

A Lord's Day Snippet!

Biblical And Southern Studies

H. Rondel Rumburg, ThM, DMin

508

1 How gracious and how wise
Is our chastising God!
And O! how rich the blessings are,
That blossom from his rod!

2 He lifts it up on high,
With pity in his heart;
That ev'ry stroke his children feel
May grace and peace impart.

3 Instruct thus, they bow
And own his sov'reign sway;
They turn their erring footsteps back
To his forsaken way.

4 His cov'nant love they seek,
And seek the happy bands
that closer still engage their hearts,
To honour his commands.

5 Submissive, Lord! we yield
To discipline divine,
And bless the pains that make us still
More uniformly thine.

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)

God and Affliction

"The Almighty ... is excellent ... he will not afflict."

Job 37:23

The question that comes to mind is: What does that mean? "The Almighty ... will not afflict!" If He is the one who dispenses judgment and plenteous justice, it means that He will *not* afflict without cause! The context establishes and qualifies this interpretation. Therefore, we know that God exercises affliction in His divine will and purpose. However, our majestic God does not afflict outside of who He is in the combination of His attributes or His person. Thus, when He afflicts there is a justified cause and holy reason. Another thing is that this great God is not champing at the bit, so to speak, to afflict, but He does

so reluctantly. It is a condescension of God to afflict, but He would rather not need to afflict. God is not pleased by having to afflict. He does not “have ... pleasure in the death of him that dieth” as a result of judgment; therefore, repent or turn from sin (Ez. 18:31-32). God is pleased by repentance. Out of necessity He causes grief, but His desire is to “have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies,” but why is that true? “For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lam. 3:32, 33). So, we see God is not pleased by having to afflict as would please a fiend. Joseph Caryl noted that “when He [God] afflicts, it is as it were a work of His hand, not of His heart, yea a work that He would gladly rid His hands of. What once that cruel tyrant Nero said when he was to sign a warrant for the execution of an offender, ‘How glad should I be if I could not write my name.’” Our God desires to be noted for the excellency of His power and the plenteous nature of His justice, because He does not desire to afflict overtly but does so out of His necessity. God would be satisfied if He never had to use His almighty power against His creation.

Job took an unusual position toward his afflictions: “Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, And said, Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither; the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly” (Job 1:20-22). Here was a man who understood the nature of God as well as man, and submitted himself to God’s divine and unerring providence. When God is your Father, your God, and the rock of your salvation then He will make your children who forsake His law, and walk contrary to His will, to be afflicted; it is “then” He “will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes” (Psalm 89:26, 30-32).

God is not controlled by a passion for revenge because He is an infinitely just and holy God. However, He says that vengeance is His alone to allocate. The Psalmist noted, “O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself” (Ps. 94:1). Here was an acknowledgment of the divine prerogative and a request for Him to use His vengeance as the following verses note. Vengeance is strictly restricted for the use of the infinitely pure and holy God who exercises limitless power, holy justice, and loving anger. The Lord tells us, “To Me belongeth vengeance, and recompense” (Deut. 32:35). Jehovah asserts it and His Word is complementary.

When the Lord judged he asked, “Where are your gods ... let them rise up and help you ... neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand... I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me” (Deut. 32:37-41). God concludes, “Rejoice, O ye nations, with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and will be merciful unto his land, and to his people” (Deut.

32:43). Paul the Apostle picks up part of Deuteronomy 32:35 when he pleads, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19). Clearly Paul postulated by divine inspiration that we are not to try to avenge ourselves, but we are to leave it in the hands of the God who will impeccably do right. We are to “give place unto wrath” or make room for wrath by getting out of the way for the Lord to handle the situation. “If any man dares to take into his own hands the vengeance which belongeth to God, it will recoil ...” (Robert Haldane). God has taken it upon Himself to avenge His people; they cannot do so themselves because they are not omniscient to know the fullness or the intricacies of what is needed in such a just recompense. Only God knows perfectly the motive and acts behind what was done. We must take God’s word for it, for He said, “I will repay, saith the Lord.” Paul explained, “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

Considering affliction as presented in our text we conclude that the Almighty who is majestic in His person and works; who is beyond comprehension; who is excellent in power; who is profound in judgment and justice is reluctant to afflict. If He were to afflict who could stand against Him? “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand” (Ps. 130:3)? The answer is no one could stand. This Almighty One cares for Job and His people who reverence Him as Jehovah issue in “a book of remembrance ... for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him” (Mal. 3:16, 17).

Joseph Caryl the Puritan noted, “As God is most bountiful in giving, so is He most merciful in forgiving. This holds the head of believing and repenting sinners above water, and keeps them from sinking into the bottomless gulf of despair, that they have a forgiving God to go unto, and that there is none like Him in forgiving.... God dealeth with sinners in measure, because He dealeth with them in a Mediator. Though He be great in power, yet He will not afflict according to the greatness of His power or the plenty of His justice.”