

God uses afflictions to discipline His children

- I. That God uses afflictions as a Father to discipline His wayward children is well established from Scripture, Ps 89.30-33; Lev 26.14-45; Ruth 1.3-6; Jdg 2.11-14; Hos 2.5-13; 5.14-15; 2Chr 15, 29; Neh 9.
- II. Why does God use afflictions to discipline us?
 - A. It's part of the covenant of grace, Ps 89.32f.; Heb 12.5-8.
 1. If it were not for the covenant of grace, God would destroy us for our sins; but the covenant of grace ensures we enjoy a medicinal and remedial benefit from our afflictions.
 2. Having judged our sins in Christ, God now works, by affliction, to purge them from us.
 - B. It's part of the purchase of Christ's cross, Jn 17.15.
 1. Christ's death doesn't keep afflictions from us, but sanctifies them to us. His death removed the curse from our afflictions so that they now work like a doctor's script to bring spiritual health.
 - C. God afflicts His enemies as a Judge to destroy them, but He afflicts His people as a Father to purge their iniquities. He afflicts to purify and reform us, to make us better and whole.
 - D. Holiness can't thrive until sin declines and therefore God afflicts us so that we can be partakers of His holiness, Heb 12.10. He afflicts us because our sins are a hindrance to the flow of the tokens of His love toward us, Isa 59.1-14.
 - E. This is the rule in God's house: out of love for us, He chastens us to remove the sin which He hates. His love compels Him to reform us and His Covenant binds Him not to forsake us until He has.
- III. You must see this as the fruit of Christ's sacrifice for you.
 - A. It's because Christ was unmercifully afflicted that you might be mercifully afflicted. It's because God behaved as His Judge that He can now behave as your Father, Jn 18.8.
 - B. What immeasurable love and devotion, then, do you owe to Christ, who loved you and gave Himself up for you, Rom 12.1!

Afflictions are singularly effective to work repentance

- I. Afflictions are best able to prepare the heart for the work of God's Spirit. The furnace is God's workshop where He's able to turn a backsliding David into a repentant David, Pss 6, 51, 32, 130.
- II. This is because God accomplishes four things by afflictions:
 - A. He breaks our proud hearts.
 1. Pride hinders repentance, Ex 5.2; Jer 44.16. There can be no reformation until pride is broken and a man is humbled before the Lord, Isa 2.12; 3.16-17. Affliction does this best.
 - B. He softens our hard hearts.

1. Cold iron is unimpressionable, but if you heat it you can emboss it easily. So it is with the heart of man. Overcome by sin, it's cold and adamant; but when by affliction God melts it, it's able to receive and respond to His Word, Jer 9.7.
- C. He opens our closed ears.
 1. Rebellion closes our ears to God's voice but God gets our attention with affliction like Absalom got Joab's, 2Sam 14.30. By affliction God says, *Come now, let us reason together* (Isa 1.18). And after affliction, we say, *speak Lord, for your child listens* (1Sam 3.10).
- D. He opens our closed eyes.
 1. Our sin blinds our eyes to the evil of sin and our need for God so that we go astray. By affliction God opens our eyes to see the danger of evil paths and the beauty of His ways and His Son, Jer 31.18-19; Ps 1119.67, 71.
 2. It's no surprise therefore that Samuel Rutherford once said, *Praise God for the hammer, the file, and the furnace!*

Applying this doctrine

- I. Understand your afflictions, 1Pet 4.12.
 - A. This explains why troubles and afflictions befall us: because we *need* them in order to be purged of our sins. Sometimes we need many of them, sometimes we need them to be heavy, and sometimes we need them for an extended period. God knows and does best by us.
 - B. Therefore don't judge God's love or hatred by your outward circumstances. Your greatest misery is not in *being* afflicted, but in being *no better* by your affliction! But as long as they better you, then you can count yourself the happiest man in the world.
- II. Heed God's fatherly discipline, Mic 6.9; 1Cor 11.32; Heb 12.10-11.
 - A. If God intends that our afflictions purge us of our sins, then let's comply with Him and put off our sins!
 - B. You must see that your sin is your enemy, not God; and that affliction is your friend, not sin.
 - C. Seek deliverance *by* the affliction rather than deliverance *from* the affliction. Because if you don't, then out of His great love for you, God will take up His rod against you and won't put it down until He reforms you, Lev 26.23-24.
- III. Properly manage your afflictions.
 - A. Be patient and content in them because you know the good God seeks to accomplish by them, Jn 18.11; 2Cor 12.9-10; Heb 12.10.
 - B. Be cheerful under your afflictions, 2Cor 4.16-18; Phil 4.4.
 - C. Be thankful for your afflictions, 1Thes 5.18.
 - D. Love God for His Fatherly care, that He hasn't spared you the rod of reproof, Prov 13.24, 1Cor 11.32.
 - E. Trust God in your afflictions that they *will* work for your eternal good and conform you to His Son's image, Rom 8.28-29.