compared together. Suppose that your afflictions were to last through life, and suppose that your life were prolonged to the utmost limit of human existence; nay, more—that all the afflictions that could be endured in body and soul were rained upon your head—every

disease that could rack your body, every temptation that could distress your mind, and every agony ever endured by a saint of God—a matter which is not to say absolutely impossible, but at least exceedingly improbable. But say that all the afflictions of Job were yours—of Jeremiah, Jonah, David, Paul, the ancient martyrs, and those who yielded up their lives at the stake at Smithfield, or in the fires of the Inquisition: say that all these met upon your head. When death closed the scene and your happy soul was translated from the body into the realms of eternal bliss, what would that past scene be in your estimation as you looked down from the battlements of heaven upon the earth beneath which had been the scene of all those sorrows and afflictions? A moment. But it is not likely that you would have all these afflictions heaped upon your single head. The Lord will never lay upon any one of his children more than they can bear. "He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust." He is very tender, very compassionate, will never break a bruised reed, nor quench a smoking flax. It is but for a moment usually; that is, not merely as compared with eternity, but even with the duration of present life, that the Lord lays affliction on his children. You may have a severe illness, but health, or a measure of it, again returns; a loss in providence, but it is in some way made up to you; a family bereavement, but time mitigates your grief, or a good hope of the departed relieves the acuteness of the sorrow; a very painful trial from a tender quarter, but some gracious support is communicated with it. Thus, though affliction, and sharp affliction too, comes, yet it is not all suffering either as regards duration or intensity. There is such a thing, when the Lord blesses it, as "glorying in tribulation," as "receiving the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost," and blessedly proving "as the sufferings of Christ abound, so consolation also aboundeth by Christ." Under the heaviest afflictions, the Lord usually grants the greatest support, and

in the deepest sorrows gives the sweetest songs. Or, if not so, there is still a promise given, or a smile, or a word of comfort, or a look of love, or, a beam of his favour that comes glancing across the dark clouds and lights it up with heavenly glory. Though the path to heaven is a path of tribulation, it is not all suffering, nor is it always extended over a man's life, so that he has no respite or reprieve. There are intervals when the Lord suspends his afflicting hand, cheers the soul onward with his gracious smile, and giving us to see what the end of all his dealings is—the good of the soul, his own glory, and heaven at the end—enables us with Moses to choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Thus viewed, well may we say with the apostle, "our light affliction;" and when we cast our eyes beyond the narrow precincts of time into the opening realms of eternity, we can fully agree with him in declaring that all the afflictions we can endure in this time-state are "but for a moment."

Now I hope, with God's blessing, I have cleared up the enigma, if ever it was an enigma to your mind—thrown it may be a little light on what might have puzzled you, when, filled with rebellion or self-pity, you were looking at your troubles and sorrows with the eyes of unbelief.

II.—But I pass on, as proposed, in the *second place*, to show what this light affliction *produces*—what, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, is its blessed fruit and effect. For let this truth be ever deeply impressed upon our mind, that there is not in affliction any power or tendency of itself to sanctify or save. It is at best but an instrument in the hands of the Lord, and can no more work by itself than any mechanical implement can execute any work without the hand of the artificer. But viewed as such by the apostle, it is declared to *work* for us "*a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" And if that

be the case, well may it be called "light!"—well may it be declared to be "but for a moment!" But how does it work for us this far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory? Is there any merit in affliction and suffering? I have no doubt many think so. When I was a minister in the Church of England, I was usually very assiduous in visiting my parishioners, and especially the sick and afflicted amongst them, having for nearly seven years two parishes under my care. Being a fellow of a College at Oxford, I was not required to reside in either of them, nor did I do so for the first year, except for the long vacation; but as eternal things pressed with greater weight and power on my mind, I turned my back upon the University, and though much to my temporal disadvantage, went to reside in one of my parishes. The good of the people and the profit of my own soul were, I believe, my only two motives for this step. But when I went to reside in this country village, having a good deal of zeal and earnestness and a desire for the people's good, I was very assiduous in visiting them, and usually spent a portion of every day in going from house to house among the poor to converse with them as far as I could upon the weighty matters of eternity. And how often have my ears been pained with a speech like this (because I visited all who were sick, whether they professed religion or not):—"I hope I shall have all my sufferings in this life;" clearly meaning, if not expressed in so many words, that their hope was their sufferings in this life would be accepted as an atonement for their sins; that God was now punishing them for their offences and that thereby he gave them, as it were, some pledge that by afflicting them here, he would not afflict them hereafter. I name what I thus used to hear, not as if those who used such words were more ignorant or more benighted than others, but as a specimen of the view generally taken about afflictions; for such is the innate self-righteousness of man's heart, and so deep his ignorance of the ways of the

Lord, that his bodily pains, and the very sickness that is to terminate in death, become invested with a certain merit in his eye. But do you think there can be any merit in affliction? in pain of body, distress of mind, loss of children, poverty and want, widowhood and old age, or in any amount whatever of bodily or mental suffering? Is that to be the price at which heaven is to be bought and glory won? Is there any fair exchange between the two? Will God, do you think, barter heaven, an immortality of bliss and glory, for a toothache, a bad cough, an aching back, or a broken limb; for poverty, however distressing, of family afflictions, however grievous? Perish the thought! It is one which a spiritual mind can never entertain for a single moment, but at once rejects. No greater dishonour could be cast upon the blood and obedience of an incarnate God than to invest human affliction with any degree of merit, or put any amount of natural suffering upon a level with the sorrows and agonies of the Son of God. If, then, it work for us "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," it cannot do so, on the footing of merit, or by the possession of any intrinsic worth or value. How, then, can it work, if it do not work meritoriously? But is all work confined to merit? May it not work *effectually*, if all merits be discarded; work *instrumentally*, if it possess no innate power or tendency? Yes; surely there is no merit in the spade that turns up the soil, or in the sickle that reaps the corn. The merit is in the hand of him that wields them. Their efficacy lies in his strength and skill, not in their own. In this way, then, affliction works. It is an instrument in God's hand to cut down all our schemes of happiness and salvation, that the counsel of his heart and the work of his hands may stand for ever and ever. We cannot have both worldly happiness and spiritual bliss. We cannot have the heart given up to everything carnal, sensual, selfish, and ungodly, and at the same time filled up with every thing sacred, holy, and divine.

Here we see how affliction works for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. By preparing our heart for it; by its being sanctified, through the grace of God, to produce in us that state of soul to which heavenly realities are so blessedly suited. You have lately had, say, a great deal of bodily affliction, or have passed through many and severe family trials, or are at this present moment steeped up to the lips in poverty. Now, if you are a partaker of grace and are able to weigh in the balance of the sanctuary the Lord's dealings with you, look at the effect of those trials and afflictions upon your soul, and what spiritual profit you have reaped from them. Have they brought you in any measure nearer to the Lord? Have they been in any measure sanctified to your soul's good? Can you find in them any of those fruits that the Scripture speaks of, such as this—"And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Can you say—"This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me;" or, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes?" Have your afflictions wrought in you rebellion, peevishness, fretfulness, self-pity, unbelief, and despair, or have they wrought prayer, supplication, confession, desires for the manifestation of Christ's love to your soul? Have they broken your spirit, laid you in the dust, weaned you from the world, made sin hateful and Christ precious, brought heaven before your eyes, and put earth under your feet?

But when we speak of afflictions being sanctified, and especially of working instrumentally an eternal weight of glory, it is not so much temporal as spiritual afflictions, that the Lord makes use of for that purpose. There is a certain preparation necessary for the manifestation of that grace to

the soul which is the beginning and the pledge of eternal glory. For instance, guilt of conscience prepares the soul for the blood of sprinkling. The arrows of the Almighty, shot into the heart from his unerring bow, prepare it for the balm of Gilead; a taste of hell for a taste of heaven; the thunders of the law for the consolations of the gospel; views of self for views of Christ. Apprehensions of the wrath to come hunt the soul out of every false refuge, convince it of its need of an imputed righteousness, and preserve it from resting in a name to live. It is thus that the deepest trials usually issue in the greatest deliverances, the sorest distress in the sweetest consolation, and the pangs of hell in the joys of heaven. Our heart, too, is so full of the world that there is in it no room for Christ till he himself drives out the intruders, as he scourged the buyers and sellers out of the temple. Affliction in his hands, and especially spiritual affliction, convinces us of the sin and folly of loving the world, embitters it to us, and detaches our heart from it by loosening those strings that bind it so fast to time and sense. What power also sin exercises in our carnal mind, and what a need there is for chastisements to teach us the folly of our ways, and to convince us that none but Christ can save us from the wrath to come! Thus, in the mysterious wisdom of God, making all things to work together for good to those that love him, affliction itself is made to work an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

But I must not pass by this beautiful expression. I must, with God's blessing, open a little of the force and beauty of this remarkable language.

1. "The *weight* of glory." The Hebrew word "glory" literally signifies "weight;" and the apostle seems to have some allusion to that circumstance by connecting, as he does, the two words together. There is indeed a natural connection

between what is weighty and what is solid and substantial. He would thus represent future glory as something solid, lasting, and durable, and therefore utterly distinct from the light, vain trifles of time, and even the passing afflictions of the day or hour. But he seems chiefly to be alluding to the exceeding greatness of that glory which is to be revealed as compared with our present faculties of body and mind and all our present conceptions. It is as though he should say—"In our present imperfect state, with our limited faculties of mind, and our weak, frail tabernacle, we could not bear the weight of that immortal glory which is prepared for the saints in the realms of bliss." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Heaven, with its opening bliss, would crush our present body and soul at once into the dust. "No man," said God to Moses, "can see me and live." When John in Patmos had a view of the glory of his risen Lord, though he had lain in his bosom at the last supper, yet he fell at his feet as dead. Therefore, we must have our soul purified from all stain of sin and expanded to the utmost of its immortal powers, and our body glorified and conformed to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, that soul and body may alike be able to bear the weight of eternal glory with which they are to be clothed. As the apostle speaks—"Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

2. But there is something in the word "*glory*" that I must not pass by. The Lord, in that touching chapter John 17., thus prays, or rather thus expresses his heavenly will—"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me." This is the "weight of glory" that the apostle speaks of—not merely freedom from sin and sorrow—not merely seeing Christ as he is, but beholding and enjoying

that unutterable glory which the Father gave him, which is all the glory of Godhead as revealed in and shining through his human nature. The fulness and perfection of this glory is reserved for the saints of God to enjoy when they shall see him as he is and know even also as they are known. We see a gleam of it when Christ is revealed to the soul; when the heavens are opened to faith; when his beauty and blessedness are manifested to our heart by the power of God. But the "exceeding and eternal weight of glory" can never be fully comprehended in the present life.

3. How striking, too, are the words—"*a far more exceeding*"—and if I may be allowed to refer to the original, I may say that even they but feebly and imperfectly express the full and majestic meaning of the inspired apostle. It is literally, "by excess to excess," as if simple language were deficient, and the word must be repeated to give any idea of the exceeding vastness and immensity of that glory—that is beyond all hyperbole. But taking the words as they stand—and they are very beautifully translated—well may we say that this weight of glory as far exceeds all earthly cares and sorrows as eternity exceeds time, as Christ surpasses man, as heaven excels earth.

Now it is affliction, as sanctified by the Holy Spirit, which instrumentally works this "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;" because through affliction grace is given, which grace is glory in the bud, as glory is grace in the flower. I believe I may say that I have never had any blessing which has not more or less come through affliction. The work began in affliction, is being carried on in affliction, and will doubtless be finished in affliction. In saying so, I speak the language of all God's suffering saints. In fact, without affliction, we are not fit for a blessing; there is no room in our heart for it. Affliction comes with stretched out

hand and empties the soul of all earthly happiness, all perishing joys, and all carnal delights; and by sweeping out of it all these anti-Christ—*for anti-Christ they are*—prepares it for Christ. He comes riding upon the storms of affliction; he appears amidst the dark night of sorrow; he beams in upon the heart when the heavens are hung in black and the soul is dressed in mourning. Then his visits are sweet, highly prized, dearly beloved; and most for this reason—because they come at a moment when they are made suitable by previous distress. It is in this way, and not by any meritorious efficacy that there is in suffering, that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Contrast the terms—see how the apostle puts them in a blessed antithesis: "light affliction," "weight of glory;" affliction "for a moment," glory "eternal." And thus he would cheer our desponding spirits, and would bid us look up and bear the cross, drink the cup, and endure the suffering, by setting before our eyes this blessed truth—that all these sufferings and sorrows are but for a moment, will cease with time, and issue in a glory without measure and without end.

III.—This leads me to our third and last point:—"*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"

The apostle speaks here of two separate things which sanctified affliction produces: the one thing is the taking of our eyes from off the things which are seen, which are temporal; and the other the fixing of our eyes upon the things which are not seen, which are eternal.

1. Our natural disposition is ever to be looking at "the things

which are seen;" nor can we raise our eyes from them except grace enable us. Day by day we are ever looking to the things presented to our natural eyes, to the objects by which we are surrounded, and with which in our time state we have to do. Our daily business or employment, the station of life we occupy, our families and friends, the circle of hourly recurring duties,—all are saying, as with so many uplifted voices—"Look to me! think of me! I want you and must have you; whatever you neglect you must not neglect me. Give me all your heart." And we are prone, too prone, to hear their voice. As Abraham incautiously and unwisely listened to Sarah when she gave him that carnal advice to take Agar for his wife, bringing thereby bondage and confusion into his house; so are we ever listening to the voice of the flesh, bidding us fix our eyes on the things which are seen. The things which are seen include everything upon which the natural eye of man can rest, the natural ear of man hear, the natural heart of man conceive, or the tongue of man utter; in a word, the expression embraces all the things by which we are daily surrounded, and in the employment or enjoyment of which our natural life consists. Now in proportion as we look at the things which are seen—the occupations, the amusements, the cares, the anxieties, or even the daily duties of this passing scene,—the more do they engross our thoughts, occupy our hearts, entangle our affections, and drag us from heaven to earth. It is not the being surrounded by them, or the being occupied in them as our lawful calling that is to be condemned, but the being so much taken up by them as to exclude the things of God and steal away our heart. So that it is to be feared that some who we dare not say are not the children of God, may pass pretty well the whole day without a spiritual thought: yes, shame be to them, without a spiritual cry or sigh after God. I must repeat the expression—shame be to them, so drowned and swallowed up are they in the poor perishing things of time

and sense as not to have room for a spiritual desire after the Lord Jesus. Now the Lord will not suffer this. It may be that for a time he permits the soul to drag on this poor, cold, dying life; but he will not always suffer it to live at such a distance from him, and be so buried alive in this tomb of death and corruption. He has a rod in Zion that he in due time brings forth; he has an affliction in his treasure-house that he commissions as a messenger; and as he said of old, "Sword, go through the land," so he says—"Affliction, go to that house! Illness, seize that man! Family trial, fall upon that woman! They are forgetting me. Their hearts are in the world. Their business and their families are engrossing all their thoughts. Go into that house. Arouse and awake those sleepy ones out of their slumber." At his command the commissioned messenger comes; the rod descends upon the back; the stripes fall hard and fast, and the trials and sorrows, like Job's messengers, rush in, each worse than the other. Now the man begins to awake. "What," he says, "have I been doing and where have I been all this time? My shop, my farm, my business, my family, my occupation have been engrossing all my thoughts. I have not been living to the Lord. He has had little or no place in my affections. The Lord forgive me this thing. The Lord heal these base backslidings, and deliver my soul from the darkness and bondage which they have brought upon me." He prays and begs of the Lord to forgive him for having been so earthly and sensual, so carnally minded, for neglecting his best, his only Friend, and to make him spiritually minded, for he feels that this alone is "life and peace." If the Lord hear his prayer this is the fruit: he begins to look away from the things which are seen, which are temporal, and to look at those things which are not seen, which are eternal; and as sanctified affliction purifies his eyes, and makes the scales drop from them, eternal things come with solemn weight and power into his conscience, and present themselves to his view as such vast

realities that everything else falls into the shade before them. If blessed with faith and hope, he looks up and what does he see? Jesus at the right hand of the Father; the glorified spirits in heaven; the exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And he sees that compared with these eternal realities, the things of time are not worth a serious thought; at any rate, that they are not worth a living affection. As, then, sanctified affliction is made in the hands of the Spirit a means of opening his eyes to see the power and blessedness of eternal things, the affections of his heart flow heavenward; Jesus makes himself precious; the "weight of glory" is seen in the dim distance; and under affliction's sharp discipline, he begins to press forward towards heaven and glory. Thus he looks away from "the things which are seen," which are merely temporal, all passing away, and he looks at "the things which are not seen," which are eternal. These will never come to a close, but stretch into ages of ever revolving ages, until, lost in the thought, he says—"The Lord forgive me that ever my mind should have been drawn away from heaven to earth! The Lord pardon my sin that I ever should have been so drowned in these poor, perishing things of sense and time, and have forgotten those blessed realities that once were the whole joy of my soul!" Now he begins to see the effect of affliction—the sanctifying effect it produces; and he blessed God that ever he was kind enough to lay his rod upon him, subscribing with heart and soul to the testimony of David—"Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word."