

THE GOLDEN CHAIN OF TRIBULATION AND LOVE

Preached at Eden Street Chapel, Hampstead Road, on Lord's Day Evening, August 15, 1852

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations 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." Romans 5:3-5

What, should you say, was the greatest attainment in religion? If this question were put to different persons, even amongst those who know and fear God, the answer might be different. One might say, "It is to be well established in the doctrines of the gospel; to be no longer a child tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine, but to be 'rooted and grounded' in 'the truth as it is in Jesus.'" Another might answer, "It is to have much enjoyment of the Spirit, grace and presence of God in the soul; to have clear and blessed views of our interest in Jesus; and to experience a continual sense of that 'perfect love' which 'casteth out fear,' and of that 'peace which passeth all understanding.'" Another might reply, "It is to have a conscience very tender and alive to the evil of sin, to walk very humbly with God, to be kept very close at His footstool, and to be watchful and prayerful all the day long." Another might say, "It consists in having the mind and will of Christ stamped on the soul, in walking with the strictest regard to all the precepts of the gospel, and in having heart, lip and life perfectly conformed to the image and example of the Lord Jesus."

Now I do not say that all or any of these answers would be wrong; but I do say that none of them would precisely hit the mark. "Well, then," it may be asked, "what do you think to

be the greatest attainment in religion?" I answer, "To glory in tribulations." That was certainly the mind of the Apostle Paul, as I think I shall in a few moments be able to show you.

Having, in the preceding chapters, established the doctrine of justification, he proceeds to mention, in the opening of this, some of the fruits which spring out of it. The first is, "Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" the second, "Access by faith into this grace wherein we stand;" and the third, "Rejoicing in hope of the glory of God." Look at these three blessed fruits of being freely justified by faith. Can anything surpass them? Peace with God, access into a gracious standing before His presence, and a rejoicing in hope of future glory. Yet the fourth fruit of justification surpasses these three rich and ripe clusters. "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also;" clearly implying that to glory in tribulation is a greater attainment than to enjoy peace with God, or to have access by faith into a state of grace, or to rejoice in hope of eternal glory.

But it may be asked, "How can this be?" The answer is embodied in our text, which I shall, therefore, as the Lord may enable me, endeavour to open up this evening.

I find in our text a golden chain, wreathed by the hand of God round the soul; and in this golden chain I find certain blessed links. What is this chain? and what are these links? The chain is that which, let down from heaven to earth, binds the soul to the throne of God. The separate links are:

I.—Tribulation.

II.—Patience.

III.—Experience.

IV.—Hope

V.—The love of God.

And when the first is connected with the last, when "tribulation" is welded on to "the love of God" the chain is complete.

With God's blessing, therefore, I shall endeavour to take up this chain, and, viewing severally its separate links, to show their connection with each other as well as their mutual dependence and beautiful harmony.

I.—The first link in this heavenly chain is a very heavy one, so heavy that it would weigh down them all, if it were not sustained by the last—"**Tribulation.**" And observe that this is the first. We are not at liberty to choose which link we shall lay hold of first, or we should probably begin where we should leave off, and grasp "the love of God" before "tribulation;" seize the crown before the cross, and shout "Victory!" before the battle. God's order must be followed, not ours; for if we begin at the wrong end we shall never make a complete chain. The first link, then, of this heavenly chain is "tribulation;" and this is a very heavy link, because many afflictions are often welded together to make it stout and strong, and give it weight and substance.

The word "tribulation," in the original, means literally a being pressed down; and it is remarkable that the English word "tribulation" has somewhat of a similar meaning, for it is derived from a Latin word, which signifies literally a threshing of corn, according to the ancient way of driving a machine over it. Nothing, then, deserves the name of "tribulation" which does not press down the soul and thresh out the chaff. Little troubles that come and go, passing vexations, transient

trials of a day or hour, the varied annoyances which try the temper or mortify pride, unexpected disappointments in business, and a hundred other circumstances which are sufficiently harassing for the time, all fall short of what is meant by the weighty word "tribulation." They are not heavy enough to form a link in the heavenly chain. The Lord's people, however, have many "tribulations," for it stands written in large letters on the arch of the strait gate, "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." These, then, are, or should be, the first words which salute the pilgrim's eye, and show him beforehand the character of the road.

As earth is but a vale of tears, the church has many tribulations in common with the world. Family troubles were the lot of Job, Abraham, Jacob and David; sickness befell Hezekiah, Trophimus and Epaphroditus; reverses and losses fell upon Job and upon the son of the prophet whose widow Elisha miraculously relieved from debt; poverty and famine drove Naomi into the land of Moab. Trouble, then, is in itself no sign of grace; for it inevitably flows from and is necessarily connected with, man's fallen state.

But we should fix our eye on two things, as especially marking the temporal afflictions of the Lord's family:

1. That they are all weighed out and timed by special appointment; for though "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards," yet "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground." **Job 5:6**
And,

2. That they are specially sanctified, and made to "work together for good" to those who love God.

But besides such afflictions as ill-health, family troubles, or straitened circumstances, which the church has in common with the world, she has tribulations peculiar to herself. Some of these are outward, as persecution, oppression, scorn, contempt, contumely; these result from her very position in the world, as a witness for Christ; she suffers them as one with her suffering Head. "If the world hate you," said He, "ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." **Joh 15:18,19** But her chief troubles are inward, and arise from the assaults of Satan, powerful temptations, the guilt of sin laid on the conscience, doubts and fears about an interest in Christ, distressing suggestions, and a daily, hourly conflict with a nature ever lusting to evil.

II.—I cannot dwell upon this part of the subject so long as it deserves, because I wish rather to trace out its particular connection with the other links of this chain. We read that "tribulation worketh patience." "Patience" here is not to be understood in its usual acceptation, as signifying meekness and quietness of disposition; the spiritual meaning of the word, here and elsewhere, is endurance. There are two different words in the original translated "patience;" one means a quiet, suffering disposition, as in **Jas 5:7,8**, "Be patient, therefore, brethren; —Be ye also patient;" the other word, which is used here, means endurance, as in **Jas 5:11**: "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job;" properly, "the **endurance** of Job," the two words being the same. It is necessary to make this distinction, for the two words mean quite different things. It is not true that "tribulation worketh patience," in the usual sense of the term. Job's tribulations certainly did not, for he was peevish and fretful; but they wrought endurance. He was

assailed on every hand, bereft of family and property, stripped to the very bone, harassed by Satan, and tempted by his own partner to "curse God and die." But amidst all this Job was not free from the surges and billows of rebellion; for he cursed the day wherein he was born, and vented the most poignant complaints. But he endured; he bared his head to the pitiless storm; he bore what God laid upon him, held fast his faith in his Maker, and did not give way to the tempter's suggestion to "curse God and die;" and he bore up and lived through all his trials, as a strong swimmer swims for his life amidst the foaming billows, and so safely reaches shore. This is "patience," that is, **endurance** in the sense of the word as used in the text.

But how does tribulation work patience? A figure may explain this. A horse unbroken cannot bear the slightest load on his back; but to teach him to carry them they are laid on, and the carrying of them at length teaches him to endure them. Or we may take another comparison. A man inured to severe bodily labour will work at it ten or twelve hours a day; I could not work one. Whence the difference? Labour has wrought in him endurance, and he submits to toil through use. So does "tribulation work patience."

But there is something further still. Endurance, in the scriptural sense, implies submission to the will of God. Until the soul is brought to endure in silence and resignation the afflicting strokes of God's hand, "tribulation" has not done its proper work; it has not wrought "patience." The first link of the chain is not welded on to the second. "Tribulation **worketh** patience." This implies a process, a something going on, a something gradually produced and eventually brought forth. It is not often thus at first. When the storm comes on we see no bright sun behind the dark cloud; nay, in a fit of unbelief or peevish rebellion, we are often

determined to see no good couched in or likely to spring out of the trial. The first blow knocks down and stuns the soul, and it is often some time before it recovers itself sufficiently to see whence the blow comes, or why it is inflicted. So dark is the mind, so bewildered the judgment, through the pressure of the trial and Satan's suggestions, that we cannot see the hand of God behind the cloud, nor believe that it is sent by Him to work a special work in the soul. Whilst this tumult is going on patience is not produced; the trial that should work patience works only rebellion. The first step, then, towards patience is to see in the trial the hand of God. "I cannot bear it, I will not bear it," says the soul, till then; but when a ray of light comes to show that the trial is from God, that produces at once submission. Here is "tribulation" working, like yeast in the dough, gradually leavening and changing the whole mass; sour indeed and bitter in itself, but eventually producing bread for solid food.

Coupled with this will be a sense of having procured the trial for ourselves. "Hast thou not procured this for thyself?" asks the prophet. "Yes," answers the soul, "indeed, indeed I have." Now comes endurance. "This trial," says the soul, "is of God; it has not come upon me by chance; I deserve it all; and had I ten thousand heavier strokes than I now suffer, I must still confess that I have merited them all. I put my mouth in the dust; I acknowledge that I deserve these heavy strokes; I submit to the rod; and O that it may deeply and lastingly profit me!" How beautifully was this exemplified in David, under God's chastening hand; first, when the child was afflicted with sickness and death, and then when he fled from Absalom! How "tribulation" wrought "patience" when he endured Shimei's cursing, and uttered that beautiful speech to Zadok: "Carry back the ark of God into the city; if I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me again, and show me both it and His habitation; but if He thus say, I

have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him." **2Sa 15:25,26** This is what James means when he says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." **Jas 1:2-4** Temptations or trials try faith; and, "the trying of faith worketh patience"—the precise expression of Paul, but "patience" must have its perfect work; that is, must be completely wrought out in the soul, and brought out in its real character. This is welding on the link. "Tribulation" thus "worketh patience," sustains it, and is united to it.

III.—But what does patience work? It inoperative; it has a work to perform. Patience worketh **experience**. What is the meaning of the word "experience" here? It does not mean experience in the usual sense of the term; that is, the whole work of God in the soul. It has here a more limited signification, and means a special experience of the power, wisdom and grace of God in and under tribulation. The word "experience" means literally "proof," and therefore signifies the proof that the soul has of the goodness of God in and under trial and affliction. See the process. Tribulation works endurance and submission; as the soul endures and submits, it gains an experience and proof of the power and goodness of God. This experience is two-fold—a proof of what God is, and a proof of what we are; light direct and light reflected.

When the surges of rebellion are calmed, we can see what a danger was escaped of making shipwreck on the lee-shore of despair, and an experience is gained of our own weakness, helplessness, sinfulness, rebelliousness and inability to do anything good or godly. It is in the furnace that the dross and scum of nature are brought to light; it is in the path of

tribulation that there are such deep discoveries of self in its baseness and blackness, filth and vileness.

But is this the only experience we gain in tribulation's path? No; there is also an experience of who and what God is. But why should patience work out this? Because, till patience has had its perfect work, we do not see God's hand in the trial. God does not reveal Himself in His mercy, love and grace to the soul whilst in a state of rebellion; when it is brought down into meekness, humility and submission, then, sooner or later, He manifests Himself. Thus patience or endurance of His afflicting hand worketh an experience of His dealings in a way of grace.

1. The first thing usually experienced is **an inward proof or approbation of the wisdom of God** in choosing the trial; for, be it ever borne in mind, it is the Lord who chooses our trials; we have no command over them, to bid them come or go; no selection of their nature, degree; or duration. The patient is not allowed to choose his own medicines. The trial, whatever it may be, is chosen in infinite wisdom by the Disposer of all things. If it be sickness, it is His choice; if an affliction in the family, it is His choice; if a trial in circumstances, it is His choice; persecution, opposition, contempt, contumely, all are His choice. Did Jacob choose to lose his Rachel by death, and his Joseph by treachery? Did Job choose his hearth to be desolated at a stroke, his flocks and herds driven away and burnt, and his body smitten with boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown? An unseen, but an unerring bow aimed the arrows, which quivered in his heart. "The arrows of the Almighty are within me," he cried out in his distress, "why hast Thou set me as a mark?"

Now, till patience has its perfect work in the soul, and we can submit to the trial as coming from God, His wisdom in

selecting and determining the peculiar form of trial is not seen. But when we begin to feel a measure of benefit springing out of the tribulation, and see what good effects it is working in our soul, such as separating us from the world, bringing us near to God, winnowing away the chaff, cleansing the dross and conforming us more to the image of Christ, then we gain an experience of the wisdom of God in sending us that particular trial; and then comes the humble acknowledgment, "It is indeed the very trial that I needed; no other would have done for me what this has done. The blow struck me, it is true, in the tenderest part, and yet in the very spot where it was most needful for me to be wounded. I see Thy wisdom in it. What evil it has kept me from! What good it has wrought in my soul! What lessons, what blessed lessons, have I learned in this trial!" Now, do you not see how "patience worketh experience?" Till patient, the mind is too confused to see this. In the calm depths of resignation alone does the wisdom of God pass before the believing eye of the soul.

2. But that is not the only experience we get. We get next an experience of **the power of God in supporting the soul** under the trial. Ah, what is nature, poor fallen nature, when tribulation comes! Can nature bear up against it? Can nature submit to it? Can nature bless God for sending it? All that nature can do is to vent itself in rebellion against the sovereign majesty of the Most High. No kissing the rod, no receiving it as from the hand of the Lord, no acknowledging the wisdom, no submission to the will of God, is there naturally in the heart of man. But if under the trial we are supported, and experience the strength of Christ made perfect in our weakness, this gives us an experience of God's **power**. What but the **power** of God supported Job? The everlasting arms were underneath; scarcely felt, perhaps, but still there. The endurance of the trial gives an experience

of the power that has wrought that endurance. And thus patience works experience.

3. But of nothing else? O yes; we gain in it an experience of **the goodness of God**; that He is good in taking away as well as in giving; good in bringing down as well as raising up; good in laying on the rod as well as bestowing the kiss; good in putting the soul into the furnace to purge out the dross, good in sustaining it in the furnace, and good in bringing it up out of the furnace. Thus we get an experience of the goodness of God by patiently enduring His afflicting hand. "The rebellious dwell in a dry land." What experience, then, have they of "the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?" It is only when the soul is possessed in patience that "the goodness of the Lord" appears.

4. But is there no other experience gained by patience? Yes; an experience of **the long-suffering mercy of God**; that He should bear with such rebels, that He should not long ago have been provoked by our rebellion to cast us utterly off, cut us down, and send us headlong to hell. When the soul is calmed down to submission, it sees what it was when the waves ran high; and as the crest of the billows subsides, the forbearance and long-suffering of the Lord shine forth in the horizon.

Without enlarging here, we may safely add, that without tribulation there is no patience, and without patience no experience. A patience without tribulation, an experience without patience, we may pronounce sadly defective, if not wholly worthless.

IV.—But experience works something else, and that is **hope**. Do you observe where the apostle places this link? Is it in the beginning, middle, or end of this chain? Most persons place it

at the beginning; they begin with hope—without tribulation, without patience, and without experience; but the apostle does not begin there. The chain contains five links, but he does not put hope as the first. **Tribulation** is the first, then comes **patience**, then **experience**, and then—linked on to experience—is **hope**. But what hope? Not hope in the general, but hope in the particular; that is, a hope connected with experience, as experience is connected with patience, and patience with tribulation. I observed before that the experience spoken of was particular; that is, limited to the path of tribulation. So is the hope particular; meaning not so much "a good hope through grace" generally, as a special hope, connected with the experience gained through patience.

But how does a special experience work a special hope? The believer walking in tribulation's path feels and speaks thus: "I get into tribulation; in this tribulation I learn, sooner or later, to submit to the will of God, and to endure the tribulation as coming from His hand. I now gain an experience of the wisdom, power and goodness of God displayed in the trial. As I gain this, I gain some ground of hope for the future; I obtain some firm basis on which to place my hope, that as the Lord has been with me in six troubles, He will also be with me in the seventh; and as in my late tribulation I obtained strength to endure, and when brought to submission sensibly experienced the wisdom, power and love of God, so in my future trials—for I must still walk in the path of tribulation—there rises up in my soul a blessed hope that I shall experience the same deliverance, feel the same power, and enjoy the same blessing."

How different is a hope of this nature, wrought in the soul by the power of God, from a hope that I might almost say is picked up in the streets, like a cast-off shoe that will fit any

foot, and is therefore only fit to be thrown in the kennel and shovelled into the scavenger's cart! The hope here spoken of is a shoe that fits the foot of the weary, way-worn pilgrim, for it is made by a divine hand out of "the preparation of the gospel of peace," with which he is shod from the armoury of God. Even natural experience is necessary to hope. A sick person has experienced benefit in a former illness from a certain physician, or a certain medicine; he has recourse to the same person or the same remedy again. "It did me good in a similar illness; why not now?" he inwardly says. Or a friend has helped us formerly; we hope, when we are brought into trying circumstances, that he will help us again. Just see how this feeling of hope was wrought in the apostle's soul. He thus writes to the Corinthian church: "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, who raiseth the dead." **2Co 1:8,9** Observe, when he was thus killed to all creature hope, how God stepped in: "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver." Now comes hope, or trust: "In whom we trust that He will yet deliver us." Just trace out the successive steps detailed here. First came a heavy trial, which overwhelmed his soul almost in despair; this crushed out creature trust. Trust in God followed; then came deliverance; upon this followed trust, or hope for the future—that He who had delivered in the past, and was delivering in the present, would also deliver for the future.

Now, this is exactly the same experience as is traced out in the text—tribulation working patience, patience working experience, and experience working hope; that is, a hope that whatever trials come, there will be support under them; that the next trial will be as beneficial to the soul as the last,

and that the goodness of God will be seen as clearly, felt as blessedly, and enjoyed as sweetly. This prepares the soul for tribulation when it comes, and raises up a blessed hope that God will support the soul under it whenever it may come, as He has already done.

But, speaking of this hope, the apostle adds, "**It maketh not ashamed.**" Contrast this hope, which springs out of experience, with false and delusive hopes. The great majority of human hopes will prove spiders' webs. The hope that is not wrought in the heart by the power of God will leave the soul at the last, and is therefore a hope, which maketh ashamed. But what a fearful thing is this, that when a man comes to a dying hour, or to stand before the tribunal of God at the great day, his hope maketh ashamed! He is ashamed of it, and it is ashamed of him. And why? Because it had no foundation, no root, for it was not grounded and rooted in his soul by the power of God. It came not either through tribulation, or patience, or experience; it was therefore a solitary link, not joined to experience at one end, or to love at the other, and consequently, like an isolated link in nature, is useless and worthless. Pick up a link of a chain in the street—what is it worth? Would you not be ashamed to be seen with it in your hand? Throw it down again, then, and kick it away. Thus there is a hope, which maketh ashamed; it is an old rusty link. Leave it to the mud-rakers, or kick it away!

Examine, then, your hope, and see whether it be a solitary link, or one in a chain of which tribulation forms one end, and love the other. How did you come by it? Can you run through your experience, and find in it any resemblance to that which is written here by the pen of inspiration? Did tribulation bow your soul down, and was submission given to endure it? Did any sweet experience come into your heart; an experience of

the mercy, goodness and love of God in tribulation? And did there spring out of this a sweet, childlike, blessed hope in the mercy of God, of an interest in the precious blood of Christ, and that the Lord would support you through every trial, and eventually set you before His face in glory?

V.—But the apostle adds the chief reason why this hope maketh not ashamed: "Because the **love of God** is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This is the last link in the chain, and makes it complete—the link of **hope** being now firmly welded on to the link of love. This union it is of hope and love, which makes hope to be "a good hope through grace," and gives it to stand unblushing before the throne of God. And yet "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost" is united to tribulation by the intermediate links; and thus you see how love, hope, experience, patience and tribulation are all joined together, each link being continuous and mutually dependent, but all combining to form one harmonious chain. They must not, cannot be separated, for God has united them, and what "God has joined together let no man put asunder." But what a blessed link is this last, "the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost!" And what strength and firmness it gives to the preceding, the link of hope! But as all the links in a chain, from the first to the last, have a mutual dependence, the highest link, which is love, and which is linked to the throne of God, bears up and supports the lowest, which is tribulation, and which drags, as it were, on the earth.

This shedding abroad of love in the heart solves the problem, "We glory in tribulations also," and explains what I stated at the outset, that the highest attainment in religion is to rejoice in tribulation. See this in Paul's case. He was caught up to the third heaven, where he heard unspeakable words,

and was blessed with unspeakable manifestations; but was this his greatest attainment? No; he had not then learned to take pleasure in infirmities; to learn to do this he had to come down from the glories of heaven to the gates of hell. Satan was allowed to buffet him. Here was tribulation indeed. But the thorn in the flesh taught him patience. Hence when the Lord told him that His grace was made perfect in his weakness, he got a blessed experience of His power. This raised up a sweet hope of future strength for future battles; and as the love of God was shed abroad in his heart, it made him glory in his tribulations also. Patience had then her perfect work; he was "perfect and entire, wanting nothing;" and these deep and highest attainments in the divine life are embodied by him in those remarkable words: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." **2Co 12:10**.

Now, it is this spiritual chain, constituted of these several spiritual links, which distinguishes the people of God from all others. You may have tribulations; but examine these tribulations, their nature and connection. Are they spiritual tribulations? Do they work patience? Here mistakes are often made. Tribulation without patience, or patience without tribulation, is nothing. Many worldly people have tribulations, many are naturally patient, and many profess to have an experience, but it is one of joy without sorrow, mercy without misery, liberty without bondage, light without darkness, and faith without unbelief. Many, too, boast of a hope, and even of "a good hope through grace," who have neither experience nor love, neither patience nor tribulation. A solitary link binds nothing. Such is a hope, which stands by itself; it does not bind the soul to the throne of God; it will not sustain the heart in the day of trial. And what, too, is love, unless in union with experience and hope? Yet many speak of the love

of God who know nothing of tribulation, or experience, or hope, or any of these links, as connected with it and each other.

But you will say, perhaps, "I know what tribulation is; I have had, or still have, affliction of body or circumstances, affliction in my family or in my mind." Well, you may have all that; but what has your tribulation done for you? That is the grand point. It may be only a solitary link; and, therefore, till welded on to patience, it must be doubtful whether it be of nature or of grace. What, then, does tribulation do for you? You say, "I find that I am very rebellious under it." Doubtless you are, and left to yourself you never can be anything else. But do you never find anything else but rebellion? Is there no endurance, no submission? Do you never see the hand of God in your trials, bless Him for them, and feel that you would not be without them, however painful? If so, the first link is being welded on to the second; the chain is being made; the blessed Spirit is at work in your soul.

But do you never get beyond this? Because there is a natural patience, as well as a spiritual; a callous stoicism as well as a gracious submission. Do you find anything spring up in your soul out of this patience? A sweet experience of the goodness, mercy, power and love of God? If you can go thus far, and have experienced anything of the power and goodness of God, may I not ask you farther, What made you long after God's testimonies? What made you see the emptiness, uncertainty and folly of everything but an experience for yourself of God's goodness and love?

Tribulation. No man will want to have a sweet experience of the love of God in his soul until he has been in the furnace. He is always full of self, until it is burnt out of him; but when trials, afflictions, distress of conscience, guilt of soul, fear of death, snares of hell and assaults of Satan have burnt

Pharisaism out of him, his soul longs to experience pardoning love and mercy, and to realise for himself that God is his Father and Friend. Is this your experience? If it be, then your hope is "a good hope through grace," and will not make you ashamed.

But have you ever experienced any measure of the love of God? You know that naturally all chains are not of the same weight and size. The number of links may be the same, but the links are generally proportionate; for it is evident that the strength of the chain is determined by the weakest link. Great tribulation is connected with great patience; great patience with great experience; great experience with great hope; and great hope with great love. And thus conversely, if we have but little tribulation we have but little patience; with little patience, little experience; with little experience, little hope; with little hope, little love. Still, great or small, heavy or light, it must be a complete chain. Now is not this scriptural as well as experimental? Can you deny it? And does not this solve the problem and bring us back to the point whence we started, that the greatest attainment in the divine life, because the last, is to glory or rejoice in tribulations? No man ever did, or could, rejoice in tribulation for its own sake; that would be a contradiction. But he can, and may, and does rejoice in tribulation on account of the fruit it bears, the effects it produces. It is true we cannot pray for it. Our coward flesh shrinks at the thought. And yet what do we know of the power of God or of the suitability and blessedness of the Lord Jesus in the path of tribulation?

What a mercy it is to have a little true religion! There is not much in our day; indeed, there are very few in whom there is any at all. What a mercy to have any, even the least particle! And you may depend upon it the only religion worth knowing is what the Holy Spirit has revealed here by the pen of Paul.

Now if you can find a little of this work going on in your heart, prize it greatly. You may be tried sometimes as to the reality and genuineness of the work. This is a part of the needful tribulation. But cleave to the Spirit's work in your heart. Prize every token for good, every mark of grace, everything which humbles self and exalts Jesus. To His suffering image must all His saints be conformed; and those who suffer with Him here will be glorified with Him hereafter.