

***"I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right,  
and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."***

Psalm 119:75

This is the Christian's acknowledgment--fully satisfied with the dispensation of God. This is his confidence--so invigorating to his own soul--so cheering to the church. The Lord's dealings are called *his judgments*--not as having judicial curses, but as the acts of his justice in the chastening of sin. (1 Pet. iv. 17.) Perhaps also--as the administration of his wise judgments in their measure and application. (Jer. x. 24. Comp. Isa. xxvii. 8.) But here is not only the confession of the Lord's general judgment, but of his especial *faithfulness* to himself. And this he *knew*--not from the dictates of the flesh (which would have given a contrary verdict), but from the testimony of the word (Deut. xxxii. 4), and the witness of his own experience. (Verse 137; cxlv. 17.) It could not be doubted--much less denied--*"I know, O Lord, that thy rules of proceeding are agreeable to thy perfect justice and wisdom; and I am equally satisfied, that the afflictions that thou hast laid upon me from time to time, are only to fulfil thy gracious and faithful promise of making me eternally happy in thyself."* Blessed fruit of affliction! when we can thus "see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"--that his "thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil!" (Jam. v. 11. Jer. xxix. 11.) "The patience and faith of the saints" teach this difficult but most consoling lesson, in deciphering the mysterious lines in God's providence.

The child of God under the severest chastisement must acknowledge justice. Our gracious reward is always more--our "punishment always less, than our iniquities deserve." (Ezra, ix. 13. Comp. Job, xi. 6.) "Wherefore should a living man complain?" (Lam. iii. 39.) In trouble he is indeed--but not in hell. If he complain, let it be of none but himself, and his own wayward choice. *I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right*--and who can doubt the wisdom? Who would charge the operator with cruelty, in cutting out the proud flesh, that was bringing death upon the man? Who would not acknowledge the *right judgment* of his piercing work? Thus, when the Lord's painful work separates us from our sin, weans us from the world, and brings us nearer to himself, what remains for us, but thankfully to acknowledge his righteousness and truth? Unbelief is put to rebuke; and we, if we have indulged suspicion "that God hath forgotten to be gracious," must confess, "This is our infirmity." (Ps. lxxvii. 7-10).

This assurance of the Lord's perfect justice, wisdom, and intimate knowledge of our respective cases, leads us to yield to his appointments in dutiful silence. Thus Aaron, under his most afflictive domestic calamity, "held his peace." (Lev. x. 1-4.) Job under a similar dispensation was enabled to say--"The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!" (Job, i. 21. Comp. 22:10.) Eli's language in the same trial was, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." (1 Sam. iii. 18.) David hushed his impatient spirit--"I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it." And when Shimei cursed him, he said, "Let him alone; let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him." (Ps. xxxix. 9. 2 Sam. xvi. 11, 12.) The Shunamite, in the meek resignation of faith, acknowledged--"It is well." (2 Kings, iv. 26.) Hezekiah kissed the rod, while it

was smiting him to the dust--"Good is the word of the Lord which you hast spoken." (Isa. xxxix. 8.) Thus uniform is the language of the Lord's people under chastisement--*I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right.*

But the confession of justice may be mere natural conviction. (Exod. ix. 27. Judges, i. 7. 2 Chron. xii. 6.) Faith goes further, and speaks of *faithfulness*. David not only acknowledges God's right to deal with him as he saw fit, and even his wisdom in dealing with him as he actually had done, but his *faithfulness in afflicting*--not his faithfulness *though he afflicted*--but *in afflicting him*; not as if it were consistent with his love, but as the very fruit of his love. It is not enough to justify God. What abundant cause is there to praise him! It is not enough to forbear to murmur. How exciting is the display of *his faithfulness* and love! Yes--the trials appointed for us are none else than the faithful performance of his everlasting engagements. And to this cause we may always trace (and it is our privilege to believe it, where we cannot *visibly* trace it) the reason of much that is painful to the flesh. (Ps. lxxxix. 30-32. Deut. viii. 16. Comp. Ps. cvii. 43.) Let us only mark its gracious effects in our restoration<sup>1</sup>--instruction (Verse 71, and texts),--healing of our backslidings (Hos. ii. 6, 7, 14), and the continual purging of sins (Isa. xxvii. 9; xlvi. 10. Zech. xiii. 9. John, xv. 2)--and they say--'Is not the *faithfulness* of God gloriously displayed?' The Philistines could not understand Samson's riddle--how "Meat could come out of the eater, and sweetness out of the strong." (Judg. xiv. 14.) As little can the world comprehend the fruitfulness of the Christian's trials; how his gracious Lord sweetens to him the bitter waters of Marah (see Exod. xv. 23-25), and makes the cross not so much the punishment as the remedy of sin. He finds therefore no inclination, and he feels that he has no interest in having any change made in the Lord's appointments, revolting as they may be to the flesh. He readily acknowledges that his merciful designs could not have been accomplished in any other way; while under trials many sweet tokens of love are vouchsafed, which, under circumstances of outward prosperity, could not have been received with the same gratitude and delight.

You that are living at ease in the indulgence of what this poor world can afford, how little does the Christian envy your portion! How surely in some future day will you be taught by experience to envy his! The world's riches are daily becoming poorer, and its pleasures more tasteless; and what will they be, and how will they appear, when eternity is at hand! Whereas affliction is the special token of our Father's love (Heb. xii. 6. Rev. iii. 19), conformity to the image of Jesus, and preparation for his service and kingdom. It is the only blessing that the Lord gives, without requiring us to ask for it.<sup>2</sup> We receive it, therefore, as promised, not as threatened; and when the "peaceable fruits of righteousness,"<sup>3</sup> which it worketh in God's time and way, spring up in our hearts, humbly and gratefully will we acknowledge the *righteousness* of his *judgment*, and the *faithfulness* of his corrections.

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1 Verse 67, and texts referred to on that verse.

2 Philip. i. 29. Lord Bacon remarks, that 'prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity is the blessing of the New, which carries the greater benediction, and the clearer revelation of God's favour.'--*Essay on Adversity*.

3 Such as patience, experience, hope--the work of tribulation. Heb. xii. 11; with Rom. v. 3-5.