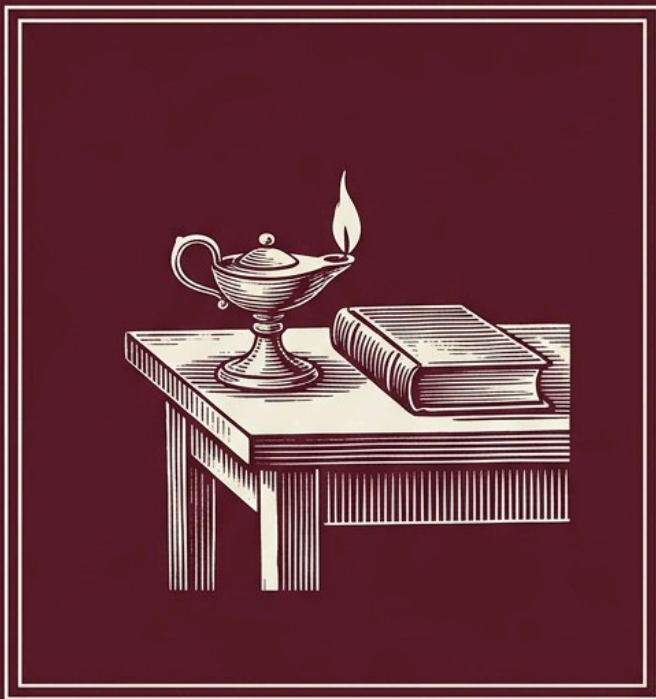


A TOKEN FOR MOURNERS

JOHN FLAVEL



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ABOUT THIS BOOK



A pastoral treatise on **Christian grief and submission to God's will**, drawn from Christ's words to a bereaved mother in Luke 7:13. Flavel diagnoses the signs of **immoderate sorrow**, marshals twenty biblical and theological considerations to restrain excessive mourning, answers twelve common pleas offered in justification of grief, and prescribes practical rules for its cure. Written out of his own experience of personal loss, this work unites **doctrinal precision with tender pastoral warmth**, guiding afflicted souls to find comfort in God's sovereignty, the Resurrection, and the covenant of grace.



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TITLE PAGE



A Token for Mourners: Or, The Advice of Christ to a distressed Mother, bewailing the Death of her Dear and only Son. Wherein, The Boundaries of Sorrow are duly fixed, Excesses restrained, the Common Pleas Answered, and divers Rules for the support of God's afflicted ones prescribed. By J. F. Preacher of the Gospel of Christ at Dartmouth in Devon.

London, Printed for Robert Boulter, at the Turks-head in Cornhill, over against the Royal Exchange. 1674.

EPISTLE DEDICATORY



Dear Friends,

The double tie of Nature and Grace, beside the many endearing passages that for so many years have linked and glued our affections so intimately, cannot but beget a tender sympathy in me under all your troubles; and make me say of every affliction which befalls you, half mine. I find it is with our affections, as with the strings of musical instruments exactly set at the same height, if one be touched the other trembles, though it be at some distance.

Our affections are one, and so in a great measure have been our afflictions also. You cannot forget that in the years lately past, the Almighty visited my Tabernacle with the Rod, and in one year, cut off from it the root, and the branch, the tender Mother, and the only Son. What the effects of those strokes, or rather of my own unmortified passions were, I have felt, and you and others have heard. Surely I was as a Bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. Indeed I may say with them (Lamentations 3:19-20), Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall, my soul has them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me.

I dare not say that ever I felt my heart discontentedly rising and swelling against God; no, I could still justify him, when I most sensibly smarted by his hand: if he had plunged me into a sea of sorrow, yet I could say in all that sea of sorrow, there is not a drop of injustice. But it was the over-heating, and over-acting of my fond and unmortified affections and passions that made so sad impressions upon my body, and cast me under those distempers which soon embittered all my remaining comforts to me.

It was my earnest desire so soon as I had strength and opportunity for so great a journey to visit you; that so, if the Lord had pleased, I might both refresh, and be refreshed by you, after all my sad and disconsolate days. And you cannot imagine what content and pleasure I projected in that visit! But it proved to us, as all other comforts of the same kind ordinarily do, more in expectation, than in fruition; for how soon after our joyful meeting and embraces, did the Lord overcast and darken our day, by sending death into your Tabernacle, to take away the desire of your eyes with a stroke! To crop off that sweet and only bud from which we promised ourselves so much comfort: but no more of that, I fear I am gone too far already. It is not my design to exasperate your troubles, but to heal them, and for that purpose have I sent you these papers, which I hope may be of use both to you and many others in your condition; since they are the after-fruits of my own troubles; things that I commend not to you from another hand, but which I have, in some measure, proved and tasted in my own trials.

But I will not hold you longer here. I have only a few things to desire for and from you, and I have done.

The things I desire are,

First, That you will not be too hasty to get off the yoke which God has put upon your neck. Remember when your child was in the womb, neither of you desired it should be delivered from there, till God's appointed time was fully come; and now that you travail again with sorrow for its death. O desire not to be delivered from your sorrows one moment before God's time for your deliverance be fully come also. Let patience have its perfect work; that comfort which comes in God's way and season, will stick by you, and do you good indeed.

Secondly, I desire, that though you and your afflictions had a sad meeting, yet you and they may have a comfortable parting. If they effect that upon your hearts which God sent them for, I doubt not but you will give them a fair testimony when they go off.

If they obtain God's blessing upon them in their operation, surely they will have your blessing too at their valediction. And what you entertained with fear, you will dismiss with praise. How sweet is it to hear the afflicted soul say when God is loosing his bonds, It's good for me that I have been afflicted!

Thirdly, I heartily wish, that these searching afflictions may make the most satisfying discoveries, that you may now see more of the evil of sin, the vanity of the creature, and the fullness of Christ, than ever you yet saw. Afflictions are searchers, and put the soul upon searching and trying its ways (Lamentations 3:40). When our sin finds us out by affliction, happy are we, if by the light of affliction we find out sin. Blessed is the man whom God chastens, and teaches out of his Law (Psalm 94:12). There are unseen causes many times of our troubles; you have an advantage now to sift out the seeds and principles from which they spring.

Fourthly, I wish that all the love and delight you bestowed upon your little one, may now be placed to your greater advantage upon Jesus Christ: and that the stream of your affection to him, may be so much the stronger, as there are now fewer channels for it to be divided into. If God will not have any part of your happiness to lie in children; then let it wholly lie in himself. If the jealousy of the Lord has removed that which drew away too much of your heart from him, and has spoken by this rod, saying, Stand aside child, you are in my way, and fill more room in your parents' hearts than belongs to you. O then deliver up all to him, and say, Lord, take the whole heart entirely and undividedly to yourself. Henceforth let there be no parting, sharing or dividing of the affections between God and the creature, let all the streams meet and center in you only.

Fifthly, That you may be strengthened with all might in the inner man to all patience, that the peace of God may keep your heart and mind. Labor to bring your hearts to a meek submission to the rod of your Father. We had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence, shall we not much more be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? Is it comely for children to contest and strive with their Father? Or is it the way to be freed from the yoke by struggling under it? Oh that your hearts might be in a like frame with his, that said, Lord, you shall beat, and I will bear. It was a good observation that one made, the soul grows wise by sitting still and quiet under the rod. And the Apostle calls those excellent fruits which the saints gather from their sanctified afflictions, the peaceable fruits of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).

Lastly, My heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may die daily to all visible enjoyments, and by these frequent converses with death in your family, you may be prepared for your own change and dissolution when it shall come.

O, Friends, How many graves have you and I seen opened for our dear relations! How often has death come up into our windows, and summoned the delight of our eyes? It is but a little while and we shall go to them, we and they are distinguished but by short intervals.

Our dear parents are gone, our lovely and desirable children are gone, our bosom relations, that were as our own souls, are gone, the greatest part of us is gone: and do not all these warning-knocks at our doors acquaint us, that we must prepare to follow shortly after them!

O that by these things our own death might be both more easy and more familiar to us! The more often it visits us, the better we should be acquainted with it, and the more of our beloved relations it removes before us, the less of either snare and entanglement remains for us when our turn comes.

My dear Friends, my flesh and my blood, I beseech you for religion's sake, for your own sake, and for my sake, whose comfort is in great part bound up in your prosperity and welfare, that you read frequently, ponder seriously, and apply believingly these Scripture-consolations and directions, which in some haste, I have gathered for your use, and the God of all consolation be with you.

I am your most endeared brother, John Flavel.

PART



Luke 7:13: And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, Weep not.

To be above the stroke of passions, is a condition equal to angels: to be in a state of sorrow, without the sense of sorrow, is a disposition beneath beasts; but duly to regulate our sorrows, and bound our passions under the rod, is the wisdom, duty, and excellency of a Christian. He that is without natural affections, is deservedly ranked among the worst of heathens; and he that is able rightly to manage them, deserves to be numbered with the best of Christians. Though when we are sanctified, we put on the divine nature; yet till we are glorified we put not off the infirmities of our human nature.

While we are within the reach of troubles, we cannot be without the danger, nor ought to be without the fear of sin; and it is as hard for us to escape sin, being in adversity, as becalming in prosperity.

How apt we are to transgress the bounds both of reason and religion under a sharp affliction, appears, as in most men's experience, so in this woman's example, to whose excessive sorrow,

Christ puts a stop in the text: He saw her, and had compassion on her, and said to her, Weep not.

The lamentations and wailings of this distressed mother, moved the tender compassions of the Lord in beholding it, and stirred up more pity in his heart for her, than could be in her heart for her dear and only Son.

In the words we are to consider, both the condition of the woman, and the counsel of Christ with respect to it.

First, The condition of this woman, which appears to be very dolorous and distressed; her groans and tears moved and melted the very heart of Christ, to hear and behold them: When he saw her, he had compassion on her.

How sad an hour it was with her when Christ met her, appears by what is so distinctly remarked by the Evangelist, in verse 12, where it is said, Now when they came near to the Gate of the City, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only Son of his Mother, and she was a widow, and much people of the City was with her.

In this one verse, divers heart-piercing circumstances of this affliction are noted.

First, It was the death of a Son. To bury a child, any child, must needs rend the heart of a tender parent; for what are children but the parent multiplied: a child is a part of the parent made up in another skin. But to lay a Son in the grave, a Son which continues the name, and supports the family; this was ever accounted a very great affliction.

Secondly, This Son was not carried from the cradle to the coffin, nor stripped out of his swaddling clothes, to be wrapped in his winding clothes: Had he died in infancy, before he had engaged affection, or raised expectation, the affliction had not been so pungent and cutting, as now it was. Death smote this Son in the flower and prime of his time. He was a man (says the Evangelist) verse 12, a young man (as Christ calls him) verse 14, he was now arrived at that age which made him capable of yielding his Mother all that comfort which had been the expectation and hope of many years, and the reward and fruit of many cares and labors: yet then when the endearments were greatest, and her hopes highest, even in the flower of his age, he is cut off. Thus Basil bewailed the death of his Son: I once had a Son who was a young man, my only successor, the solace of my age, the glory of his kind, the prop of my family, arrived to the endearing age: then was he snatched from me by death, whose lovely voice but a little before I heard, who lately was a pleasant spectacle to his parent. Reader, if this has been your own condition, as it has been his that writes it; I need say no more to convince you, that it was a sorrowful state indeed Christ met this tender Mother in.

Thirdly, And which is yet more, he was not only a Son, but an only Son: so you find in verse 12. He was the only Son of his Mother: one in whom all her hopes and comforts of that kind were bound up.

All her affections were contracted into this one object. If we have never so many children, we know not which of them to spare. If they stand like olive plants about our table, it would grieve us to see the least twig among them broken down. But surely the death of one out of many, is much more tolerable than of all in one.

Hence it is noted in Scripture as the greatest of earthly sorrows (Jeremiah 6:26), O daughter of my people gird yourself with sackcloth, and wallow yourself in ashes. Make mourning as for an only Son, most bitter lamentation. Indeed, so deep and penetrating is this grief that the Holy Spirit borrows it to express the deepest spiritual troubles by it (Zechariah 12:10), They shall mourn for him, namely Christ whom they pierced, as one mourns for an only Son.

Fourthly, And yet to heighten the affliction it is added, verse 12, And she was a widow. So that the staff of her age, on whom she leaned was broken: she had now none left to comfort or assist her in her helpless comfortless state of widowhood; which is a condition not only void of comfort, but exposed to oppression and contempt.

Indeed, and being a widow, the whole burden lay upon her alone; she had not a husband to comfort her, as Elkanah did Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:8, Why do you weep? and why is your heart grieved? Am I not more to you than ten Sons? This would have been a great relief; but her husband was dead as well as her Son: both gone, and she only surviving, to lament the loss of those comforts that once she had. Her calamities came not single, but one after another, and this reviving and aggravating the former. This was her case and condition when the Lord met her.

Secondly, Let us consider the counsel which Christ gives her, with respect to this her sad and sorrowful case. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said to her, Weep not: relieving and supporting words, wherein we shall consider,

Occasion. Motive. Counsel itself.

First, The occasion of it, and that was his seeing of her. This meeting at the Gate of the City, how accidental and occasional soever it seems, yet without doubt it was providentially suited to the work intended to be wrought: the eye of his omniscience foresaw her, and this meeting was by him designed, as an occasion of that famous miracle which he wrought upon the young man. Christ has a quick eye to discern poor mourning and disconsolate creatures: and though he be now in heaven, and stands out of our sight, so that we see him not; yet he sees us; and his eye, which is upon all our troubles, still affects his heart, and moves his compassion for us.

Secondly, The motive stirring him up to give this relieving and comfortable counsel to her, was his own compassion. She neither expected, nor desired it from him; but so full of tender pity was the Lord towards her, that he prevents her with unexpected consolation: her heart was nothing so full of compassion for her Son, as Christ was for her. He bore our infirmities, even natural as well as moral ones, in the days of his flesh; and though he be now exalted to the highest glory, yet still he continues as merciful as ever, and as apt to be touched with the sense of our miseries (Hebrews 4:15).

Lastly, The counsel itself, Weep not, herein fulfilling the office of a comforter to them that mourn, to which he was anointed (Isaiah 61:1-3). Yet the words are not an absolute prohibition of tears and sorrow; he does not condemn all mourning as sinful, or all expressions of grief for dead relations as uncomely: no, Christ would not have his people stupid and insensate; he only prohibits the excesses and extravagances of our sorrows for the dead, that it should not be such a mourning for the dead as is found among the

heathens, who sorrow without measure, because without hope, being ignorant of that grand relief by the resurrection which the Gospel reveals.

The resurrection of her Son from the dead, is the ground upon which Christ builds her consolation and relief. Well might he say, Weep not, when he intended quickly to remove the cause of her tears by restoring him again to life.

Now though there be somewhat in this case extraordinary and peculiar; for few or none that carry their dear children to the grave, may expect to receive them again from the dead immediately by a special resurrection, as she did: I say this is not to be expected by any that now lose their relations; the occasion and reasons of such miraculous special resurrections being removed, by a sufficient and full evidence and confirmation of Christ's divine power and Godhead. Yet those that now bury their relations, if they be such as die in Christ, have as good and sufficient reason to moderate their passions, as this mourner had, and do as truly come within the reach and compass of this Christ's comfortable and supporting counsel, Weep not, as she did. For do but consider, what of support or comfort, can a particular and present resurrection from the dead give us, more than that it is, and as it is a specimen, first-fruits, or pledge of the general resurrection? It is not the returning of the soul to its body, to live an animal life again in this world of sin and sorrow, and shortly after to undergo the agonies and pains of death again, that is in itself any such privilege, as may afford much comfort to the person raised, or his relations. It is no privilege to the person raised; for it returns him from rest to trouble,

from the harbor back again into the ocean. It is matter of trouble to many dying saints, to hear of the likelihood of their returning again, when they are got so near to heaven.

It was once the case of a godly minister of this nation, who was much troubled at his return, and said, I am like a sheep driven out of the storm almost to the fold, and then driven back into the storm again: or a weary traveler that is come near his home, and then must go back to fetch something he had forgotten: or an apprentice, whose time is almost expired, and then must begin a new term.

But to die, and then return again from the dead, has less of privilege, than to return only from the brink of the grave; for the sick has not yet felt the agonies and last struggles or pangs of death: but such have felt them once, and must feel them again; they must die twice, before they can be happy once. And besides, during the little time they spend on earth between the first and second dissolution, there is a perfect forgetfulness and insensibility of all that which they saw or enjoyed in their state of separation. It being necessary, both for them, and others that it should be so; for themselves it is necessary, that they may be content to live, and endure the time of separation from that blessed and ineffable state, quietly and patiently; and for others, that they may live by faith, and not by sense, and build upon divine and not human authority and report.

So that here you see, their agonies and pangs are doubled, and yet their life not sweetened by any sense of their happiness which returns and remains with them, and therefore it can be no such privilege to them.

And for their relations, though it be some comfort to receive them again from the dead; yet the consideration, that they are returned to them into the stormy sea, to partake of new sorrows and troubles, from which they were lately free; and in a short time they must part with them again, and feel the double sorrows of a parting pull, which others feel but once: surely such a particular resurrection considered in itself, is no such ground of comfort as at first we might imagine it to be.

It remains then, that the ground of all solid comfort and relief against the death of our relations, lies in the general and last resurrection, and what is in a particular one, is but as it is a specimen, and evidence of the general: and there the Apostle places our relief (1 Thessalonians 4:17), that we shall see and enjoy them again at the Lord's coming. And surely this is more, than if with this mother in the text we should presently receive them from the dead, as she did her Son. And if we judge not so, it is because our hearts are carnal, and measure things rather by time, and sense, than by faith and eternity.

Thus you see the counsel, with its ground, which for the most part is common to other Christian mourners with her; the difference being but inconsiderable, and of little advantage.

Here then you find many aggravations of sorrow meeting together; a Son, an only Son, is carrying to the grave, yet Christ commands the pensive Mother, not to mourn.

Hence we note,

Doctrine: That Christians ought to moderate their sorrows for their dead relations, however many afflicting circumstances and aggravations soever do meet together in their death.

It is as common with men, indeed, with good men, to exceed in their sorrows for dead relations, as it is to exceed in their loves and delights to living relations; and both of the one and other, we may say as they say of waters, it is hard to confine them within their bounds. It is therefore grave advice which the Apostle delivers in this case (1 Corinthians 7:29-30), But this I say brethren, the time is short, it remains, that both they that have wives, be as though they had none, and they that weep, as though they wept not, and those that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not. As if he had said, the floating world is near its port: God has contracted the sails of man's life: it is but a point of time we have to live, and shortly it will not be a point to choose, whether we had wives or not, children or not: all these are time-eaten things, and before the expected fruit of these comforts be ripe, we ourselves may be rotten. It is therefore a high point of wisdom, to look upon things which shortly will not be, as if already they were not, and to behave ourselves in the loss of these carnal enjoyments, as the natural man behaves himself in the use of spiritual ordinances. He hears as if he heard not, and we should weep as if we wept not; their affections are a little moved sometimes by spiritual things, but they never lay them so to heart, as to be broken-hearted for the sin they hear of, or deeply affected with the glory revealed. We also ought to be sensible of the stroke God puts upon our dear relations: but yet still we must weep, as if we wept not; that is, we must keep due bounds and moderation in our sorrows, and not be too deeply concerned for these dying short-lived things.

To this purpose the Apostle exhorts (Hebrews 12:5), My Son despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither faint when you are rebuked of him. These are two extremes, despising, and fainting:

when God is correcting, to say, I do not regard it, let God take all if he will; if my estate must go, let it go; if my children die, let them die: this is to despise the Lord's chastening: and God cannot bear it, that we should bear it thus lightly.

There is also another extreme, and that is fainting: if when goods are taken away, the heart be taken away, and when children die, then the spirit of the parent dies also; this is fainting under the rod. You lament (says Seneca) your deceased friend, but I would not have you grieve beyond what is meet: that you should not grieve at all, I dare not require you; tears may be excused, if they do not exceed: let your eyes therefore be neither wholly dry, nor yet let them overflow; weep you may, but wail you must not.

Happy the man that still keeps the golden bridle of moderation upon his passions and affections, and still keeps the possession of himself, whatever he loses the possession of.

Now the method in which I purpose to proceed shall be: 1. To discover the signs of immoderate sorrow. 2. To dissuade from the sin of immoderate sorrow. 3. To remove the pleas of immoderate sorrow. 4. To propose the cure of immoderate sorrow.

PART



First, I shall give you the signs of immoderate sorrow, and show you when it exceeds its bounds, and becomes sinful, even a sorrow to be sorrowed for; and for clearness' sake, I will first allow what may be allowed to the Christian mourner, and then you will the better discern wherein the excess and sinfulness of your sorrow lies.

And first, however much we censure and condemn immoderate sorrow, yet the afflicted must be allowed an awakened and tender sense of the Lord's afflicting hand upon them. It is no virtue to bear what we do not feel: indeed it is a most unbecoming temper, not to tremble when God is smiting.

The Lord says to Moses, in the case of Miriam (Numbers 12:24), If her Father had spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days? The face is the table and seat of beauty and honor; but when it is spit upon, it is made the sink of shame. Had her own Father spit upon her face when she had displeased him, would she not have gone aside as one ashamed by such a rebuke, and not have shown her face to him again in seven days? How much more should she take it to heart, and be sensible of this re-

buke of mine, who have filled her face with leprous spots, the signs of my displeasure against her? Surely God will be ashamed of those, that are not ashamed when he rebukes them.

It is not magnanimity, but stupidity to make light of God's corrections, and for this the afflicted are smartly taxed (Jeremiah 5:3), I have smitten them but they have not grieved. When God struck Job in his person, children, and estate, he arose and tore his mantle, and put dust upon his head, to show he was not senseless and unaffected, and yet blessed the afflicting God, which as plainly showed he was not contumacious and unsubmitive.

Secondly, We must allow the mourning afflicted soul, a due and comely expression of his grief and sorrow, in his complaints both to God and men.

It is much more becoming a Christian ingenuously to open his troubles, than sullenly to smother them. There is no sin in complaining to God, but much wickedness in complaining of him. Grievs are eased by groans, and heart pressures relieved by utterance. This was David's course, and constant way, who was a man of afflictions (Psalm 142:2-3), I poured out my complaint before him, I showed before him my trouble: when my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then you knew my path.

To whom should children go but to their Father to make their moan? From where may they expect relief and comfort but from him? Psalm 102 is entitled, A Psalm for the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

And happy were it if every afflicted soul would choose this way to express his sorrows. Did we complain more to God, God would complain less of us, and quickly abate the matters of our com-

plaint. O you cannot think how moving, how melting, how prevailing it is with God, when his poor burdened and afflicted people, in a day of distress and despondency, when deep calls to deep, and one wave drives on another, then for the oppressed soul with humility, filial confidence, and faith, to turn itself to the Lord and thus address him,

Father, What shall I do? My soul is greatly bowed down by trouble, I am full to the brim, my vain heart has looked for relief this way and that way but none comes, every door of comfort is shut up against me. You have multiplied my sorrows, and renewed your witnesses against me: comfort is removed from my outward, and peace from my inner man: sharp afflictions without, and bitter reflections within. O Lord I am oppressed, undertake for me. Fathers of the flesh pity their distressed children when they complain to them, and will not you O Lord, whose compassions as far exceed creature-compassions, as the sea exceeds a drop. O my Father pity me, support me, deliver me.

O how acceptable is this to God! How advantageous to the soul!

We may also make our complaint to men. So did Job (Job 19:21), Have pity, have pity on me O you my friends; for the hand of God has touched me. And it is a mercy if we have any friends that are wise, faithful, and experienced. They are born for such a time as this (Proverbs 17:17). But be they what they will, they cannot pity as God, relieve and succor as he. And often times we may say with Job (Job 21:4), As for me, is my complaint to men? and if it were, why should not my spirit be troubled? That is to say, what great advantage can I get by these complaints? I may burden the heart of my friend, but how little does that ease my own! Yet the

very opening of the heart to an experienced tender Christian is some relief, and the engaging his prayers is more. Thus far you may safely go: in all this there is no danger.

Thirdly, The afflicted person may, ordinarily, accuse, judge and condemn himself, for being the cause and procurer of his own troubles. He may lawfully be discontented, and vexed with himself for his own folly, when the iniquity of his heels compasses him about. And truly it is but seldom that any great affliction befalls a gracious person, but he saw the need of such a rod before he felt it.

Has God smitten your child or friend? and did you not foresee some sharp trial coming? Did not your fond secure carnal temper need such a scourge, to awaken, quicken and purge you? Or if you did not foresee it, it is now your duty to search and examine yourselves. So the Church in their afflictions resolved (Lamentations 3:40), Let us search and try our ways. When God is smiting we should be searching. Surely our iniquities will inquire after us, if we will not inquire after them. Indeed, in the day of affliction, a gracious soul is inquisitive about nothing more than the procuring and provoking cause of his troubles (Job 10:2), Show me for what you contend with me? That is to say, Lord what special corruption is it that this rod is sent to rebuke? What sinful neglect does it come to humble me for? O discover it now to me, and recover me now from it.

And having found the root and cause of their troubles, ingenuous souls will shame themselves for it, and give glory to God by a humble submission, and vindication of the equity of his proceedings (Job 7:20), I have sinned, what shall I do to you, you preserver of men? He thinks it no shame freely to discover to God, and deeply to abase himself before him, for his folly.

I remember a choice note that Mr. Brightman has in his commentary upon the Canticles.

Holy men, says he, after their hearts are renewed by repentance, are not ashamed to remember and confess their slips and shameful falls, to the glory of God: for they account that glory which such confessions take from them is not lost, while it goes to the glory of God. If his glory may rise out of our shame, how willing should we be to take such shame to us? Holy David was not ashamed to acknowledge (Psalm 38:5), My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. He is the wisest man that thus makes a fool of himself before God.

It is true God may afflict from prerogative, or for trial; but we may always see cause enough in ourselves, and it is safest to charge it upon our own folly.

Lastly, The afflicted Christian may in a humble submissive manner, plead with God and be earnest for the removal of the affliction.

When affliction presses us above strength, when it disables us for duty, or when it gives advantage to temptation, then we may say with David, Remove your stroke from me, I am consumed by the blow of your hand (Psalm 39:10). Even our Lord Jesus Christ, in the day of his troubles, poured out his soul with strong cries and many tears, saying, Father if you be willing, let this cup pass from me (Luke 22:42). Oppressed nature desires ease; and even our renewed nature desires freedom from those clogs and temptations which hinder us in duty, or expose us to snares.

Thus far we may safely go.

PART



But sorrow then becomes sinful and excessive when,
First, It causes us to slight and despise all our other mercies and enjoyments, as small things in comparison of what we have lost.

It often falls out that the setting of one comfort clouds and benights all the rest. Our tears for our lost enjoyment so blind our eyes that we cannot see the many other mercies which yet remain: we take so much notice of what is gone, that we take little or no notice of what is left. But this is very sinful; for it involves in it both ignorance, ingratitude, and great provocation.

It is a sin springing from ignorance. Did we know the desert of our sin, we would rather wonder to see one mercy left, than that twenty are cut off. They that know they have forfeited every mercy, should be thankful that they enjoy any, and patient when they lose many of their comforts.

Did we know God, even that sovereign Lord at whose disposal our comforts come and go, who can the next moment blast all that remain, and turn you into hell, afterwards you would prize the mercies he yet indulges to you at a higher value. Did you under-

stand the fickle vanishing nature of the creature, what a flower, what a bubble it is, oh how thankful would you be to find so many yet left in your possession!

Did you know the case of thousands as good, indeed better than you, whose whole harvest of comfort in this world, is but a handful to the gleanings of the comforts you still enjoy, who in all their lives never were owners of such comfortable enjoyments as you now overlook, surely you would not act as you do.

Besides, what vile ingratitude is in this? What! are all your remaining mercies worth nothing? You have buried a child, a friend: well, but still, you have a husband, a wife, other children; or if not, you have comfortable accommodations for yourselves, with health to enjoy them; or if not, yet you have the ordinances of God, it may be an interest in Christ, and in the covenant, pardon of sin, and hopes of glory. What! and yet sink at this rate, as if all your mercies, comforts, and hopes, even in both worlds, were buried in one grave. Must Ichabod be written upon your best mercies, because mortality is written upon one? Fie, fie, what shameful ingratitude is here?

And truly friend, such a carriage as this under the rod, is no small provocation to the Lord to go on in judgment, and make a full end of all that remains, so that affliction shall not rise up the second time.

What if God taking notice how little you regard the many undeserved favors you yet possess, should say, Well, if you think them not worth the owning, neither do I think them worth the continuing. Go death, there is a husband, a wife, other children yet left, smite them all. Go sickness and remove the health of his body yet

left; go losses and impoverish his estate yet left; go reproach and blast his reputation which is yet sweet. What would you think of this? And yet if you be out of Christ, you are in danger of a far sadder stroke than either or all yet mentioned. What if God should say, Do you not prize my mercy? Have you no value for my goodness, and forbearance towards you? Is it nothing that I have spared you thus long in your sins and rebellions? Well then, I will stretch out my hand upon your life, cut off that thread which has kept you so many years from dropping into hell.

O think then what you have done, by provoking the Lord through your vile ingratitude! It is a dangerous thing to provoke God, when he is already in a way of judgment. And if you be his own people, and so out of the danger of this last and worst stroke: yet know, you have better mercies to lose, than any you have yet lost. Should God cloud your soul with doubts, let loose Satan to buffet you, remove joy and peace from your inner man, how soon would you be convinced, that the funeral of your dearest friend is but a trifle to this?

Well then, whatever God takes, be still thankful for what he leaves. It was the great sin of Israel in the wilderness, that though God had delivered them from their cruel servitude in Egypt, miraculously fed them in the desert, and was leading them on to a land flowing with milk and honey; yet as soon as any want did but begin to pinch them, presently all these mercies were forgotten, and slighted (Numbers 14:12), Would to God, say they, we had died in Egypt. And (Numbers 11:6), There is nothing at all beside this manna. Beware of this O you mourning and afflicted ones. You see both the sin that is in it, and the danger that attends it.

Secondly, And no less sinful are our sorrows, when they so wholly engulf our hearts, that we either mind not at all, or are little or nothing sensible of the public evils and calamities which lie upon the Church and people of God.

Some Christians have such public spirits that the Church's troubles swallow up their personal troubles. Melanchthon seemed to take little notice of the death of his child, which he dearly loved, being almost overwhelmed with the miseries lying on the Church.

And it was a good evidence of the graciousness and publicness of Eli's spirit, who sitting in the gate anxiously waiting for tidings from the Army, when the tidings came that Israel fled before the Philistines, that his two Sons Hophni and Phinehas were dead, and that the Ark of God was taken; just at the mention of that word, The Ark of God, before he heard out the whole narration, his mind quickly presaging the issue, he sank down and died (1 Samuel 4:19-20). O that was the sinking, the killing word; had the messenger stopped at the death of his two Sons, likely enough he had supported that burden, but the loss of the Ark was more to him than sons or daughters.

But how few such public spirits appear even among professors in this selfish generation? May we not with the Apostle complain (Philippians 2:21), All seek their own, and not the things that are of Christ. Few men have any great cares or designs lying beyond the bounds of their own private interests. And what we say of cares, is as true of sorrows: if a child die, we are ready to die too, but public calamities pierce us not.

How few suffer either their domestic comforts to be swallowed up in the Church's troubles, or their domestic troubles to be swallowed up by the Church's mercies! Now when it is thus with us, when we little regard what mercies or miseries lie upon others, but are wholly intent upon our own afflictions, this is a sinful sorrow, and ought to be sorrowed for.

Thirdly, Our sorrows then become sinful and exorbitant, when they divert us from, or distract us in our duties, so that our intercourse with heaven is stopped and interrupted by them.

How long can we sit alone musing upon a dead creature? Here our thoughts easily flow, but how hard to fix them upon the living God! When our hearts should be in heaven with our Christ, they are in the grave with our dead. May not many afflicted souls justly complain, that their troubles have taken away their Christ from them, I mean as to sweet sensible communion, and laid the dead child in his room?

Poor creature, cease to weep any longer for your dead relation, and weep rather for your dead heart. Is this your compliance with God's design in afflicting you? What, to grow a greater stranger to him than before! Or is this the way to your cure and comfort in affliction, to restrain prayer, and turn your back upon God?

Or if you dare not wholly neglect your duty, yet your affliction spoils the success and comfort of it; your heart is wandering, dead, distracted in prayer and meditation, so that you have no relief or comfort from it.

Rouse up yourself Christian and consider, This is not right. Surely the rod works not kindly now. What, did your love to God expire, when your friend expired? Is your heart as cold in duty, as

his body is in the grave? Has natural death seized him, and spiritual deadness seized you? Sure then you have more reason to lament your dead heart, than your dead friend. Divert the stream of your troubles speedily, and labor to recover yourself out of this temper quickly; lest sad experience shortly tell you, that what you now mourn for, is but a trifle to that which you shall mourn for hereafter. To lose the heavenly warmth and spiritual liveliness of your affections, is undoubtedly a far more considerable loss, than to lose the wife of your bosom, or the sweetest child that ever a tender parent laid in the grave.

Reader, If this be your case, you have reason to challenge the first place among the mourners. It is better for you to bury ten sons, than to remit one degree of love or delight in God. The end of God in smiting, was to win your heart nearer to him, by removing that which estranged it; how then do you cross the very design of God in this dispensation? Must God then lose his delight in your fellowship, because you have lost yours in the creature? Surely when your troubles thus accompany you to your closet, they are sinful and extravagant troubles.

Fourthly, Then you may also conclude your sorrows to be excessive and sinful, when they so overload and oppress your bodies, as to endanger your lives, or render them useless and unfit for service.

Worldly sorrow works death (2 Corinthians 7:10), that is, sorrow after the manner of worldly men, sorrow in a mere carnal natural way, which is not relieved by any spiritual reasonings and considerations. This falls so heavily sometimes upon the body, that it sinks under the weight, and is cast into such diseases as are

never more worked off, or healed in this world. Heaviness in the heart of a man makes it stoop, says Solomon (Proverbs 12:25). The stoutest body must stoop under heart pressures.

It is with the mind of man, says one, as with the stone Tyrhenus: as long as it is whole it floats, but once broken it sinks presently. Grief is a moth which getting into the mind, will in short time, make the body, be it never so strong and well wrought a piece, like an old sere garment.

Philosophers and physicians generally reckon sorrow among the chief causes of shortening life. Christ was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with griefs, and this some think was the reason, that he appeared as a man of fifty, when he was little more than thirty years old (John 8:57). But his sorrows were of another kind.

Many a man's soul is to his body, as a sharp knife to a thin sheath, which easily cuts it through; and what do we by poring and pondering upon our troubles, but whet the knife that it may cut the deeper and quicker? Of all the creatures that ever God made, devils only excepted, man is the most able and apt to be his own tormentor.

How unmercifully do we load them in times of affliction? How do we not only waste their strength by sorrow, but deny relief and necessary refreshment? They must carry the load, but be allowed no refreshment. If they can eat the bread of affliction, and drink tears, they may feed at full; but no pleasant bread, no quiet sleep is permitted them. Surely you would not burden a beast, as you do your own bodies; you would pity and relieve a brute beast groaning and sinking under a heavy burden, but you will not pity nor relieve your own bodies.

Some men's souls have given such deep wounds to their bodies, that they are never likely to enjoy many easy or comfortable days more while they dwell in them.

Now this is very sinful, and displeasing to God; for if he have such a tender care for our bodies, that he would not have us swallowed up with over much grief, even for sin (2 Corinthians 2:7), but even to that sorrow sets bounds. How much less with outward sorrow for temporal losses? May not your stock of natural strength be employed to better purposes, do you think, than these? Time may come, that you may earnestly wish you had that health and strength again to spend for God, which you now so lavishly waste, and prodigally cast away upon your troubles to no purpose, or advantage.

It was therefore a high point of wisdom in David, and recorded no doubt for our imitation, who when the child was dead, ceased to mourn, but arose, washed himself, and ate bread (2 Samuel 12:20).

Fifthly, When affliction sours the spirit with discontent, and makes it inwardly grudge against the hand of God, then our trouble is full of sin, and we ought to be humbled for it before the Lord.

Whatever God does with us or ours, still we should maintain good thoughts of him. A gracious heart cleaves nearer and nearer to God in affliction, and can justify God in his severest strokes, acknowledging them to be all just and holy (Psalm 119:75), I know also that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me. And by this the soul may comfortably evidence to itself its own uprightness, and sincere love to God. Indeed, it has been of singular use to some souls, to take right measures of their love to God in such trials; to have lovely and well-pleased thoughts

of God even when he smites us in our nearest and dearest comforts; this argues plainly that we love him for himself, and not for his gifts only. And that his interest in the heart is deeper, than any creature interest is. And such is the comfort that has resulted to some from such discoveries of their own hearts by close smarting afflictions; that they would not part with it, to have their comforts, whose removal occasioned them, given back in lieu of it.

But to swell with secret discontent, and have hard thoughts of God, as if he had done us wrong, or dealt more severely with us than any. O this is a vile temper, cursed fruit springing from an evil root; a very carnal, ignorant, proud heart; or at least from a very distempered if renewed heart. So it was with Jonah when God smote his gourd, Indeed, says he, I do well to be angry even to death (Jonah 4:9). Poor man, he was highly distempered at this time and out of frame; this was not his true temper or ordinary frame, but a surprise; the effect of a paroxysm of temptation, in which his passions had been over-heated.

Few dare to vent it in such language, but how many have their hearts embittered by discontent, and secret risings against the Lord? which if ever the Lord opens their eyes to see, will cost them more trouble than ever that of affliction did, which gave the occasion of it.

I deny not, but the best heart may be tempted to think and speak perversely concerning these works of the Lord, that envious adversary the Devil, will blow the coals, and labor to blow up our spirits at such time into high discontents. The temptation was strong even upon David himself, to take up hard thoughts of God, and to conclude, Truly I have cleansed my heart in vain. That is to say, how little privilege from the worst of evils has a man by his

godliness? But he soon suppressed such motions. If I should say thus, I should offend against the generation of your children: meaning, that he should condemn the whole race of godly men through the whole world; for who is there among them all, but is, or has, or may be afflicted as severely as myself?

Surely, it is fitting to be said to God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more (Job 34:31). Whatever God does with you, speak well, and think well of him, and his works.

Sixthly, Our sorrows exceed due bounds, when we continually excite and provoke them by willing irritations.

Grief like a lion loves to play with us before it destroys us. And strange it is that we should find some kind of pleasure in rousing our sorrows. It is Seneca's observation, and experimentally true, that even sorrow itself has a certain kind of delight attending it.

The Jews that were with Mary in the house to comfort her, when they saw that she went out hastily, followed her, saying, she goes to the grave to weep there (John 11:32). As they do, says Calvin, that seek to provoke their troubles by going to the grave, or often looking upon the dead body.

Thus we delight to look upon the relics of our deceased friends, and often to mention their actions and sayings, not so much for any matter of holy and weighty instruction or imitation; for that would warrant and commend the action; but rather to rub the wound, and fetch fresh blood from it, by piercing ourselves with some little trivial, yet wounding circumstances. I have known many that will sit and talk of the features, actions and sayings, of their children, for hours together, and weep at the rehearsal of them, and that for many months after they are gone: so keeping

the wound continually open, and excruciating their own hearts without any benefit at all by them. A lock of hair or some such trifle must be kept for this purpose to renew their sorrow daily by looking on it. On this account Jacob would not have his Son called Benoni, lest it should renew his sorrow, but Benjamin.

I am far from commending a brutish forgetfulness of our dear relations, and condemn it as much as I do this childish and unprofitable remembrance. Oh friends we have other things to do under the rod than these. Were it not better to be searching our hearts and houses, when God's rod is upon us, and studying how to answer the end of it, by mortifying those corruptions which provoke it? Surely the rod works not kindly till it comes to this.

Seventhly, Lastly. Our sorrows may then be pronounced sinful, when they deafen our ears to all the wholesome and seasonable words of counsel and comfort offered us for our relief and support.

Jeremiah 31:15: A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children, would not be comforted for her children, because they were not. She will admit no comfort, her disease is curable by no other means but the restoration of her children; give her them again and she will be quiet, else you speak into the air, she regards not whatever you say.

Thus Israel in the cruel bondage in Egypt, Moses brings them the glad tidings of deliverance, but they listened not to him, because of the anguish of spirit, and their cruel bondage (Exodus 6:9).

Thus obstinately fixed are many in their trouble, that no words of advice or comfort find any place with them: indeed, I have known some exceeding quick and ingenious, even above the rate of

their common parts and abilities in inventing shifts, and framing objections to turn off comfort from themselves; as if they had been hired to plead against their own interest. And if they be driven from those pleas, yet they are settled in their troubles too fast to be moved: say what you will they mind it not; or at most it abides not upon them. Let proper seasonable advice or comfort be tendered they refuse it, your counsel is good, but they have no heart to it now. Thus (Psalm 77:2), My soul, says he, refused to be comforted.

To want comfort in time of affliction, is an aggravation of our affliction; but to refuse it, when offered us, is not without sin. Time may come, when we would be glad to receive comfort, or hear a word of support, and shall be denied it.

O, it is a mercy to the afflicted to have a Barnabas with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand; and it will be the great sin, and folly of the afflicted to spill those excellent cordials prepared and offered to them, like water upon the ground, out of a perverse, or dead spirit, under trouble. Say not with them (Lamentations 3:18-19), My hope is perished from the Lord, remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. It is a great pity the wormwood and gall of affliction should so disgust a Christian, as that he should not at any time be able to relish the sweetness that is in Christ, and in the promises. And thus I have dispatched the first part of my design, in showing you wherein the sin of mourners does not lie, and in what it does.

Secondly, Having cleared this, and shown you wherein the sin and danger lies; my way is prepared to the second thing proposed: namely, to dissuade mourners from these sinful excesses of sorrows, and keep the golden bridle of moderation upon their passions in times of affliction. And O that my words may be as suc-

cessful upon those pensive souls that shall read them, as Abigail's were to David (1 Samuel 25:32), who when he perceived how proper and seasonable they were, said, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your advice.

I am sensible how hard a task it is I here undertake; to charm down, and allay mutinous, raging, and tumultuous passions; to give check to the torrent of passion is ordinarily but to provoke it, and make it rage and swell the more.

The work is the Lord's, and wholly depends upon his power and blessing. He that says to the sea, when the waves thereof roar, be still; can also quiet and compose the stormy and tumultuous sea that rages in the breasts of the afflicted, and casts up nothing but the froth of vain and useless complaints of our misery, or the dirt of sinful and wicked complaints of the dealings of the Lord with us.

The rod of affliction goes round and visits all sorts of persons without difference: it is upon the tabernacles of the just and of the unjust, the righteous and the wicked, both are mourning under the rod.

The godly are not so to be minded, as that the other be wholly neglected, they have as strong and tender, though not as regular affections to their relations, and must not be wholly suffered to sink under their unrelieved burdens.

Here therefore I must have respect to two sorts of persons, whom I find in tears upon the same account; I mean the loss of their dear relations, the regenerate, and the unregenerate, I am a debtor to both, and shall endeavor their support and assistance; for even the unregenerate call for our help and pity, and must not

be neglected and wholly slighted in their afflictions. We must pity them, that cannot pity themselves. The law of God commands us to help a beast, if fallen under its burden; how much more a man sinking under a load of sorrow?

I confess uses of comfort to the unregenerate are not, ordinarily, in use among us; and it may seem strange from where any thing of support should be drawn for them, that have no special interest in Christ, or the promises.

I confess also, I find myself under great disadvantages for this work, I cannot offer them those reviving cordials that are contained in Christ, and the covenant for God's afflicted people; but yet such is the goodness of God even to his enemies, that they are not left wholly without supports, or means to allay their sorrow.

If this therefore be your case, who reads these lines; afflicted and unsanctified, mourning bitterly for your dead friends, and more cause to mourn for your dead soul; Christless, and graceless, as well as childless or friendless: no comfort in hand, nor yet in hope, full of trouble, and no vent by prayer or faith to ease your heart.

Poor creature, your case is sad, but yet do not wholly sink, and suffer yourself to be swallowed up of grief, you have laid your dear one in the grave, yet throw not yourself headlong into the grave after him; that will not be the way to remedy your misery: but sit down a while and ponder these three things:

First, That of all persons in the world, you have most reason to be tender over your life and health, and careful to preserve it; for if your troubles destroy you, you are eternally lost, undone forever. Worldly sorrow, says the Apostle, works death. And if it works

your death, it works your damnation also; for Hell follows that pale horse (Revelation 6:8). If a believer dies, there is no danger of Hell to him, the second death has no power over him; but woe to you if it overtakes you in your sin; beware therefore what you do against your health and life. Do not put the candle of sorrow too near that thread by which you hang over the mouth of Hell.

O it is far better to be childless, or friendless on earth; than hopeless, and without remedy in hell.

Secondly, Own and admire the bounty and goodness of God manifested to you in this affliction; that when death came into your family to smite and carry off one, it had not fallen to your lot to be the person; your husband, wife, or child is taken, and you are left. Had your name been in the commission, you would now be past hope.

O the sparing mercy of God! The wonderful long-suffering of God towards you! Possibly that poor creature that is gone, never provoked God as you have done; your poor child, never abused mercies, neglected calls, treasured up the thousandth part of that guilt you have done: so that you might well imagine it should rather have cut you down, who had so provoked God, than your poor little one.

But oh the admirable patience of God! Oh the riches of long-suffering! You are only warned, not smitten by it: is there nothing in this worth your thankful acknowledgment? Is it not better to be in black for another on earth, than in the blackness of darkness forever? Is it not easier to go to the grave with your dead friend, and weep there; than to go to hell among the damned where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth?

Thirdly, This affliction for which you mourn, may be the greatest mercy to you that ever yet befell you in this world. God has now made your heart soft by trouble, showed you the vanity of this world; and what a poor trifle it is which you made your happiness. There is now a dark cloud spread over all your worldly comforts. Now, O now, if the Lord would but strike in with this affliction, and by it open your eyes to see your deplorable state, and take off your heart forever from the vain world which you now see has nothing in it; and cause you to choose Christ the only abiding good for your portion. If now your affliction may but bring your sin to remembrance, and your dead friend may but bring you to a sense of your dead soul, which is as cold to God and spiritual things, as his body is to you; and more loathsome in his eyes than that corpse is, or shortly will be to the eyes of men: then this day is certainly a day of the greatest mercy that ever yet you saw. O happy death, that shall prove life to your soul.

Indeed, this is sometimes the way of the Lord with men (Job 36:8-9), If they be bound in fetters, and held in cords of affliction, then he shows them their work and their transgression, that they have exceeded: he opens also their ear to discipline, and commands them that they return from iniquity.

O consider poor pensive creature, that which stole away your heart from God is now gone: that which ate up your time and thoughts, that there was no room for God, soul, or eternity in them, is gone: all the vain expectations you raised up to yourself, from that poor creature which now lies in the dust, are in one day perished. O what an advantage you have now for heaven, beyond what ever you yet had! If God will but bless this rod, you will have cause to keep many a thanksgiving day for this day.

I pray let these three things be pondered by you: I can bestow no more comforts upon you, your condition bars the best comforts from you; they belong to the people of God, and you have yet nothing to do with them.

I shall therefore turn from you to them, and present some choicer comforts to them to whom they properly belong, which may be of great use to you in reading; if it be but to convince you of the blessed privilege and state of the people of God in the greatest plunges of troubles in this world; and what advantages their interest in Christ gives them for peace and settlement beyond that state you are in.

And here I do with much more freedom and hope of success apply myself to the work of counseling and comforting the afflicted. You are the fearers of the Lord, and tremble at his word; the least sin is more formidable to you than the greatest affliction. Doubtless you would rather choose to bury all your children than provoke and grieve your heavenly Father. Your relations are dear, but Christ is dearer to you by far.

Well then let me persuade you to retire a while into your closets, redeem a little time from your unprofitable sorrows, ease and empty your hearts before the Lord, and beg his blessing upon the following quieting and heart-composing considerations that follow, some of which are more general and common, some more particular and special, but all of them such, as through the blessing of God may be very useful at this time to your souls.

Consideration 1. Consider in this day of sorrow, who is the framer and author of this rod by which you now smart, is it not the Lord? And if the Lord has done it, it becomes you meekly to sub-

mit. Psalm 46:10: Be still and know that I am God.

Man and man stand upon even ground, if your fellow creature does any thing that displeases you, you may not only inquire who did it, but why he did it? You may demand his grounds and reasons for what he has done; but you may not do so here. It is expected that this one thing, The Lord has done it, should without any further disputes or contests silence and quiet you, whatever it be that he has done (Job 33:13), Why do you strive against him? for he gives not an account of any of his matters. The supreme being must needs be an unaccountable and uncontrollable being.

It is a shame for a child, to strive with his Father; a shame for a servant to contend with his Master: but for a creature to quarrel and strive with the God that made him, O how shameful is it? Surely it is highly reasonable that you be subject to that will from where you proceeded, and that he who formed you and yours, should dispose of both as seems good to him. It is said (2 Samuel 3:36), That whatever the king did, pleased all the people: and shall anything the Lord does displease you? He can do no wrong. If we pluck a rose in the bud as we walk in our gardens, who shall blame us for it, it is our own, and we may crop it off when we please; is not this the case? Your sweet bud which was cropped before it was fully blown, was cropped off by him that owned it, indeed by him that formed it. If his dominion be absolute, sure his disposal should be acceptable.

It was so to good Eli (1 Samuel 3:18), It is the Lord, let him do what seems good to him. And it was so to David (Psalm 39:9), I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because you did it. O let it be forever remembered, that he whose name alone is Jehovah, is the most high over all the earth (Psalm 83:18).

The glorious sovereignty of God is illustriously displayed in two things, his decrees, and his providences. With respect to the first he says (Romans 9:15), I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. Here is no ground of disputing with him; for so it is said, verse 20, Who are you O man, that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why have you made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay?

And as to his providences, wherein his sovereignty is also manifested. It is said (Zechariah 2:13), Be silent O all flesh before the Lord, for he is raised up out of his habitation. It is spoken of his providential working in the changes of kingdoms, and desolations that attend them.

Now seeing the case stands thus, that the Lord has done it, it is his pleasure to have it so; and if it had not been his will, it could never have been as it is. He that gave you, rather lent you your relation, has taken him. O how quiet should this consideration leave you! If your landlord who has many years suffered you to dwell in his house, does at last warn you out of it, though he tells you not why; you will not contend with him, or say he has done you wrong: much less if he tells you, it will be more for his profit and accommodation to take it into his own hand, than let it to you any longer.

Doubtless reason will tell you, you ought quietly to pack up and quit it. It is your great Landlord from whom you hold, at his pleasure, your own, and your relations' lives, that has now warned you out from one of them, it being more for his glory, it may be, to take it in hand by death; and must you dispute the case with him?

Come Christian, this no way becomes you, but rather, The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken, blessed be the name of the Lord. Look off from a dead creature, lift up your eyes to the sovereign, wise, and holy pleasure that ordered this affliction: consider who he is, and what you are; indeed, pursue this consideration till you can say, I am filled with the will of God.

Consideration 2. Ponder well the quality of the comfort you are deprived of, and remember, that when you had it, it stood but in the rank and order of common and inferior comforts.

Children and all other relations are but common blessings, which God indifferently bestows upon his friends and enemies, and by the having or losing of them, no man knows either love or hatred. It is said of the wicked (Psalm 17:14), that they are full of children; indeed, and of children that do survive them too; for, they leave their substance to their babes. Full of sin, yet full of children, and these children live to inherit their parents' sins and estates together.

It is the mistaking of the quality and nature of our enjoyments, that so plunges us into trouble when we lose them. We think there is so necessary a connection between these creatures and our happiness, that we are utterly undone when they fail us.

But this is our mistake, there is no such necessary connection or dependence, we may be happy without these things. It is not father, mother, wife, or child, in which our chief good and felicity lies, we have higher, better, and more enduring things than these, all these may perish, and yet our soul secure and safe, indeed and our comfort in the way, as well as end; may be safe enough though these be gone. God has better things to comfort his people with

than these, and worse rods to afflict you with than the removal of these. Had God let your children live and flourish, and given you ease and rest in your tabernacle; but in the meantime inflicted spiritual judgments upon your souls, how much more sad had your case been?

But as long as your best mercies are all safe, the things that have salvation in them remain, and only the things that have vanity in them are removed: you are not prejudiced, or much hindered as to the attainment of your last end by the loss of these things.

Alas, it was not Christ's intent to purchase for you a sensual content in the enjoyment of these earthly comforts, but to redeem you from all iniquity; purge your corruptions, sanctify your natures, wean your hearts from this vain world; and so to dispose and order your present condition, that finding no rest and content here, you might the more ardently pant and sigh after the rest which remains for the people of God. And are you not in as probable a way to attain this end now, as you were before? Do you think you are not as likely by these methods of providence to be weaned from the world, as by more pleasant and prosperous ones? Every wise man reckons that station and condition to be best for him, which most promotes and secures his last end and great design.

Well then, reckon you are as well without these things as with them; indeed, and better too, if they were but clogs and snares upon your affections, you have really lost nothing, if the things wherein your eternal happiness consists be yet safe. Many of God's dearest children have been denied such comforts as these, and many have been deprived of them, and yet never the farther from Christ and heaven for that.

Consideration 3. Always remember that however soon and unexpected soever your parting with your relations was, yet your lease was expired before you lost them, and you enjoyed them every moment of the time that God intended them for you.

Before this relation whose loss you lament, was born, the time of your enjoyment and separation was unalterably fixed and limited in heaven, by the God of the spirits of all flesh; and although it was a secret to you, while your friend was with you: yet now it is a plain and evident thing, that this was the time of separation before appointed; and that the life of your friend could by no means be prolonged or abbreviated, but must keep you company just so far, and then part with you.

This position lacks not full and clear Scripture authority for its foundation, how pregnant and full is that text (Job 14:5-6), Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with you: you have appointed him his bounds which he cannot pass.

The time of our life as well as the place of our habitation was prefixed before we were born.

It will greatly conduce to your settlement and peace to be well established in this truth: that the appointed time was fully come, when you and your dear relation parted; for it will prevent and save a great deal of trouble which comes from our after reflections.

O if this had been done, or that omitted; had it not been for such miscarriages and oversights; my dear husband, wife, or child, had been alive at this day? No, no, the Lord's time was fully come, and all things concurred and fell in together to bring about the pleasure of his will; let that satisfy you; had the ablest physicians in the world been there, or had they that were there, prescribed

another course, as it is now, so it would have been, when they had done all. Only it must be cautioned, that the decree of God no way excuses any voluntary sinful neglects or miscarriages. God overrules these things to serve his own ends, but no way approves them: but it greatly relieves against all our involuntary and unavoidable oversights and mistakes about the use of means, or the timing of them; for it could not be otherwise than now it is.

Objection: But many things are alleged against this position, and that with much seeming countenance from such Scriptures as these: Psalm 55:23, Bloodthirsty men shall not live out half their days. Ecclesiastes 7:17, Why should you die before your time? Psalm 102:24, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days. Isaiah 38:10, I am deprived of the residue of my years. And Proverbs 10:27, The fear of the Lord prolongs days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. It is demanded what tolerable sense we can give these Scriptures while we assert an unalterable fixation of the term of death.

Solution: The sense of all these Scriptures will be cleared up to full satisfaction by distinguishing death and the terms of it.

First we must distinguish death into, natural and violent.

The wicked and bloodthirsty man shall not live out half his days: that is, half so long as he might live according to the course of nature, or the vigor and soundness of his natural constitution; for his wickedness either drowns nature in an excess of riot and luxury, or exposes him to the hand of justice, which cuts him off for his wickedness before he has accomplished half his days.

Again we must distinguish of the term or limit set for death, which is either, general or special.

The general limit is now seventy or eighty years (Psalm 90:10), The days of our years are threescore years and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow. To this short limit the life of man is generally reduced since the flood; and though there be some few exceptions, yet the general rule is not thereby destroyed.

The special limit is that proportion of time which God by his own counsel and will has allotted to every individual person; and it is only known to us by the event. This we affirm to be a fixed and immovable term, with it all things shall fall in, and serve the will of God in our dissolution at that time. But because the general limit is known, and this special limit is a secret hid in God's own breast; therefore man reckons by the former account, and may be said when he dies at thirty or forty years old to be cut off in the midst of his days; for it is so, reckoning by the general account: though he be not cut off till the end of his days, reckoning by his special limit.

Thus he that is wicked dies before his time; that is, the time he might attain to in an ordinary way: but not before the time God had appointed. And so in all the other objected Scripture.

It is not proper at all in a subject of this nature to digress into a controversy. Alas, the poor mourner, overwhelmed with grief has no pleasure in that; it is not proper for him at this time; and therefore I shall for present waive the controversy, and wind up this consideration with a humble and serious motion to the afflicted; that they will wisely consider the matter, the Lord's time was come. Your relations lived with you every moment that God intended them for you, before you had them.

O Parents! mind this I beseech you; the time of your child's continuance in the womb, was fixed to a minute by the Lord; and when the full time of that had come, were you not willing it should be delivered from there into the world? The tender mother would not have it abide one minute longer in the womb however well she loved it: and is there not the same reason we should be willing when God's appointed time is come, to have it delivered by death out of this state, which in respect of the life of heaven is but as the life of a child in the womb, to its life in the open world.

And let none say that the death of children is a premature death. God has ways to ripen them for heaven, whom he intends to gather there early, which we know not: in respect of fitness they die in a full age, though they be cut off in the bud of their time.

He that appointed the seasons of the year, appointed the seasons of our comfort in relations; and as those seasons cannot be altered, no more can these. All the course of providence is guided by an unalterable decree; what falls out casually to our apprehension, yet falls out necessarily in respect of God's appointment.

O therefore be quieted in it, this must needs be as it is.

Consideration 4. Has God smitten your darling, and taken away the delight of your eyes with his stroke? Bear this stroke with patience and quiet submission; for how do you know but your trouble might have been greater from the life, than it is now from the death of your children?

Sad experience made a holy man once to say, It is better to weep for ten dead children, than for one living child: a living child may prove a continual dropping, indeed, a continual dying to the parent's heart. What a sad word was that of David to Abishai (2

Samuel 16:11), Behold, says he, my Son which came out of my bowels seeks my life. I remember Seneca in his consolatory epistle to his friend Marullus, brings in his friend thus aggravating the death of his child:

O says Marullus, Had my child lived with me, to how great modesty, gravity, and prudence, might my discipline have formed and molded him? But, says Seneca, which is more to be feared, he might have been as others mostly are; for look, says he, what children come even out of the worthiest families; such who exercise both their own and others' lusts; in all whose life there is not a day without the mark of some notorious wickedness upon it.

I know your tender love to your children will scarce admit such suspicions of them; they are for present sweet, lovely, innocent companions; and you doubt not but by your care of their education, and prayer for them, they might have been the joy of your hearts.

Indeed, doubtless Esau, when he was little and in his tender age, promised as much comfort to his parents as Jacob did; and I question not but Isaac and Rebecca, a gracious pair, spent as many prayers, and bestowed as many holy counsels upon him as they did upon his brother. But when the child grew up to riper years, then he became a sharp affliction to his parents; for it is said in Genesis 26:34, that when Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beerli the Hittite, which was a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebecca. The word in the original, comes from a root that signifies to embitter: this child embittered the minds of his parents by his rebellion against them, and despising their counsels.

And I cannot doubt but Abraham disciplined his family as strictly as any of you, never man received a higher commendation from God upon that account (Genesis 18:19), I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord. Nor can I think but he bestowed as many and as frequent prayers for his children; and particularly for his Ishmael, as any of you. We find one, and that a very pathetic one recorded (Genesis 17:18), O that Ishmael might live before you: and yet you know how he proved, a son that yielded him no more comfort, than Esau did to Jacob and Rebecca.

O how much more common is it for parents to see the vices and evils of their children, than their virtues and graces? And where one parent lives to rejoice in beholding the grace of God shining forth in the life of his child; there are twenty, it may be a hundred, that live to behold, to their vexation and grief, the workings of corruption in them.

It is a note of Plutarch, in his *Morals*, Niocles, says he, lived not to see the noble victory obtained by Themistocles his Son. Nor Miltiades to see the battle his Son Cimon won in the field. Nor Xanthippus to hear his Son Pericles preach, and make orations. Ariston never heard his Son Plato's lectures and disputations. But men, says he, commonly live to see their children fall a gaming, reveling, drinking, and whoring; multitudes live to see such things to their sorrow. And if you be a gracious soul, O what a cut would this be to your very heart! to see those, as David spoke of his Absalom, that came out of your bowels to be sinning against God; that God whom you love, and whose honor is dearer to you than your very life!

But admit, they should prove civil and hopeful children, yet might you not live to see more misery come upon them, than you could endure to see? O think what a sad and doleful sight was that to Zedekiah (Jeremiah 52:10), the King of Babylon brought his children and slew them before his eyes. Horrid spectacle! And that leads to the

Consideration 5. How do you know but by this stroke which you so lament, God has taken them away from the evil to come?

It is God's usual way when some extraordinary calamities are coming upon the world, to hide some of his weak and tender ones out of the way by death (Isaiah 57:1-2). He leaves some, and removes others, but takes care for the security of all. He provided a grave for Methuselah before the flood. The grave is a hiding place to some, and God sees it better for them to be under ground, than above ground in such evil days.

Just as a careful and tender father, who has a Son abroad at school, hearing the plague is broken out in, or near the place, sends his horse presently to fetch home his Son before the danger and difficulty be greater. Death is our Father's pale horse, which he sends to fetch home his tender children, and carry them out of harm's way.

Surely, when national calamities are drawing on, it is far better for our friends to be in the grave in peace, than exposed to the miseries and distresses that are here, which is the meaning of Jeremiah 22:10, Weep not for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep for him that goes away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

And is there not a dreadful sound of troubles now in our ears? Do not the clouds gather blackness? Surely all things round about us seem to be preparing and disposing themselves for affliction. The days may be near in which you shall say, Blessed is the womb that never bore, and the breasts that never gave suck.

It was in the day wherein the faith and patience of the saints were exercised, that John heard a voice from heaven saying to him, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth.

Your friend by an act of favor is disbanded by death, while you yourself are left to endure a great fight of affliction. And now if troubles come, your cares and fears will be so much the less, and your own death so much the easier to you; when so much of you is in heaven already. In this case, the Lord by a merciful dispensation is providing both for their safety, and your own easier passage to them.

In removing your friends beforehand, he seems to say to you as he did to Peter (John 13:7), What I do you know not now, but hereafter you shall know it. The eye of providence has a prospect far beyond yours; it would be in probability a harder task for you to leave them behind, than to follow them.

A tree that is deeply rooted in the earth, requires many strokes to fell it, but when its roots are loosened beforehand, then an easy stroke lays it down upon the earth.

Consideration 6. A parting time must needs come, and why is not this as good as another? You knew beforehand, your child or friend was mortal, and that the thread that linked you together, must be cut. If anyone, says Basil, had asked you, when your child was born, What is that which is born? What would you have an-

swered? Would you not have said it is a man? and if a man, then a mortal vanishing thing. And why then are you surprised, with wonder to see a dying thing dead?

He, says Seneca, who complains that one is dead, complains that he was a man. All men are under the same condition, to whose share it falls to be born, to him it remains to die.

We are indeed distinguished by intervals, but equalized in the issue, it is appointed to all men once to die (Hebrews 9:27). There is a statute law of heaven in the case.

Possibly you think this is the worst time for parting that could be; had you enjoyed it longer, you could have parted easier, but how are you deceived in that? The longer you had enjoyed it, the more reluctant still you would have been to leave it: the deeper it would have rooted itself in your affection.

Had God given you such a privilege as was once granted to the English Parliament; that the union between you and your friend should not be dissolved, till you yourself were willing it should be dissolved; when do you think would you have been willing it should be dissolved?

It is well for us and ours, that our times are in God's hand, not in our own. And however immature soever it seemed to be when it was cut down; yet it came to the grave in a full age, as a shock of corn in its season (Job 5:26). They that are in Christ, and in the covenant, never die unseasonably whenever they die. One says upon the text, They die in a good old age; indeed, though they die in the spring and flower of youth, they die in a good old age, that is, they are ripe for death whenever they die. Whenever the godly die, it is harvest time with them: though in a natural capacity they

be cut down while they are green, and cropped, in the bud or blossom; yet in their spiritual capacity they never die before they are ripe; God can ripen them speedily, he can let out such warm rays and beams of his spirit upon them, as shall soon mature the seeds of grace into a preparedness for glory.

It was doubtless the most fit and seasonable time for them that ever they could die in; and as it is a fit time for them, so for you also. Had they lived longer, they might either have engaged you more, and so your parting would have been harder; or else have puzzled and stumbled you more by discovering natural corruption: and then what a stinging aggravation of your sorrow would that have been?

Surely the Lord of time, is the best judge of time; and in nothing do we more discover our folly, and rashness, than in presuming to fix the times either of our comforts or troubles. As to our comforts, we never think they can come too soon, we would have them presently, whether the season be fit or not, as Numbers 12:13, Heal her now Lord. O let it be done speedily; we are in great haste for our comforts. And as for our afflictions, we never think they come late enough; not at this time Lord, rather at any other time than now.

But it is good to leave the timing both of the one and other to him, whose works are all beautiful in their seasons, and never does anything in an improper time.

Consideration 7. Call to mind in this day of trouble, the covenant you have made with God, and what you solemnly promised him in the day you took him for your God.

It will be very seasonable and useful for you Christian at this time to reflect upon those transactions, and the frame of your heart in those days, when a heavier load of sorrow pressed your heart, than you now feel.

In those your spiritual distresses, when the burden of sin lay heavy, the curse of the law, the fear of hell, the dread of death and eternity beset you on every side; and shut you up to Christ, the only door of hope. Ah what good news would you then have accounted it, to escape that danger with the loss of all earthly comforts!

Was not this your cry in those days, Lord give me Christ, and deny me whatever else you please? Pardon my sin, save my soul; and in order to both, unite me with Christ, and I will never repine or open my mouth. Do what you will with me; let me be friendless, let me be childless, let me be poor, let me be anything rather than a Christless, graceless, hopeless soul.

And when the Lord listened to your cry, and showed you mercy, when he drew you off from the world into your closet, and there treated with you in secret, when he was working up your heart to the terms of his covenant, and made you willing to accept Christ upon his own terms. O then how heartily did you submit to his yoke as most reasonable and easy, as at that time it seemed to you.

Call to mind these days, the secret places where Christ and you made the bargain. Have not these words, or words to this sense, been whispered by you into his ear with a dropping eye, and melting heart?

Lord Jesus, here am I a poor guilty sinner, deeply laden with sin, fear and trouble upon one hand, and there is a just God, a severe law, and everlasting burnings on the other hand; but blessed be God, O blessed be God for Jesus the Mediator, who interposes between me and it. You are the only door of hope at which I can escape, your blood the only means of my pardon and salvation. You have said, Come to me all you that labor and are heavy laden. You have promised that he that comes to you shall in no wise be cast out.

Blessed Jesus, your poor creature comes to you upon these encouragements: I come, O but it is with many staggerings, with many doubts and fears of the issue, yet I am willing to come, and make a covenant with you this day.

I take you this day to be my Lord, and submit heartily to all your disposals: do what you will with me or with mine: let me be rich or poor, anything or nothing in this world, I am willing to be as you would have me. And I do likewise give myself to you this day to be yours, all I am, all I have shall be yours; yours to serve you, and yours to be disposed at your pleasure. You shall henceforth be my highest Lord, my chief good, my last end.

Now Christian, make good to Christ what you so solemnly promised him. He, I say, He has disposed of this your dear relation as pleased him; and is thereby trying your uprightness in the covenant which you made with him. Now where is the satisfaction and content you promised to take in all his disposals? Where is that covenanted submission to his will? Did you except this affliction that is come upon you?

Did you tell him, Lord I will be content that you take anything I have, except only this husband, this wife, or this dear child? I reserve this out of the bargain. I shall never endure that you should take this comfort. If so, you proved yourself a hypocrite. If you were sincere in your covenant, as Christ had no reserves on his part, so you had none on yours.

It was all without any exception that you resigned to him, and now will you go back from your word, as one who had over-promised himself and regrets the bargain? Or at least as one who has forgotten these solemn transactions in the days of your distress. In what way has Christ failed in one point that he promised you? Charge him if you can with the least unfaithfulness. He has been faithful to the last point on his part; be faithful on yours. This day it is put to the proof. Remember what you promised him.

Consideration 8. But if your covenant with God will not quiet you, yet God's covenant with you might be presumed to do it.

Is your family, which was lately hopeful and flourishing, a peaceful household, now broken up and scattered? Is your posterity, from which you raised great expectations of comfort in old age, cut off? So that you are now like to have neither a name nor a memorial left in the earth.

Do you sit alone and mourn to think where your hopes and comforts have now come?

Do you read over these words of Job 29:1-5 and comment upon them with many tears: O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me, when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in

the days of my youth, when the secret of God was upon my household, when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were about me.

Yet let the covenant God has made with you comfort you in this your desolate condition.

You know what domestic troubles holy David met with in sad succession, not only from the death of children, but, what was much worse, from the wicked lives of his children. There was incest, murder, and rebellion in his family — a far harder trial than death in their infancy could have been. And yet see how sweetly he relieves himself from the covenant of grace in 2 Samuel 23:5: Although my house be not so with God, yet he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and my desire, although he make it not to grow.

I know this place principally refers to Christ, who was to spring out of David's family according to God's covenant made with him in that behalf. And yet I do not doubt that it has another, though less principal, application to his own family, over all the afflictions and troubles of which the covenant of God with him abundantly comforted him.

And as it comforted him, although his house did not increase and those who were left were not such as he desired, so it may abundantly comfort you also, whatever troubles or deaths be upon your families, who have an interest in the covenant.

First, if you are God's covenant people, though he may afflict, yet he will never forget you. Psalm 111:5: He is ever mindful of his covenant. You are as much on his heart in your deepest afflictions as in the greatest flourishing of your prosperity.

You find it hard to forget your child, though it is now turned to corruption and rottenness. O how does your mind run upon it night and day! Your thoughts do not tire of that object. Why, surely it is much easier for you to forget your dear child while living and most endearing, much more when dead and undesirable, than it is for your God to forget you. Isaiah 49:15: Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, they may forget, yet will I not forget you.

Can a woman, the more affectionate sex, forget her nursing child — her own child — while it hangs on the breast, and together with the milk from the breast draws love from its mother's heart? Can such a thing be in nature? Possibly it may, for creature love is fickle and variable. But I will not forget you — it is an everlasting covenant.

Second, as he will never forget you in your troubles, so he will order all your troubles for your good. It is a well-ordered covenant, or a covenant orderly disposed, so that everything shall work together for your good.

The covenant so orders all your trials, ranks, and disposes your various troubles so that they shall in their proper order sweetly cooperate and join their united influences to make you happy.

Possibly you cannot see how the present affliction should be for your good. You are ready to say with Jacob in Genesis 42:36: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and you will take Benjamin away; all these things are against me. But could you once see how sweetly and orderly all these afflictions work under the blessing

and influence of the covenant toward your eternal good, you would not only be quiet but thankful for that which now so much afflicts and troubles you.

Third, this covenant is not only well ordered in all things but sure. The mercies contained in it are called the sure mercies of David in Isaiah 55:3. Now how sweet and seasonable a support does this give to God's afflicted under the rod! You lately made yourselves sure of that creature comfort which has forsaken you. Perhaps you said of your child who is now gone, as Lamech said of his son Noah in Genesis 5:29: This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands — meaning that his son should not only comfort them by assisting them in the work of their hands, but by enjoying the fruit of their toil and pains for him.

Probably you have had such thoughts and raised great expectations of comfort in your old age from it. But now you see you built upon the sand. And where would you be now, if you had not a firmer foundation to build upon? But blessed be God, the covenant mercies are more sure and solid. God, Christ, and heaven never fade as these things do.

The sweetest creature enjoyments you ever had or have in this world cannot say to you, as your God does: I will never leave you nor forsake you. You must part with your dear husbands, however well you love them. You must bid farewell to the wife of your bosom, however closely your affections are linked and your heart delighted in her. Your children and you must be separated, though they are to you as your own soul.

But though these vanish away, blessed be God there is something that abides. Though all flesh is as grass, and the goodliness of it as the flower of the grass, though the grass withers and the flower falls because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it — yet the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:6-8). There is so much supporting comfort in this one consideration, that could your faith but fix here to realize and apply it, I might lay down my pen and say the work is done, there needs no more.

Consideration 9. The hope of the resurrection should powerfully restrain all excess of sorrow in those who profess it.

Let them only mourn without measure who mourn without hope. The farmer does not mourn when he casts his seed-corn into the earth, because he sows in hope and commits it to the ground with an expectation to receive it again with increase. And just so the apostle states it in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14: But I would not have you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so those also who sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

Do not look upon the dead as a lost generation. Do not think that death has annihilated and utterly destroyed them. No, they are not dead but only asleep, and if they sleep, they shall awake again. You do not cry out and lament for your children and friends when you find them asleep in their beds. Death is but a longer sleep, out of which they shall as surely awake as ever they did in the morning in this world.

I have often wondered at that golden sentence in Seneca: My thoughts of the dead, said he, are not as others are; I have fair and pleasant apprehensions of them; for I enjoyed them as one who reckoned I must part with them, and I part with them as one who expects to have them again.

He speaks no doubt of that enjoyment of them which his pleasant contemplations of their virtuous actions could give him, for he was wholly unacquainted with the comfortable and heart-supporting doctrine of the resurrection. Had he known the advantages that result from it, at what a rate might we think he would have spoken of the dead and of their state? But this you profess to believe, and yet sink at a strange rate. Do not let paganism outdo Christianity. Do not let pagans challenge the greatest believers to surpass them in a quiet and cheerful bearing under afflictions.

I urge you, reader, if your deceased friend has left you any solid ground of hope that he died having an interest in Christ and the covenant, that you distinctly ponder these admirable supports which the doctrine of the resurrection affords.

First, that the same body which was so pleasant a sight to you shall be restored again — yes, numerically the same, not just the same in kind, so that it shall not only be what he was but who he was. These eyes shall see him, and not another (Job 19:27). The very same body you laid in the grave shall be restored. You shall find your own husband, wife, child, or friend again — the very same, and not another.

Second, and further, this is a support: as you shall see the same person who was so dear to you, so you shall know them to be the same who were once endeared to you on earth in so near a bond of

relation.

Indeed, you shall know them no more in any earthly relation — death dissolved that bond. But you shall know them to have been your dear relations in this world, and be able to single them out among that great multitude and say: This was my father, mother, husband, wife, or child. This was the person for whom I wept and made supplication, who was an instrument of good to me, or to whose salvation God then made me instrumental.

For we may allow in that state all the knowledge which is cumulative and perfective — whatever may enlarge and heighten our felicity and satisfaction. Luther, being asked by his friends at supper the evening before he died what would happen at the resurrection, replied: What happened to Adam? He never saw Eve, but was in a deep sleep when God formed her. Yet when he awoke and saw her, he asked not who she was or where she came from, but said she was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. Now how did he know that? Being full of the Holy Spirit and endowed with the knowledge of God, he spoke thus. After the same manner we also shall in the other life be renewed by Christ and shall know our parents, our wives and children.

And this was among the things with which Augustine comforted the lady Italica after the death of her dear husband, telling her that she should know him in the world to come among the glorified saints. Indeed, a greater than either of these — Paul — comforted himself that the Thessalonians whom he had converted to Christ should be his joy and crown of rejoicing in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ at his coming (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20), which implies his distinct knowledge of them in that day, which would be many hundred years after death had separated them

from each other. Whether this knowledge shall be by the glorified eyes discerning some mark of individuation remaining upon the glorified bodies of our relations, or whether it shall be by immediate revelation as Adam knew his wife, or as Peter, James, and John knew Moses and Elijah in the Mount — as it is difficult to determine, so it is needless to trouble ourselves about it.

It is the concurrent judgment of sound theologians, and it has support from Scripture and reason, that such a knowledge of them shall be in heaven. And then the sadness of this parting will be abundantly repaid by the joy of that meeting.

Third, that at your next meeting, they shall be unspeakably more desirable, sweet, and excellent than ever they were in this world. They had a desirableness here, but they were not altogether lovely and in every respect desirable. They had their infirmities, both natural and moral. But all these are removed in heaven and forever done away. No natural infirmities hang about glorified bodies, nor sinful ones upon perfected spirits of the just. Oh what lovely creatures will they appear to you then, when that which is sown in dishonor shall be raised in honor (1 Corinthians 15)!

Fourth, you shall have an everlasting enjoyment of them in heaven, never to part again. The children of the resurrection can die no more (Luke 20:36). You shall kiss their pale lips and cold cheeks no more. You shall never fear another parting, but be together with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17). And this the apostle thought an effectual comfort when he urged the Thessalonians to comfort one another with these words.

Consideration 10. The present felicity into which all who die in Christ are immediately admitted should abundantly comfort Christians over the death of those who either carried a living hope out of the world or have left good grounds of such a hope behind them.

Some carried a living hope to heaven with them, who could give evidence of their interest in Christ and the covenant to themselves and friends. Even if they had died in silence, their conversations would have spoken for them, and the course of their lives would leave no ground for doubting regarding their death. Others, dying in infancy or youth, though they carried no such active hope with them, have yet left good grounds of hope behind them.

Parents, ponder these grounds. You have prayed for them; you have many times wrestled with the Lord on their behalf. You have taken hold of God's covenant for them as well as for yourselves, and dedicated them to the Lord. And they have not by any actions of theirs destroyed those grounds of your hope, so that you may with much probability conclude they are with God.

Why, if the case be so, what abundant reason you have to be quiet and well satisfied with what God has done. Can they be better than where they are? Did you have better provisions and entertainments for them here than their heavenly Father has above?

There is no Christian parent in the world who would not rejoice to see his child surpass and get ahead of him in grace, that he may be more eminent in parts and service than ever he was. And what reason can be given why we should not as much rejoice to see our children get ahead of us in glory as in grace? They have gotten to heaven a few years before you, and is that a cause for mourning?

Would not your child, if he were not ignorant of your state, say as Christ said to his friends just before his death when he saw them cast down at the thought of parting: If you loved me, you would rejoice because I go to the Father (John 14:28)? Do you value your own sensible comfort from my bodily presence above my glory and advancement in heaven? Is this love to me, or is it not rather self-love?

So would your departed friend say to you: you have professed much love all along to me, my happiness seemed very dear to you. How is it then that you mourn so exceedingly? This is rather the effect of a fond and fleshly love than of rational and spiritual love. If you loved me with a pure spiritual love, you would rejoice that I am gone to my Father. It is infinitely better for me to be here than with you on earth, under sin and sorrow. Weep not for me, but for yourselves.

Though you want your friend's company, he does not want yours. Your care was to provide for this child, but Jesus Christ has provided infinitely better for it than you could. You intended an estate, but he a kingdom. You thought of some match for your child, but Christ has forbidden all others and married your child to himself. Can you imagine a higher honor for the fruit of your bodies?

A king from heaven has sent for your friend — do you grudge at the journey? Think, and think again, what an honor it is to you that Christ has taken them out of your bosom and laid them in his own, stripped them of the garments you provided and clothed them in white robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. Let not your hearts be troubled; rather rejoice exceedingly that God made you instruments to replenish heaven and bring forth an heir for the kingdom of God.

Your child is now glorifying God in a higher way than you can. And though you have lost its bodily presence for a time, I hope you do not reckon as your loss that which turns to God's greater glory.

When Jacob heard that his Joseph was lord of Egypt, he wished himself with Joseph rather than his Joseph with him, in his wants and straits. So should it be with you. You are yet rolling and tossing upon a tempestuous sea, but your friend has gone into the quiet harbor. Desire rather to be there than that he should be at sea again with you.

Consideration 11. Consider how vain a thing all your trouble and self-vexation is; it in no way betters your case or eases your burden.

As a bull by wrestling and straining in the furrow may make his yoke more heavy, gall his neck, and spend his strength sooner, but in no way helps himself — so it stands with you, if you are as a bull unaccustomed to the yoke. What Christ says of anxious care we may say of grieving: Which of you by worrying can add one inch to his height (Matthew 6:27)?

Cares may break our sleep, yes, break our hearts, but they cannot add to our stature either in a natural or a civil sense. So your sorrowing may sooner break your heart than ease the yoke God has laid on you.

What is all this but the fluttering of a bird in the net, which instead of freeing itself only entangles it further? It was therefore a wise resolve of David in this very case, when the will of God was signified in the death of his child: But now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me (2 Samuel 12:23).

Can I bring him back again? No, I can no more alter the purpose and work of God than I can change the seasons of the year, or alter the course of sun, moon, and stars, or disturb the order of day and night, which are all unalterably established by a firm constitution and ordinance of heaven.

As these seasons cannot be changed by man, so neither can this course and way of his providences be changed. Job 23:13: He is of one mind, and who can turn him? And what his soul desires, that he does. Indeed, while his pleasure and purpose are unknown to us, there is room for fasting and prayer to prevent the thing we fear. But when the purpose of God is manifested in the outcome, and the stroke is given, then it is the vainest thing in the world to fret and vex ourselves, as David's servants thought he would do as soon as he heard the child was dead. But he was wiser than that. His tears and cries to God before had the nature and use of means to prevent the affliction; but when it had come and could not be prevented, they were of no use. Why should I fast? To what end and purpose will it be now?

Cast not away your strength and spirits to no advantage. Reserve them for future exercises and trials. A time may come when you will need all the strength you have, and much more, to support greater burdens than this.

Consideration 12. The Lord is able to restore all your lost comforts in relations double to you, if you meekly submit to him and patiently wait upon him under the rod.

When Esau had lost his blessing, he said: Has my father but one blessing? (Genesis 27:38). But your Father has more blessings for you than one. His name is the Father of mercies (2 Corinthians

1:3). He can beget and create as many mercies for you as he pleases; relations and the comforts of them are at his command.

It is but a few months or years since these comforts whose loss you now lament were not yet in being; nor did you know from where they should arise, yet the Lord gave the word and commanded them for you. And if he pleases he can make the death of these but like a scythe to the meadow that is mown down, or a razor to the head that is shaved bare — which though it lays you under the present trouble and appearance of barrenness, yet makes way for a double increase, a second spring with advantage.

So it was with the captive church in respect of her spiritual children in the day of her captivity and reproach. The Lord made up all with advantage to her, even to her own astonishment. Isaiah 49:20: The children which you shall have after you have lost the other shall say again in your ears, the place is too small for me, give place to me that I may dwell.

Thus may he deal with you as to your natural children and relations. So what the man of God said to Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 25:9 may be applied here: Amaziah said, But what shall we do for the hundred talents? And the man of God answered, The Lord is able to give you much more than this.

Do not say, What shall I do for friends and relations? Death has robbed me of all comfort in them. The Lord is able to give you much more. But then, as ever you expect to see your future blessings multiplied, look to it and be careful that you neither dishonor God nor grieve him by your unsubmitive and impatient bearing under the present rod.

God took away all Job's children, and that at one stroke — a stroke immediate and extraordinary — when they were grown up and some of them settled in distinct families, while they were endearing each other by mutual expressions of affection. This must be acknowledged to be an extraordinary trial. Yet he meekly receives and patiently bears it from the hand of the Lord.

You have heard of the patience of Job (James 5:11), and seen the end the Lord brought about. Not only the gracious intention of the Lord in all his afflictions, but the happy outcome the Lord gave to all his afflictions, of which you have the account in Job 42:10: The Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before. The number of his children was not doubled as his other comforts were, but though the Lord only restored the same number he had taken away, the comfort he had in these latter children was likely double what he had in the former. Nothing is lost by waiting patiently and submitting willingly to the Lord's disposal.

It is as easy for the Lord to revive as to remove your comforts in relations. There is a sweet expression to this purpose in Psalm 18:28: For you, Lord, will light my candle; the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.

Every comfortable enjoyment — whether in relations, estates, health, or friends — is a candle lighted by providence for our comfort in this world. They are but candles, which will not always last, and those that last longest will be consumed and spent at last. Often it happens with them as with candles: they are blown out before they are half consumed, yes, almost as soon as lit, and then we are in darkness for the present.

It is a dark hour with us when these comforts are put out. But David's faith did, and ours may, comfort us with this: that he who blew out one candle can light up another. You, Lord, shall light my candle; the Lord my God shall enlighten my darkness — that is, the Lord will renew my comforts, alter the present sad state I am in, and chase away the trouble and darkness which now lies upon me. Only beware of offending him at whose word your lights and comforts come and go. Michal displeased the Lord, and therefore had no child to the day of her death (2 Samuel 6:23).

Hannah waited humbly upon the Lord for the blessing of children, and the Lord remembered her. He enlightened her condition with that comfort when she was as a lamp despised. There is no comfort you have lost but God can restore it — yes, double it in kind, if he sees it fitting for you. And if not, then —

Consideration 13. Consider that, though God should deny you any more comforts of that kind, he has far better ones to bestow upon you — such as these deserve not to be named alongside.

You have an excellent Scripture for this purpose in Isaiah 56:4-5: For thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant — even to them I will give in my house and within my walls a place and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

A man's name is said to be continued in his descendants, and a numerous line of descendants is counted no small honor (Psalm 127:4-5). God therefore promises here to supply and make good

the want of descendants, and whatever honor here or memorial hereafter might have come from them — by bestowing far greater and more lasting honor: a name better than sons and daughters.

It is a greater honor to be a child of God than to have the greatest honor or comfort that children ever afforded their parents in this world.

Poor heart, you are now downcast by this affliction as if all joy and comfort were cut off from you in this world.

A cloud dwells over all other comforts; this affliction has so embittered your soul that you taste no more sweetness in any other earthly comfort than in the white of an egg. O if you did but consider the consolations that are with God for those who answer his ends in affliction and patiently wait on him for their comfort! He has comforts for you far surpassing the joy of children.

Some have found this when their children have been cut off from them, and in so eminent a degree that they have valued their comfort in children little in comparison with this comfort.

I will set down a striking instance of this, as I find it recorded by the worthy author of that excellent book entitled *The Fulfilling of the Scripture*.

A notable instance of grace, with a very remarkable passage in his condition: One Patrick MacEwrath, who lived in the west parts of Scotland, had his heart touched in a remarkable way by the Lord. After his conversion, as he showed to many Christian friends, he was in such a frame — so affected with a new world he had entered, the discoveries of God and of a life to come — that for some months together he scarcely slept, but was constantly taken up in wonder. His life was very remarkable for tenderness and

near fellowship with God in his walk. One day, after a sharp trial in which his only son was suddenly taken away by death, he retired alone for several hours. When he came forth he looked so cheerfully that those who asked him the reason, wondering at it in such a time, were told by him: He had gotten that in his retirement with the Lord that, to have it renewed afterward, he would be content to lose a son every day.

What a sweet exchange he had made! Surely he had gold for brass, a pearl for a pebble, a treasure for a trifle — for so great, yes and far greater, is the disproportion between the sweet light of God's countenance and the faint dim light of the best creature enjoyment.

Would it please the Lord to make this sun arise and shine upon you now, when the stars that shone with a dim and borrowed light have gone down — you would see such gain in the exchange that it would quickly make you cast your vote with him just mentioned, and say: Lord, let every day be as this funeral day, let all my hours be as this, so that I may see and taste what I now do. How gladly would I part with the dearest and nearest creature comfort I own in this world.

The gracious and tender Lord has his divine cordials reserved on purpose for such sad hours. These are sometimes given before a sharp trial to prepare for it, and sometimes after to support under it.

I have often heard from the mouth and found in the diary of a sweet Christian now with God, that a little before the Lord removed her dear husband by death, there was such an abundant outpouring of the love of God into her soul, for several days and

nights following, that when the Lord took away her husband by death — though he was a gracious, sweet-tempered, and by her most tenderly beloved husband — she was scarcely sensible of the stroke, but was carried completely above all earthly things, their comforts and their troubles. She had almost lost the thoughts of her husband in God. Had not the Lord taken this course with her, she concluded that blow could not have been borne by her; she would have sunk without such a preparation.

A husband, a wife, a child are great things — very great — as they stand by other creatures. But surely they will seem little things, and next to nothing, when the Lord shall set himself beside them before the soul.

And how do you know but that God has bid these earthly comforts stand aside this day to make way for heavenly ones? Perhaps God is coming to communicate himself more sweetly and more sensibly than ever to your souls, and these are the providences which must prepare the way of the Lord. Possibly God's meaning in their death is but this: Child, stand aside — you are in my way and filling my place in your parent's heart.

Consideration 14. Be careful that you do not exceed in your grief for the loss of earthly things, considering that Satan takes advantage of all extremes.

You cannot touch any extreme without being touched by that enemy, whose greatest advantages lie in assaulting you there.

Satan is called the ruler of the darkness of this world (Ephesians 6:12) — that is, his kingdom is supported by darkness. Now there is a twofold darkness which gives Satan great advantage: the darkness of the mind, namely ignorance, and the dark-

ness of the condition, namely trouble and affliction. Of the former the apostle speaks chiefly in that text, but the latter also is often exploited by him to carry on his designs upon us. When it is a dark hour of trouble with us, then is his fittest season to tempt.

That cowardly spirit falls upon the people of God when they are down and low in spirit as well as in circumstances. Satan would never have desired that the hand of God should be stretched out against Job's person, estate, and children, except that he promised himself a notable advantage thereby to poison his spirit with vile thoughts of God. Do this, said he, and he will curse you to your face.

What the psalmist observes of natural darkness is equally true of spiritual darkness. Psalm 104:20: You make darkness and it is night, in which all the beasts of the forest creep forth, the young lions roaring after their prey.

When it is dark night with men, it is noonday with Satan — that is, our season of suffering is his busiest season of working. Many a dismal suggestion he then plants and grafts upon our affliction, which are much more dangerous to us than the affliction itself.

Sometimes he injects despairing thoughts into the afflicted soul. Then said I, I am cut off from before your eyes (Psalm 31:22). And Lamentations 3:18-19: My hope is perished from the Lord, remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall.

Sometimes he suggests hard thoughts of God. Ruth 1:20: The Lord has dealt very bitterly with me. Yes, that he has dealt more severely with us than with any other. Lamentations 1:12: See and

behold if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which has been done to me, with which the Lord has afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.

And sometimes murmuring and resentful thoughts against the Lord rise up, the soul being displeased at the hand of God upon it. Jonah was angry at the hand of God and said: I do well to be angry, even to death (Jonah 4:9). What dismal thoughts are these — and how much more afflictive to a gracious soul than the loss of any outward enjoyment in this world!

And sometimes very irreligious and unbelieving thoughts arise, as if there were no advantage to be had by religion, and all our pains, zeal, and care about duty were little better than lost labor. Psalm 73:13-14: Truly I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning.

By these things Satan gains no small advantage upon the afflicted Christian. Though these thoughts are his burden, and God will not impute them to the condemnation of his people, yet they rob the soul of peace, hinder it from duty, and make it act unworthily under affliction, to the stumbling and hardening of others in their sin. Beware, therefore, lest by excess of sorrow you give place to the devil. We are not ignorant of his devices.

Consideration 15. Do not give way to excessive sorrow over affliction, if you have any regard for the honor of God and religion, which will thereby be exposed to reproach.

If you slight your own honor, do not slight the honor of God and religion too. Take heed how you carry yourself in a day of trouble — many eyes are upon you. What will the atheist and what will

the profane scoffer say when they see this? So malicious they are that if they see you in affliction, they straightway ask scornfully: Where is your God?

But what will they say if they should hear you yourselves crying out in unbelief: Where is our God? Will they not be ready to say: This is the religion they make such boast of, which you see does so little for them in a day of extremity. They talk of promises — rich and precious promises — but where are they now, and to what purpose do they serve? They said they had a treasure in heaven. What ails them to mourn so if their riches are there?

Beware what you do before the world. They have eyes to see what you can do, as well as ears to hear what you can say. And as long as your bearing under troubles is so much like their own, they will never think your principles are better than theirs. Worldly people will be drawn to think that whatever fine talk you may have about God and heaven, your hearts were most upon the same things as theirs, since your grief for their removal is as great as theirs.

They know by experience what a support it is to the heart to have an able, faithful friend to depend upon, or to have hopes of a great estate shortly coming to them. And they will never be persuaded that you have any such ground of comfort, if they see you as much cast down as those who make no such profession.

By this means the precepts of Christ to constancy and contentment in all circumstances will come to be regarded as only fine words but impossible to practice. And the whole of the gospel will be taken for an airy notion, since those who profess greatest regard to it are no more helped by it.

What a shame it is that religion should in this case make no more difference between one person and another! Show to the world that your care is not so much to differ from them in opinions and outward strictness, as in humility, meekness, contempt of the world, and heavenly-mindedness. Now let these graces display themselves by your cheerful, patient bearing under all your grievances.

For what purpose has God planted those excellent graces in your souls, but that he might be glorified and you benefited by their exercise in tribulation? Should these be suppressed and hidden, and nothing but the pride, passion, and unsubdued earthliness of your hearts be put to work and displayed in times of trouble — what a wound you will give to the glorious name that is called upon by you! And then if your hearts are truly gracious, that will pierce you deeper than ever the affliction that occasioned it did.

I urge you, therefore, be tender of the name of God, if you will not be so of your own peace and comfort.

Consideration 16. Be quiet and hold your peace — you little know how many mercies lie in the womb of this sharp affliction.

Great are the benefits of a sharp, rousing affliction to the people of God at certain times, and all might have them at all times were they more careful to improve them. Holy David thankfully acknowledges in Psalm 119:71: It is good for me that I have been afflicted.

And surely there is as much good in afflictions for you as for him, if the Lord sanctifies them to such ends and uses as his were sanctified to.

Such a sharp rod as this did not come before there was need enough of it, and possibly you yourselves saw the need of some awakening providence. But if not, the Lord did. He did not take up the rod to smite you until his faithfulness and tender love to your souls called upon him to correct you.

You now sit pensive under the rod, sadly lamenting and deploring the loss of some earthly comfort. Your heart is overburdened with sorrow; your eyes run down at every mention and remembrance of your dear friend. Why, if there were no more, this alone may reveal the need you had of this rod. Does not all this sorrow at parting plainly show how much your heart was set upon and fast bound to this earthly comfort?

Now you see that your affections had sunk many degrees deeper into the creature than you were aware of. And what should God do in this case? Should he allow you to cleave to the creature more and more? Should he permit it to steal away your love and delight and draw your heart from himself? This he could not do and still love you. The more impatient you are under this affliction, the more you needed it.

And what if by this stroke the Lord will awaken your drowsy soul and recover you from that pleasant but dangerous spiritual slumber you had fallen into, while you had pillowed your head upon this pleasant, sensible creature comfort? Is not this really better for you than if he should say: Sleep on? He is joined to idols, let him alone; he is departing from me the fountain to a broken cistern, let him go?

What if by this stroke upon one of the pleasantest things you had in this world, God will reveal to you, more sensibly and effectively than ever, the vanity both of it and of all other earthly comforts — so that from this time forward you shall never let out your heart, your hope, your love and delight to any of them as you did before? You could talk before of the creature's vanity, but I question whether you ever had so clear and convincing a sight of it as you have this day. And is not this a considerable mercy in your eyes?

Now, if ever, God is weaning you from all fond opinions and vain expectations from this world. By this, your judgment of the creature is corrected and your affections to all other earthly enjoyments moderated. And is this nothing? Surely it is a greater mercy to you than to have your friend alive again.

And what if by this rod your wandering, roving heart shall be whipped home to God? Your neglected duties revived, your decayed communion with God restored, a spiritual and heavenly frame of heart recovered? What will you say then?

Surely you will bless that merciful hand which removed the obstructions, and adore the divine wisdom and goodness that by such a means as this recovered you to himself. Now you can pray more constantly, more spiritually, more affectionately than before. O blessed rod, which buds and blossoms with such fruits as these! Let this be written among your best mercies, for you shall have cause to adore and bless God eternally for this beneficial affliction.

Consideration 17. Do not let yourself be carried away by impatience and swallowed up with grief because God has exercised you under a sharp rod. For as sharp as it is, it is comparatively a gentle

stroke to what others as good as yourself have felt.

Your dear relation is dead — be it so. Here is but a single death before you. But others have seen many deaths combined into one for their relations, to which yours is nothing.

Zedekiah saw his children murdered before his eyes, and then had those eyes put out. The worthy author of the book already mentioned tells of a godly gentlewoman in the north of Ireland, who when the rebellion broke out there fled with three children, one of them at the breast. They had not gone far before they were stripped naked by the Irish, who remarkably spared their lives, likely concluding that cold and hunger would kill them. Afterward, going on, others met them at the foot of a river and would have them cast in. But this godly woman, not dismayed, asked a little liberty to pray. As she lay naked on the frozen ground she got resolve not to go on her own feet to so unjust a death. Calling her, and she refusing, they dragged her by the heels along that rough way to cast her in with her little ones and companions.

But she then turned, and on her knees said: You should be Christians, and men I see you are. In taking away our miserable lives you do us a favor. But know that, as we never wronged you or yours, you must remember to die yourselves one day and give an account of this cruelty to the Judge of heaven and earth. At this they resolved not to murder them with their own hands, but turned them all naked onto a small island in the river without any provision, there to perish.

The next day the two boys, creeping aside, found the hide of a beast that had been killed at the root of a tree, which the mother cast over them as they lay upon the snow. The next day a little boat

passed by, and she called out for God's sake to take them out. They being Irish refused. She begged a little bread, but they said they had none. Then she begged a coal of fire, which she obtained, and thus with some fallen chips made a little fire. The children took a piece of the hide, laid it on the coals, and began to gnaw the leather. But without an extraordinary divine support, what could this do?

They lived ten days without any visible means of help, having no bread but ice and snow, nor drink except water. The two boys being near starved, she pressed them to go out of her sight, not able to bear watching their death. Yet God delivered them as miraculously at last as he had sustained them all that while.

But judge whether a natural death in an ordinary way is comparable to such a trial as this — and yet thus the Lord dealt with this choice and eminently gracious woman.

And another writer relates as sad a passage of a poor family in Germany, who were driven to such extremity in the famine that at last the parents proposed to each other to sell one of the children for bread to sustain themselves and the rest. But when they came to consider which child it should be, their hearts so relented and yearned over each one that they resolved rather to all die together. Yes, we read in Lamentations 4:10: The hands of the pitiful women have boiled their own children.

But why speak of these extremities? How many parents — yes, some godly ones too — have lived to see their children dying in profaneness, and some by the hand of justice, lamenting their rebellions with a rope about their necks?

Reader, you little know what stings there are in the afflictions of others. Surely you have no reason to think the Lord has dealt more bitterly with you than with any. It is a gentle stroke, a merciful dispensation, if you compare it with what others have felt.

Consideration 18. If God is your God, you have really lost nothing by the removal of any creature comfort.

God is the fountain of all true comfort. Creatures — the very best and sweetest — are but cisterns to receive and convey to us what comfort God is pleased to communicate through them. And if the cistern be broken, or the pipe cut off, so that no more comfort can be conveyed that way, he has other ways and means to do it by which we do not think of. And if he pleases, he can convey his comforts to his people without any of them. If he does it more immediately, we shall be no losers by that — for no comforts in the world are so delectable and ravishingly sweet as those that flow immediately from the fountain.

And it is the sensuality of our hearts that causes us to desire them so excessively and grieve for their loss so immoderately, as if we had not enough in God without these creature supplements.

Is the fullness of the fountain yours? And yet do you cast yourselves down because the broken cistern is removed? The best creatures are no better than this — Jeremiah 2:13: Cisterns have nothing but what they receive, and broken ones cannot hold what is put into them. Why then do you mourn as if your life were bound up in the creature? You have as free access to the fountain as you had before. It is the advice of a pagan — and let them take the comfort of it — to repair by a new earthly comfort what we have lost in the former.

As Seneca says: You have carried forth him whom you loved; seek one whom you may love in his place; it is better to repair than to mourn your loss.

But if God never repairs your loss in things of the same kind, you know he can abundantly repair it in himself.

Christian, is not one kiss of his mouth, one glimpse of his countenance, one seal of his Spirit, a sweeter and more substantial comfort than the sweetest relation in this world can afford? If the stream fails, repair to the fountain. There is enough still. God is where he was and what he was, though the creature is not.

Consideration 19. Though you may want a little comfort in your life, yet surely it may be repaid to you by an easier death.

The removal of your friends before you may turn to your great advantage when your own hour comes to follow them. O how many good souls have been clogged and ensnared in their dying hour by the loves, cares, and fears they have had about those they must leave behind them in a sinful and evil world!

Your love to them might have proved a snare to you, and caused you to hold back and be loath to go. For these are the things that make men reluctant to die. And so it might have been with you, except God had removed them beforehand, or should give you in that day such sights of heaven and tastes of divine love as would master and subdue all your earthly affections to these things.

I knew a gracious person, now in heaven, who for many weeks in her last sickness complained that she found it hard to part with a dear relation, and that nothing proved a greater clog to her soul

than this. It is much easier to think of going to our friends who are in heaven before us, than of parting with them and leaving our desirable and dear ones behind us.

And who knows what cares and distracting thoughts you may then be troubled with on their account? What shall become of these when I am gone? I am now to leave them, God knows, to what wants, miseries, temptations, and afflictions, in the midst of a deceitful, defiling, dangerous world.

I know it is our duty to leave our fatherless children and friendless relations with God — to trust them with him who gave them to us. And some have been enabled cheerfully to do so when parting from them. Luther could say: Lord, you have given me a wife and children; I have little to leave them. Nourish, teach, and keep them, O Father of the fatherless and Judge of widows. But every Christian has not Luther's faith. Some find it a hard thing to disentangle their affections at such a time. But now, if God has sent all yours before you, you have so much the less to do. Death may be easier for you than for others.

Consideration 20. But if nothing yet said will stay with you, then lastly, remember that you are near that state and place which admits no sorrows or sad reflections upon any such accounts as these.

Yet a little while, and you shall not miss them, you shall not need them, but you shall live as the angels of God. We now live partly by faith, partly by sense, partly upon God and partly upon the creature. Our state is mixed, therefore our comforts are so too.

But when God shall be all in all, and we shall be as the angels of God in the manner of our living — how much will the case be altered with us then from what it is now!

Angels neither marry nor are given in marriage; neither shall the children of the resurrection. When the days of our sinning are ended, the days of our mourning shall be ended too. No graves were opened until sin entered, and no more shall be opened when sin is excluded.

Our glorified relations shall live with us forever. They shall complain no more, die no more. Yes, this is the happiness of that state to which you are passing on: your souls being in the nearest union with God the fountain of joy, you shall have no concern outside of him. You shall not be put to these exercises of patience, nor subjected to such sorrows as you now feel, any more. It is but a little while and the end of all these things will come. Bear up, therefore, as those who expect a day of jubilee at hand.

And thus I have finished the second general head of this discourse, which is a dissuasion from the sin of immoderate sorrow.

PART



I now proceed to the third thing proposed: to remove the pleas and excuses for immoderate grief. It is natural to people, yes to good people, to justify their excesses, or at least minimize them, by pleading for their passions, as if they lacked not cause and reason enough to excuse them. If these be fully answered and the soul once convicted and left without an apology for its sin, it is then in a fair way for its cure — which is the last thing designed in this treatise.

My present work therefore is to satisfy those objections and answer those reasons commonly pleaded in this case to justify excessive grief for lost relations. And though I shall carry it in that line of relation to which the text directs, it is equally applicable to all others.

PLEA 1



You press me by many great considerations to meekness and quiet submission under this heavy stroke of God, but you little know what stings my soul now feels in it.

This child was a child of many prayers — a Samuel begged of the Lord. And I concluded when I had him that he brought with him the answers of many prayers. But now I see it was nothing of the sort. God had no regard to my prayers about him, nor was he given to me in that special way of mercy as I imagined. My child is not only dead, but my prayers on the same day are shut out and denied.

ANSWER TO PLEA 1



That you prayed for your children before you had them was your duty. If you prayed not submissively — referring it to the pleasure of God to give or deny them, to continue or remove them, as should seem good to him — that was your sin. You ought not to limit the Holy One of Israel, nor prescribe to him, nor bargain with him for what term you shall enjoy your outward comforts. If you did so, it was your error, and God has justly rebuked it by this stroke. If you did pray conditionally and submissively, referring both the mercy asked and the continuance of it to the will of God as you ought to do — then there is nothing in the death of your child that crosses the true intent of your prayer.

ANSWER



Your prayers may be answered, though the thing prayed for be withheld, yes, or though it should be given for a little while and then taken from you again. There are four ways God answers prayers: by giving the thing prayed for immediately (Daniel 9:23); by suspending the answer for a time and giving it afterward (Luke 18:7); by withholding the mercy you ask and giving you a much better mercy in its place (Deuteronomy 3:24 compared with Deuteronomy 34:4-5); or lastly, by giving you patience to bear the loss or want of it (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Now if the Lord has taken away your child or friend, and in place of that has given you a meek, quiet, submissive heart to his will, you need not say he has shut out your cry.

PLEA 2



But I have lost a lovely, obliging, and most endearing child — one that was beautiful and sweet. It is a stony heart that would not dissolve into tears for the loss of one so desirable and so engaging as this was. Ah, it is no common loss!

ANSWER



The more lovely and engaging your relation was, the more excellent will your patience and contentment with the will of God in its death be. The more loveliness, the more self-denial; and the more self-denial, the more grace. Had it been a thousand times more endearingly sweet than it was, it was not too good to yield for God. If therefore obedience to the will of God truly masters natural affections, and you look upon patience and contentment as far more beautiful than the sweetest and most desirable enjoyment on earth, it may turn to you as a testimony of the truth and strength of grace — that you can, like Abraham, part with a child whom you so dearly love, in obedience to the will of your God whom you love infinitely more.

ANSWER



The loveliness and beauty of our children and relations, though it must be acknowledged a good gift from the hand of God, is but a common gift, and often becomes a snare; and in its own nature it is but a transitory, vanishing thing. Therefore it is no such great aggravation of the loss as is claimed.

It is but a common gift. Eliab, Adonijah, and Absalom had as lovely a presence as any in their generation. Yes, it is not only common to the wicked as well as the godly, but to animals as well as men. And for most who excel in it, it becomes a temptation — the souls of some had been more beautiful and lovely if their bodies had been less so. Besides, it is but a flower which flourishes in its season and then fades. This therefore should not be counted as so great a circumstance to aggravate your trouble.

ANSWER



But if your relation sleeps in Jesus, he will appear ten thousand times more lovely in the morning of the resurrection than he ever was in this world. What is the finest and purest beauty of mortals compared to the incomparable beauty of the saints in the resurrection? Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43). In this hope you part with them; therefore act in a manner consistent with your hope.

PLEA 3



But my child was cut off by death in the very bud. I did but see, and love, and part. Had I enjoyed him longer, and had time to draw out the sweetness of such an enjoyment, I could have borne it easier. But his months or years with me were so few that they only served to raise an expectation, which was quickly — and therefore the more sadly — disappointed.

ANSWER



Did your friend die young, or was the bond of another relation dissolved almost as soon as made? Let not this seem so intolerable a burden to you. For if you have ground to hope they died in Christ, then they lived long enough in this world. It is truly said: he has sailed long enough who has won the harbor; he has fought long enough who has obtained the victory; he has run long enough who has touched the goal; and he has lived long enough on earth who has won heaven — be his days here never so few.

ANSWER



The sooner your relation died, the less sin was committed and the less sorrow felt. What can you see in this world but sin or sorrow? A quick passage through it to glory is a special privilege. Surely the world is not so desirable a place that Christians should wish an hour's time longer in it for themselves or those they love, beyond what is needed to fit them for a better.

ANSWER



And whereas you imagine the parting would have been easier if the enjoyment had been longer, it is a fond and groundless suspicion. The longer you had enjoyed them, the stronger the bonds of affection would have been. A young and tender plant may be easily pulled up by a single hand, but when it has spread and fixed its roots many years in the earth, it will require many a strong blow and hard pull to root it up. Affections, like those underground roots, are fixed and strengthened by nothing more than habit and long possession. It is much easier parting now than it would be hereafter, whatever you may think. However, let this satisfy you: God's time is the best time.

PLEA 4



But I have lost all in one — it is my only one. I have none left to fill its place and make up the loss. If God had given me other children to take comfort in, the loss would not have been so great. But to lose all at one stroke is insupportable.

ANSWER



Religion does not allow Christians the liberty of calling the death of their dear relations a loss of them. They are not lost but sent on before you. And it is a shameful thing for a Christian to be reproved for such an unbecoming expression by a pagan. It is enough to make us blush to read what Epictetus said in this case: Never say you have lost anything, but that it is returned. Is your son dead? He is only restored. Is your inheritance taken from you? It is also returned. And he adds: Let everything be as God wills it.

ANSWER



It is not a fitting expression to say you have lost all in one — except that one be Christ, and he, once being yours, can never be lost. Doubtless your meaning is that you have lost all your comfort of that kind. And what though you have? Are there not multitudes of comforts yet remaining of a higher kind and more precious and lasting nature? If you have no more of that sort, yet so long as you have better, what cause have you to be content?

ANSWER



You too much imitate the way of the world in this complaint. Worldly people know no way to repair the loss of one comfort but by another of the same nature to fill its place and the vacancy it leaves. But have you no other way to supply your loss? Have you not a God to fill the place of any creature that leaves you? Surely this complaint would better become a man whose portion is in this life, than one who professes that God is his all in all.

PLEA 5



But my only one is not only taken away — there remains no expectation or probability of any more. I must now look upon myself as a dry tree, never to take comfort in children again. That is a cutting thought.

ANSWER



Suppose what you say is true — that you have no hope or expectation of another child remaining to you. Yet if you have a hope of better things than children, you have no reason to be cast down. Bless God for higher and better hopes than these. In Isaiah 56:4-5 the Lord comforts those who had no expectation of sons or daughters with this: that he will give to them in his house and within his walls a place and a name better than sons and daughters — even an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. There are better mercies and higher hopes than children. Though your hopes of children, or from children, should be cut off, yet if your eternal hopes are secure and such as shall not put you to shame, you should not be so cast down.

ANSWER



If God will not have your comfort rest any more in children, then resolve to place it in himself, and you shall never find cause to complain of loss by such an exchange. You will find in God what is not to be had in the creature. One hour's communion with him shall give you what the happiest parent never yet had from his children. You will exchange brass for gold, perishing vanity for solid and abiding excellence.

PLEA 6



But the suddenness of the stroke is stunning. God gave little or no warning to prepare for this trial. Death executed its commission as soon as it opened it. My dear husband, wife, or child was snatched unexpectedly out of my arms by a surprising stroke. And this makes my grief heavier than my complaint can express.

ANSWER



That the death of your relation was so sudden and surprising was much your own fault. You ought to have lived in the daily sense of its vanity and the expectation of your separation from it. You knew it was a dying comfort even in its best estate. And it is no such wonderful thing to see dead what you knew before to be dying. Besides, you heard the bells of death ringing round about you in other families; you frequently saw other parents, husbands, and wives carrying forth their dead. And what were all these but warnings given you to prepare for the same trials?

Surely then it was your own security and carelessness that made this affliction so surprising to you — and you know who is to be blamed for that.

ANSWER



There is much difference between the sudden death of infants and that of grown persons. The latter may have much work to do — many sins actually to repent of, and many evidences of their interest in Christ to examine and establish — in order to a more comfortable death. And so sudden death may rightly be dreaded by them.

But the case of infants who do not yet exercise their reason is far different. They have no such work to do, but are purely passive. All that is done in order to their salvation is done by God immediately upon them. And so it comes to the same thing whether their death be more quick or more slow.

ANSWER



You complain of the suddenness of the stroke, but another will be ready to say: had my friend died in that manner, my affliction would have been nothing to what it now is. I have seen many deaths combined into one. I saw the gradual approach of death upon my dear relation, who felt every step of death as it came on toward him, who often cried with Job (3:20): Why is light given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter in soul, who long for death but it does not come, and dig for it more than for hidden treasures, who rejoice greatly when they find the grave?

What you count the sting of your affliction, others would have counted a favor and a privilege. How many tender parents and other relations who loved their friends as dearly as you have been driven to their knees on no other errand but this: to beg the Lord to hasten the separation and put an end to that sorrow, which to them was much greater than the sorrow for the dead.

PLEA 7



You press me to moderation of sorrow, and I know I ought to show it. But you do not know how the case stands with me.

There is a sting in this affliction that none feels but myself. O how intolerable it is! I neglected proper means in season to preserve life, or failed in the use of means. I now see such a neglect, or such a mistake about the means, as I cannot but judge greatly contributed to the sad loss which I now — too late — lament.

O my negligence! O my rashness and thoughtlessness! How my conscience now smites me for my folly, and by this aggravates my burden beyond what is usually felt by others. Had I applied myself in season to the use of proper means, and kept strictly to such courses and counsels as those who are able and skilled might have prescribed, I might now have had a living husband, wife, or child. Whereas I am now not only bereaved, but am apt to think I have bereaved myself of them. Surely there is no sorrow like my sorrow.

ANSWER



Though it is an evil to neglect and slight the means ordained by God for recovery of health, yet it is no less evil to ascribe too much to them or rely too much on them. The best means in the world are weak and ineffectual without God's assistance and concurrence. And they never have that assistance or concurrence when his time is come. That his time was fully come in your friend's case is now manifested by the outcome. So that if your friend had had the most excellent help the world could afford, it would have availed nothing. This consideration applies only in your case — when you can see what God's will was by the outcome — and may not be pleaded by anyone while that remains dubious and uncertain, as it generally is during sickness.

ANSWER



Do you not unjustly charge and blame yourself for what was not really your fault or neglect? How far you are chargeable in this case will best appear by comparing the circumstances you are now in with those you were in when your relation was only arrested by sickness, and it was uncertain to you what your duty and best course was.

Possibly you had observed so many perish in physicians' hands, and so many recover without them, that you judged it safer for your friend to be without those means than to be endangered by them.

Or if diverse methods were prescribed and urged, and you now see your error in preferring what was most improper and neglecting what was more safe and likely — yet as long as it did not so appear to your understanding at that time, and you followed the best light you had to guide you, it would be most unjust to charge the fault upon yourself for choosing the course that then seemed best, whether it was so in itself or not.

To be angry with yourself for doing or omitting what was then done or omitted according to your best discretion and judgment — because you now see it by the light of the outcome to be otherwise

than you did before — is to be troubled that you are but human, or that you are not as God, who alone can foresee issues and outcomes. It is to be troubled that you acted as all rational creatures are bound to do: according to the best light they have at the time and season of action.

ANSWER



To conclude: times of great affliction are ordinarily times of great temptation. It is Satan's usual practice then to charge us with more sins than we are really guilty of, and also to make things seem to be sins which, on impartial examination, will not be found to be so.

Indeed, had your neglect or failure been knowing and deliberate — had you really preferred a little money, being able to give it, before the life of your relation, deliberately choosing to risk their life rather than part with your money — then no doubt there would have been much sin mixed with your affliction, and your conscience may justly smite you for it. But in the other case, which is more common and I presume is yours, it is a false charge, and you ought not to assist the design of Satan in it.

Judge by the sorrow you now feel for your friend, in what degree he was dear to you, and what you could now be willing to give to ransom his life if it could be done with money. Judge by this how groundless the charge is that Satan now draws up against you — and to which you are all too ready to yield.

PLEA 8



But my troubles are on a higher score and account. My child or friend has passed into eternity, and I do not know how it is with their soul. Were I sure that my relation was with Christ, I should be at peace. But the fears of the contrary are overwhelming. O it is terrible to think of the damnation of one so dear to me.

ANSWER



Granted what the objection supposes — that you have real grounds to fear the eternal condition of your dear relation — yet even in such a case it is wholly unfitting for you to dispute with or repine against the Lord.

I acknowledge it is a sore and heavy trial, and that there is no case more sad and crushing to the spirit of a gracious person. Their death is but a trifle compared to this. And yet, if you are one who fears the Lord, his indisputable sovereignty over them and his distinguishing love and mercy to you should at least silence you in this matter.

First, his indisputable sovereignty over them. Romans 9:20: Who are you, O man, who disputes with God? He speaks this in the matters of eternal election and reprobation. What if the Lord will not be gracious to those who are so dear to us? Is any wrong done to them or to us by this? Aaron's two sons were cut off in an act of sin by the Lord's immediate hand, and yet he held his peace (Leviticus 10:3). God told Abraham plainly that the covenant would not be established with Ishmael, for whom he so earnestly

prayed: O let Ishmael live before you! And Abraham knew there was no salvation outside the covenant. Yet he sat down silent under the word of the Lord.

Second, but if this does not quiet you, yet his distinguishing love and mercy to you should. O what do you owe to God, that root and branch were not cast together into the fire! That the Lord has given you good hope through grace that it shall be well with you forever. Let this stop your mouth and quiet your spirit, even if you have grounds for this fear.

ANSWER



But examine the grounds of your fear. May it not proceed from the strength of your affection for the eternal welfare of your friend, or from Satan's subtlety in designing to overwhelm and swallow you up in sorrow, as much as from just and solid grounds? In two cases it is very probable your fear may proceed only from your own affection or Satan's temptation.

First, if your relation died young, before doing anything to destroy your hope.

Second, if grown and in some good degree hopeful — only they did not in life or at death manifest and give evidence of grace with the clearness you desired.

As to the case of infants in general, it is not our concern to judge their condition. And as for those who sprang from covenanted parents, it becomes us to exercise charity toward them; the Scripture speaks very favorably of them.

And as for the more mature, who have escaped the corruptions of the world and made a matter of conscience of sin and duty — even if they never manifested what you could have desired — yet in them, as in young Abijah, may be found some good thing toward the Lord which you never noticed. Reverence of your authority,

modesty and bashfulness, reserve of disposition, and many other things may hide those small and weak beginnings of grace in children from a parent's observation. God might have seen in them what you never saw. He does not despise the day of small things.

However it may be, it is now beyond your watch. Your concern now is rather to improve the affliction for your own good than to judge and determine their condition — which belongs not to you, but to God.

PLEA 9



But I have sinned in this relation, and now God has punished my sin in dissolving it. One says: My heart was set too much upon it, I even idolized it — that was my sin. Another says: I lacked proper affection and did not love my relation, or at least not as spiritually as I ought — that was my sin. Now God is visiting me for all the neglects and deficiencies that have been in me toward my relation.

ANSWER



There is no person so thoroughly sanctified as not to fail and fall short in many things pertaining to relative duties. And to speak plainly, the corruptions of the holiest persons are as much discovered here as in anything else. And it is very common for conscience not only to charge these failures upon us, but to aggravate them to the utmost when God has made the separation. So that this is no more than what is usual and very common with persons in your case.

ANSWER



Granted what the objection supposes — that God has afflicted you for your sin and removed from you the comfort you idolized and too much doted upon — yet there is no reason you should be so cast down under your affliction. For all this may be, and probably is, the fruit of his love and care for your soul. Revelation 3:19: Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten. How much better is it to have an idolized enjoyment taken from you in mercy, than if God should say concerning you, as he said of Ephraim in Hosea 4:17: He is joined to idols, let him alone.

It is better for you that your Father now reckons with you for your follies with the rod in his hand, than to say of you, as he does of some: Let them go on — I will not hinder them in or rebuke them for their sinful courses, but will reckon with them for all together in hell at last.

ANSWER



And as to what you now charge upon yourself — that neglect of duty sprang from want of love to your relation — your sorrow at parting shows that your relation was rooted deep in your affection. But if your love was not so spiritual and pure as to love and enjoy them in God, that was undoubtedly your sin, and is the sin of most Christians. For this, both you and all others ought to be humbled.

PLEA 10



God has blessed me with an estate and outward comforts in the world, which I reckoned to leave to my posterity. And now I have none to leave it to, nor any comfort in thinking of it. The purposes of my heart are broken off, and the comfort of all my other enjoyments blasted by this stroke in one hour. How have the pains and cares of many years come to nothing!

ANSWER



How many are there in the world — yes, of your own acquaintance — whom God has either denied or deprived of both the comforts of children and estates? If he has left you your outward comforts, you ought to acknowledge his goodness in this and not despise them because he has deprived you of the other.

ANSWER



Though your children are gone, God has many children left in the world whose needs you may meet with what he has bestowed upon you. Your charity to them will doubtless turn to a more comfortable account than if you had left a large estate to your own posterity.

Surely we are not sent into this world to heap up great estates for our children. If you have been too eager in this design, you may now read God's just rebuke of your folly. Bless God that you still have an opportunity to serve him eminently by your charity. And if God denies you other executors, let your own hands be your executors — to distribute to the needs of the saints, so that the blessings of those ready to perish may come upon you.

PLEA 11



But the remembrance of his clever words and sweet ways is wounding.

ANSWER



Let it rather lift up your heart to God in praise that he gave you so delightful a child, than fill your heart with discontent at his hand in removing it. How many parents are there in the world whose children God has deprived of reason and understanding, so that they differ from animals only in outward form? And how many show from early on so perverse a temper that little comfort can be expected from them?

ANSWER



These are but small circumstances and trivial things in themselves. But by these little things Satan manages a great design against your soul — to cast it down or embitter it. And surely this is not your business at this time. You have greater things than the words and actions of children to attend to: searching out God's end in your affliction, mortifying the corruption it was sent to rebuke, quieting your heart in the will of God. This is your work.

PLEA 12



Lastly, it is objected: God hides his face from me in my affliction. It is dark within as well as without, and this makes my case most deplorable — greatly afflicted and sadly forsaken.

ANSWER



Though you lack sensible comfort at present, you have reason to be thankful for gracious supports. Though the light of God's countenance does not shine upon you, yet you find the everlasting arms are beneath you. The care of God works for you even when the consolations of God are withdrawn from you.

ANSWER



To have God hide his face in a time of trouble is no new or unusual thing. God's dearest saints — yes, his own Son — have experienced it. In the depths of inward and outward trouble, when wave called to wave, he did not feel those sweet and sensible influences of comfort from God that had always filled his soul before. If Christ cries in extremity, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, then surely we need not wonder as if some strange thing had happened to us.

ANSWER



May not your unsubmissive bearing under the rod provoke God to hide his face from you? Pray consider it well — nothing is more probable than this as the cause of God's withdrawal from you. If you could in meekness and quietness receive the cup your Father has given you to drink, accept the punishment of your iniquities, and say: Good is the word of the Lord; it is the Lord, let him do what he will — you would soon find your case altered. But the comforting Spirit finds no delight or rest in a turbulent and troubled heart.

And thus I have answered the most considerable pleas urged in justification of our excesses.

PART



I come now to the last thing proposed: the means of curing and preventing these sinful excesses of sorrow for the death of our dear relations.

And although much has been said already to dissuade from this evil, and I have enlarged already far beyond my first intention, yet I shall offer some further help toward the healing of this disorder by prescribing the following rules.

Finis.

RULE 1



Rule 1. If you would not mourn excessively for the loss of creature comforts, then beware that you do not set your delight and love excessively or inordinately upon them while you have them.

Strong affections make strong afflictions. The higher the tide, the lower the ebb. According to the measure of our delight in the enjoyment is our grief at the loss of these things. The apostle links the two graces of temperance and patience together in the precept (2 Peter 1:6). And it is very observable how intemperance and impatience are inseparably linked in experience — yes, even in the experience of the best men. We read in Genesis 37:3 how Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age, and made him a coat of many colors.

This was the darling; Jacob's heart was exceedingly set upon him; his very life was bound up in the life of the lad. Now when the supposed death of this child was brought to him, how did he carry it? Genesis 37:34-35: Jacob tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and all

his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said: I will go down to my son in the grave mourning. Thus his father wept for him.

Here, as in a mirror, the effects of excessive love to a child are displayed. Here you may see what work immoderate love will make, even in a sanctified heart.

Therefore let your moderation be known to all in your delights and sorrows about earthly things, for ordinarily the proportion of the one answers to the other.

RULE 2



Rule 2. If you would not be overwhelmed with grief for the loss of your relations, be exact and careful in discharging your duties to them while you have them.

The testimony of your conscience that you labored in all things to discharge the duties you owed to your relations while they were with you will prove an excellent allay to your sorrows for them when they are no longer yours. It is not so much the affliction itself as the guilt charged upon us in times of affliction that makes our burden so heavy.

What a terrible thing it is to look upon our dead while conscience is accusing and upbraiding us for neglected duties and sins committed. You little know how dreadful a sight this will make the dead body of your friend.

Conscience, if not entirely deadened, will speak at such a time. Therefore, as ever you would provide for a comfortable parting at death, or a peaceful meeting again at judgment, be exact, punctual, and careful in all your relative duties.

RULE 3



Rule 3. If you would not be overwhelmed by trouble for the loss of your relations, then turn to God under your trouble and pour out your sorrows by prayer into his bosom.

This will ease and allay your troubles. Blessed be God for the ordinance of prayer. How much are all the saints beholden to it at all times, but especially in heart-sinking and distressing times! It is some relief, when in distress, to be able to pour out our trouble into the bosom of a wife or faithful friend. How much more when we leave our complaint before the gracious, wise, and faithful God. I told you before of that holy man who, having lost his dear and only son, retired to his closet; there poured out his soul freely to the Lord; and when he came down to his friends waiting below to comfort him — fearing how he would bear that stroke — he came from his time with God with a cheerful face, telling them he would be content to bury a son, if it were possible, every day, provided he might enjoy such comfort as his soul had found in that private hour.

Go your way, Christian, to your God. Get to your knees in the cloudy and dark day. Retire from all creatures that you may have your full liberty with your God. There pour out your heart before

him in free, full, and broken-hearted confession of sin. Judge yourself worthy of hell as well as of this trouble. Justify God in all his sharpest strokes. Beg him in this distress to put the everlasting arms beneath you. Entreat one smile, one gracious look to lighten your darkness and cheer your drooping spirit. Say with the prophet in Jeremiah 17:17: Be not a terror to me; you are my hope in the day of evil. And try what relief such a course will afford you. Surely if your heart is sincere in this, you shall be able to say with that holy man in Psalm 94:19: In the multitude of my thoughts within me, your comforts delight my soul.

RULE 4



Rule 4. If you would bear the loss of your dear relations with moderation, fix your eyes on God throughout the whole process of the affliction, and less on secondary causes and circumstances.

Psalm 39:9: I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because you did it. Consider the hand of the Lord in the whole matter — and consider it as:

First, a sovereign hand, which has right to dispose of you and all your comforts without your leave or consent (Job 33:13).

Second, a Father's hand correcting you in love and faithfulness. Proverbs 3:11: Whom the Lord loves he corrects, as a father the son in whom he delights. O if you could but see affliction as a rod in a Father's hand, proceeding from his love and intended for your eternal good — how quiet you would be!

And surely if affliction draws your heart nearer to God and mortifies it more to this vain world, it is a rod in the hand of special love. If it ends in your love for God, do not doubt that it comes from God's love for you.

Third, a just and righteous hand. Have you not brought this upon yourself by your own folly? Yes, the Lord is just in all that has come upon you. Whatever he has done, he has done you no wrong.

Fourth and lastly, a moderate and merciful hand that has punished you less than your iniquities deserve. He has cast you into affliction; he might justly have cast you into hell. It is of the Lord's mercy that you are not consumed. Why does a living person complain?

RULE 5



Rule 5. If you would bear your affliction with moderation, compare it with the afflictions of other people, and that will greatly quiet your spirit.

You have no cause to say God has dealt bitterly with you and that there is no sorrow like your sorrow. Look around and impartially consider the conditions of others in no way inferior to you. You have one dead child; Aaron had two at one stroke; Job had all at one stroke — and both of these by an immediate stroke from the hand of God. Some godly parents have lived to see their children die in their sin by the hand of justice. Others have seen them live to the dishonor of God and the breaking of their own spirits, and would have counted it a mercy if they had died from the womb and given up the breath when they came out of the belly, as Job speaks.

In what misery have some parents seen their children lie, God holding them before their eyes as terrible spectacles of suffering — so that they have begged the Lord with urgency to release his hand and cut them off. Death seemed to them as nothing compared to the continual agonies in which they saw them writhing from day to

day. O you little know what a bitter cup others have been given to drink! Surely if you compare, you must say: the Lord has dealt gently and graciously with me.

RULE 6



Rule 6. Carefully shun and avoid whatever may renew your sorrow or provoke you to impatience.

Do not increase your sorrow by the sight of or conversations about sad objects, but labor to avoid them as occasions presented by the enemy of your souls to draw out the corruptions of your hearts.

I told you before why Jacob would not have the child for whom Rachel died called by the name his wife had given — Benoni, the son of my sorrow — lest it should prove a daily occasion to renew his grief for the loss of his dear wife. Instead he called his name Benjamin.

Your impatience is like tinder or gunpowder. So long as you can prevent the sparks from falling on it, there is no great danger. But those who carry such dangerous material in their own hearts cannot be too careful to prevent it. Deal with murmuring as you do with blasphemous thoughts — turn your mind entirely another way and give no occasion.

RULE 7



Rule 7. In the day of your mourning for the death of your friends, seriously consider your own death as approaching, and that you and your dead are distinguished by only a small interval of time.

2 Samuel 12:23: I shall go to him. Surely the thought of your own death as also approaching will greatly allay your sorrows for the dead who have gone before you.

We are prone to imagine a long life in the world. And then the loss of those comforts from which we promised ourselves so much sweetness seems an intolerable thing.

But would you reckon on your own death more, you would not be so deeply troubled by their death. Could you look into your own grave more seriously, you would be able to look into your friend's grave more peacefully.

And thus I have finished what I designed from this Scripture. The Father of mercies and God of all comfort — whose sole prerogative it is to comfort those who are cast down — write all his truths upon your hearts, that they may abide there, and bring your disordered affections to that frame which best suits the will of God and the profession you make of subjection and resignation to it.

THANKS FOR READING



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