

Comfort To The Sick And Afflicted

James Hervey | Added: Apr 13, 2019 | Category: Theology

James Hervey was most practical and sober in his counselling. He never approached a person on the sick bed or one suffering from loss of a dear one or great personal problems without talking about human sin and divine grace. He never gave a seeker or suffering person reason to feel sorry for himself or feel that circumstances were being extra hard on a person. Nor did he ever sit down by an individual who was complaining about his lot and complain with him. At times, his counsel will certainly seem harsh to a modern spoilt mind who believes that sympathy with the nature of the sufferer is the best sign of a good Christian counsellor. Whilst showing strong Christian love for a soul and understanding of his predicament, Hervey never hesitated to look to God as the instigator of afflictions for a purpose often hidden in the divine love. Writing to one suffering friend at the end of 1747, he says:

You well know that all afflictions, of what kind soever, proceed from God: I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things (Isaiah 45:7). They spring not from the dust; are not the effects of a random chance, but the appointment of an all-wise, all foreseeing God, who intends them all for the good of His creatures. This I think, is the fundamental argument for resignation and the grand source of comfort. This should be our first reflection and our sovereign support. He that gave me my being, and gave His own Son for my redemption, He has assigned me this suffering. What He ordains, who is boundless love, must be good; what He ordains, who is unerring wisdom must be proper.

This reconciled Eli to the severest doom that ever was denounced: it is the Lord and though grievous to human nature much more grievous to parental affection, yet it is unquestionably the best; therefore, I humbly acquiesce I kiss the awful decree, and say from my very soul, let Him do what seemeth Him good (1 Samuel 3:18).

This calmed the sorrows of Job under all his unparalleled distresses: The Lord gave me affluence and prosperity; the Lord has taken all away: rapacious hands and warring elements were only His instruments; therefore I submit, I adore, I bless His holy name.

This consolation fortified the man Christ Jesus at the approach of His inconceivably bitter agonies: the cup which, not my implacable enemies, but my Father, by their administration, has given me, shall I not drink it? It is your Father, dear sir, your heavenly Father, who loves you with an

everlasting love, that has mingled some gall with your portion in life. Sensible of the beneficent hand from which the visitation comes, may you always bow your head in patient submission; and acknowledge, with the excellent but afflicted monarch Hezekiah, Good is the word of the Lord concerning me (2 Kings 20:19).

All afflictions are designed for blessings; to do us good at the latter end, however they may crop our desires, or disquiet our minds at present. Happy (says the Spirit of inspiration, and not wretched) is the man whom God correcteth (Job 5:17); and for this reason, because His merciful chastenings, though not joyous but grievous, yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them that are exercised thereby (Hebrews 12:11). God's ways are not as our ways. The children whom we love we are apt to treat with all the soft blandishments and fond caresses of profuse indulgence; and too, too often cocker them to their hurt, if not to their ruin. But the Father of spirits is wise in His love, and out of kindness severe. Therefore it is said, Whom he loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Hebrews 12:6). Would you not, dear sir, be a child of that everlasting Father, whose favour is better than life? Affliction is one sign of your adoption to this inestimable relation. Would you not be an 'heir of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away'?

Affliction is your path to this blissful patrimony. Through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of heaven (Acts 14:22). Would you not be made like your ever-blessed and amiable Redeemer? He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and every disciple must expect to be as his master.

Perhaps you may think your affliction peculiarly calamitous; and that, if it had been of some other kind, you could more cheerfully submit, more easily bear it. But you are in the hands of an all-wise Physician, who joins to the bowels of infinite love the discernment of infinite wisdom. He cannot mistake your case. He sees into the remotest events; and, though He varies His remedies, always prescribes with the exactest propriety to every one's particular state. Assure yourself, therefore the visitation which He appoints is the very properest recipe in the dispensatory of heaven. Any other would have been less fit to convey saving health to your enjoyment of the temporal blessings which may, perhaps, be yet in store for you.

Should you inquire what benefits accrue from afflictions. Many and precious. They tend to wean us from the world. When our paths are strewn with roses, when nothing but music and odours float around; how apt are we to be enamoured with our present condition, and forget the crown of glory, forget Jesus and everlasting ages: But affliction, with a faithful though harsh voice, rouses us from the sweet delusion. Affliction warns our hearts to rise and depart from these inferior delights, because here is not our rest. True and lasting joys are not here to be found. The sweeping tempest, and the beating surge, teach the mariner to prize the haven, where undisturbed repose waits his arrival. In like manner,

disappointments, vexations, anxieties, crosses teach us to long for those happy mansions, where all tears will be wiped away from the eyes (Revelation 21:4); all anguish banished from the mind; nothing, nothing subsist, but the fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.

Afflictions tend to bring us to Christ. Christ has unspeakable and everlasting blessings to bestow: such as the world can neither give nor take away; such as are sufficient to pour that oil of gladness into our souls, which will swim above the waves of any earthly tribulation. But are we not, dear sir, are we not most unhappily indolent and inattentive to these blessings, in the gay hours of uninterrupted prosperity? It is very observable that scarce any made application to our divine Redeemer, in the days of His abode with us, but the children of affliction. The same spirit of supineness still possesses mankind. We undervalue, we disregard the Lord Jesus, and the unspeakable privileges of His gospel, while all proceeds smoothly, and nothing occurs to discompose the tenor of our tranquillity. But when misfortunes harass our circumstances, or sorrows oppress our minds; then we are willing, we are glad, we are earnest, to find rest in Christ.

In Christ Jesus there is pardon of sins. Sin is a burden, incomparably sorer than any other distress. Sin would sink us into the depths of eternal ruin, and transfix us with the agonies of endless despair. But Christ has, at the price of His very life, purchased pardon for all that fly to Him. He has borne the guilt of their sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). Have they deserved condemnation? He has sustained it in their stead. Are they obnoxious to the wrath of God? He has endured it as their substitute; He has made satisfaction, complete satisfaction for all their iniquities (Romans 3:25, 26). So that justice itself, the most rigorous justice, can demand no more. O that distresses may prompt us to prize this mercy! May incite us to desire ardently this blessedness! Then it will be good for us to have been afflicted (Psalm 119:71).

Christ has obtained for us the gift of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:2), to sanctify our hearts, and renew our natures. An unrenewed carnal mind, is ten thousand times more to be lamented, more to be dreaded, than any external calamities. And nothing can cure us of this most deadly disease but the sanctification of the Spirit. The divine Spirit alone is able to put the fear of God in our souls, and awaken the love of God in our hearts (Jeremiah 32:40). His influences suggest such awful and amiable thoughts to our minds, as will be productive of these Christian graces. This sacred principle subdues our corruptions, and conforms us to our blessed Redeemer's image. How is this best gift of Heaven disesteemed by the darlings of the world, who have nothing to vex them? But how precious is it, how desirable, to the heirs of sorrow? They breathe after it, as the thirsty hart panteth for the water brooks. They cannot be satisfied without its enlightening, purifying, cheering communications. This is all their request, and all their relief, 'that the spirit of Christ may dwell in their hearts' (Romans 8:9); may enable them to possess their souls in patience (Luke

21:19), and derive never-ending good from momentary evils. Before I close these lines, permit me to recommend one expedient, which yet is not mine, but the advice of an inspired apostle. If any be afflicted, let him pray. Dear sir, fly to God in all your adversity, pour out your complaints before Him in humble supplication, and show Him your trouble (Psalm 142:2). When I am in heaviness, says a holy sufferer, I will think upon God (Psalm 61:2), — His omnipotent power, His unbounded goodness, whose ear is ever open to receive the cry of the afflicted. When the psalmist was distressed on every side, without were fightings, within were fears, the throne of grace was the place of his refuge; I give myself to prayer (Psalm 109:3), was his declaration. This method, we read, Hannah took, and you cannot but remember the happy issue (1 Samuel 1:10). Let me entreat you to imitate these excellent examples; frequently bend your knees, and more frequently lift up your heart to the Father of mercies, and God of all consolation; not doubting, but that through the merits of His dear Son, through the intercession of your compassionate High-priest; He will hear your petitions, will comfort you under all your tribulations, and make them all work together for your infinite and eternal good.

In the meantime, I shall not cease to pray, that the God of all power and grace may vouchsafe to bless THESE CONSIDERATIONS, and render them as balm to your aching heart, and as food to the divine life in your mind. I am, dear sir, with much esteem, compassion, and respect, your very sincere well-wisher, &c.

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