

GOOD COMES THROUGH AFFLICTION

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680)

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted.”—Psalm 119:71

A GRACIOUS soul secretly concludes, “As stars shine brightest in the night, so God will make my soul shine and glisten like gold while I am *in* this furnace, and when I come out of the furnace of affliction.” “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10).

Surely, as the taste of honey opened Jonathan’s eyes, so this cross, this affliction shall open my eyes. By this stroke, I shall come to have a clearer sight of my *sins* and of my *self* and a fuller sight of my *God* (Job 33:27-28; 40:4-5; 13:1-7)!

Surely this affliction shall proceed in the purging away of my dross (Isa 1:25)!

Surely as plowing of the ground kills the weeds, and harrowing breaks hard clods, so these afflictions shall kill my sins and soften my heart (Hos 5:15; 6:1-3)!

Surely as the plaster¹ draws out the infectious core, so the afflictions that are upon me shall draw out the core of *pride*, the core of *self-love*, the core of *envy*, the core of *earthliness*, the core of *formality*, the core of *hypocrisy* (Psa 119:67, 71)!

Surely by these afflictions, the Lord will crucify my heart more and more to the world and the world to my heart (Gal 6:14; Psa 131:1-3)!

Surely, by these afflictions, the Lord will keep pride from my soul (Job 33:14-21)!

Surely, these afflictions are but the Lord’s pruning-knives by which He will bleed my sins, prune my heart, and make it more fertile and fruitful! They are but the Lord’s potion by which He will clear me and rid me of those spiritual diseases and maladies that are most deadly and dangerous to my soul! Affliction is such a *healing potion* as will carry away all soul-diseases better than all other remedies (Zec 13:8-9)!

Surely, these afflictions shall increase my spiritual communion with God (Rom 5:3-4)!

Surely by these afflictions, I shall be made to partake more of God’s holiness (Heb 12:10)! As black soap makes white clothes, so do sharp afflictions make holy hearts!

Surely, by these afflictions, the Lord will draw out my heart more and more to seek Him! “In their afflictions they will seek me early” (Hos 5:15)! In times of affliction, Christians will industriously, speed-ily, early seek unto their Lord!

Surely by these trials and troubles, the Lord will fix my soul more than ever upon the great concernments of the eternal world (Joh 14:1-3; Rom 8:17-18; 2Co 4:16-18)!

Surely by these afflictions the Lord will work in me more tenderness and compassion towards those who are afflicted (Heb 10:34; 13:3)!

Surely, these afflictions are but *God’s love-tokens*! “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev 3:19)! So says the holy Christian, “O my soul! Be quiet; be still. All is sent in love; all is a fruit of divine favor. I see honey upon the top of every twig; I see the rod is but a rosemary branch;² I have sugar with my gall,³ and wine with my wormwood; therefore be silent, O my soul!”

Afflictions abase the carnal attractions of the world outside us that might entice us! Affliction abates the lustiness of the flesh within us that might otherwise ensnare us!

Afflictions humble us and keep us low! Holy hearts will be humble under the afflicting hand of God. When God’s rod is upon their backs, their mouths shall be in the dust! A godly heart will lie lowest when the hand of God is lifted highest.

All this proves that affliction is a mighty advantage to us! “It is good for me that I have been afflicted...” (Psa 119:71).

¹ **plaster** – a paste-like mixture applied to a part of the body for healing.

² **rosemary branch** – rosemary is an evergreen shrub of the mint family and yields a fragrant essential oil. In literature and folklore, it is a symbol of remembrance and faithfulness. God’s rod is, then, a fragrant reminder of His faithfulness to us.

³ **gall** – something bitter to endure.

“For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”

—Psalm 30:5

Their mourning shall last but until morning. God will turn
 their winter’s night into a summer’s day,
 their sighing into singing,
 their grief into gladness,
 their mourning into music,
 their bitter into sweet,
 their wilderness into a paradise.

The life of a Christian is filled up with interchanges of
 sickness and health,
 weakness and strength,
 want and wealth,
 disgrace and honor,
 crosses and comforts,
 miseries and mercies,
 joys and sorrows,
 mirth and mourning.

All honey would harm us; all wormwood⁴ would undo us; a composition of both is the best way to keep our souls in a healthy constitution. It is best and most for the health of the soul that the warm south wind of mercy and the cold north wind of adversity do both blow upon it. And though every wind that blows shall blow good to the saints, yet certainly their sins die most and their graces thrive best when they are under the frigid, drying, nipping north wind of calamity, as well as under the warm, nourishing south wind of mercy and prosperity.

“In the day of adversity, consider...”—Ecclesiastes 7:14

If you would be quiet and silent under your present troubles and trials, then dwell much upon the benefit, the profit, the advantage that has redounded⁵ to your souls by *all your former troubles and afflictions*. Oh! Consider how by former afflictions the Lord has revealed sin, prevented sin, and mortified sin!

Consider how the Lord by former afflictions has revealed to you the impotency, the mutability,⁶ the insufficiency, and the vanity of the world and all worldly concerns!

Consider how the Lord by former afflictions has melted your heart, broken your heart, humbled your heart, and prepared your heart for clearer, fuller, and sweeter enjoyments of Him!

Consider what pity, what compassion, what affections, what tenderness, and what sweetness former afflictions have wrought in you towards others in misery!

Consider what room former afflictions have made in your soul for God, for His Word, for good counsel, and for divine comfort!

Consider how by former afflictions the Lord has made you more [a] partaker of His Christ, His Spirit, His holiness, His goodness, etc.

Consider how by former afflictions the Lord has made you to look towards heaven more, to mind heaven more, to prize heaven more, and to long for heaven more, etc.

Now, who can seriously consider all the good that he has gotten by former afflictions and not be silent under present afflictions? Who can remember those choice, those great, and those precious profits that his soul has made of former afflictions, and not reason himself into a holy silence under present afflictions thusly, “O my soul! Has not God done you much good, great good, special good by former afflictions? Yes! O my soul! Has not God done that for you by former afflictions, which you would not undo for ten thousand worlds? Yes! And is not God—O my soul!—as powerful as ever, as faithful as ever, as gracious as ever, and as ready and willing as ever to do you good by *present* afflictions as He has been to do you good by *former* afflictions?”

⁴ **wormwood**— a plant proverbial for its bitter taste; therefore, used for anything bitter or grievous to the soul.

⁵ **redounded**— overflowed.

⁶ **mutability**— the tendency to frequent change; inconstancy.

“I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it.”—Psalm 39:9

In the words, you may observe three things: (1) The person speaking and that is David. David a king, David a saint, David “a man after God’s own heart,” David a Christian. And here we are to look upon David, not as a king, but as a Christian, as a man whose heart was right with God. (2) The action and carriage of David under the hand of God in these words: “I was silent; I would not open my mouth.” (3) The reason of this humble and sweet carriage of his in these words, “Thou didst it,” or, in other words, “You are the One Who has done this!”

The proposition is this: That it is the great duty and concern of gracious souls to be mute and silent under the greatest afflictions, the saddest providences, and sharpest trials that they meet with in this world.

David’s silence is an acknowledgment of God as the author of all the afflictions that come upon us. There is no sickness so little but God has a finger in it, though it be but the aching of the little finger. David looks through all secondary causes to the first cause and is silent. He sees a hand of God in all and so sits mute and quiet. The sight of God in an affliction is of an irresistible efficacy to silence the heart and to stop the mouth of a godly man.

Men who do not see God in an affliction are easily cast into a feverish fit. They will quickly be in a flame; and when their passions are up and their hearts on fire, they will begin to be [disrespectful] and make no bones of telling God to His teeth that they do well to be angry. Those who will not acknowledge God to be the author of all their afflictions will be ready enough to fall in with that mad principle of the Manichees,⁷ who maintained the devil to be the author of all calamities; as if there could be any evil or affliction in the city and the Lord have no hand in it (Amo 3:6).

If God’s hand be not seen in the affliction, the heart will do nothing but fret and rage under affliction. Those who can see the ordering hand of God in all their afflictions will with David lay their hands upon their mouths when the rod of God is upon their backs! They see that it was a Father Who put those bitter cups in their hands; love that laid those heavy crosses upon their shoulders; grace that put those yokes around their necks; and this caused much quietness and calmness in their spirits.

When God’s people are under the rod, He makes by His Spirit and Word such sweet music in their souls [that it calms] all tumultuous motions,⁸ passions,⁹ and [disturbances].

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in booklet form from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

Thomas Brooks (1608-1680): Congregational preacher; born into a Puritan family and later sent to Emmanuel College, Cambridge; author of *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices*, *The Mute Christian under the Smarting Rod*, and others; buried in Bunhill Fields, London.



⁷ **Manichees** also **Manichaeans** – disciples of Mani (A.D. 216-277), an Iranian philosopher who synthesized Persian, Christian, and Buddhist ideas to form Manichaeism. This Persian (Iranian) Gnostic religion was one of the major religions of the ancient world. Augustine was a Manichaean before his conversion to Jesus Christ. A special feature of the system was that Satan was represented as co-eternal with God.

⁸ **tumultuous motions** – chaotic, disorderly changes; commotions.

⁹ **passions** – feelings; emotions.