

Affliction Sanctified

Quotations from Richard Sibbes

1. Whatsoever is good for God's children they shall have it, for all is theirs to further them to heaven; therefore, if poverty be good, they shall have it; if disgrace be good, they shall have it; if crosses be good, they shall have them; if misery be good, they shall have it; for all is ours, to serve for our greatest good.

2. God's children have these outward things with God Himself; they are as conduits to convey His favour to us, and the same love that moved God to give us heaven and happiness, moves Him to give us our daily bread.

3. God pities our weakness in all our troubles and afflictions; He will not stay too long, lest we put forth our hands to evil; He will not suffer the rod of the wicked to rest upon the lot of the righteous (Psalm 125.3).

4. Is it not an unreasonable speech for a man at midnight to say, "It will never be day"? So it is an unreasonable thing for a man that is in trouble to say, "O Lord, I shall never get free of this; it will always be thus with me."

5. God takes a safe course with His children, that they may not be condemned with the world. He permits the world to condemn them, that they may not love the world. The world hates them, that they may not love the world; that they may be crucified to it, the world is to be crucified to them. Therefore they meet with such crosses and abuses and wrongs in the world. Because He will not suffer them to perish with the world, He sends them afflictions in and by the world.

6. Glory follows afflictions, not as the day follows the night but as the spring follows the winter; for the winter prepares the earth for the spring, so do afflictions sanctified prepare the soul for glory.

7. When God visits with sickness, we should think (in the use of means) our work is more in heaven with God than with men or with medicine. When David dealt directly and plainly with God and confessed his sins, then God forgave them and healed his body too.

8. Christ chiefly manifests Himself to the Christian in times of affliction because then the soul unites itself most closely by faith to Christ. The soul in time of prosperity, scatters its affections and loses itself in the creature, but there is a uniting power in sanctified afflictions by which the soul (as in rain the hen collects her brood) gathers his best affections unto his Father and his God.

9. Though God deliver us not out of trouble yet He delivers us from the evil of trouble, from despair in trouble, by supporting the spirit. Nay, He delivers by trouble, for He sanctifies the trouble to cure the soul, and by little troubles He delivers us from greater.

10. There are in the world many of the poor who yet are exceeding proud, but God sanctifies outward poverty to His children so that it promotes true poverty of spirit. As they are poor, so they have a mean esteem of themselves; it makes them inwardly more humble and more tractable to God's government. Therefore when we are under any cross let us observe how it works, see whether we join with God or not. When He afflicts us outwardly, whether inwardly we be more humble. When He humbles us and makes us poor, whether we become also poor in spirit. When God designs to humble us we should labour through grace to abase ourselves and mortify pride.

11. Whatsoever God takes away from His children, He either supplies it with a much greater favour or else with strength to bear it; God gives charge to others to take care of the fatherless and widow and will He neglect them Himself?

12. It is a true rule in divinity that God never takes away any blessing from His people but He gives them a better; when Elijah was taken from Elisha into heaven, God doubled His Spirit upon Elisha; if God take away wife or children, He gives better things for them. The disciples parted with Christ's bodily presence, but He sent them the

Holy Ghost.

13. The reason why the world sees not the happy condition of God's children is because their bodies are subject to the same infirmities with the worst of men, nor are they exempted from troubles; they are also subject to fall into gross sins, and therefore worldly men think, "Are these the men that are happier than we?" They see their crosses but not their crowns; they see their infirmities but not their graces; they see their miseries but not their inward joy and peace of conscience in the Holy Ghost.

14. It were a thousand times better for many persons to be cast on a bed of sickness and to be God's prisoners, than so scandalously to abuse the health that they have had continued so long.

15. God takes it unkindly if we weep too much and over-grieve for the loss of a wife, child or friend, or for any cross in the things of this life, for it is a sign we fetch not that comfort from Him which we should and may do. Nay, though our weeping be for our sins, we must keep a moderation in that: we must with one eye look upon our sins and with the other look upon God's mercy in Christ, and therefore if the best grief must be moderated, much more must the other.

16. He to whom this pilgrimage is over-sweet loves not heaven as he should; yet the pleasures of this life are so suitable to our nature that we would sit by them, only that God follows us with several crosses, therefore let us take in good part any cross, because it is out of heavenly love that we are exercised, lest we should surfeit upon things here below.

17. There is no condition but a Christian picks good matter of it, as a good artist sometimes will make a good piece of work out of bad materials to show his skill. A gracious man is not dejected over-much with abasement, nor lifted up over-much with abundance, but by faith carries himself in a uniform manner becoming a Christian in all conditions. Whereas those that have not been brought up in Christ's school nor trained up in a variety of conditions, they learn to do nothing. If they abound, they are proud; if they be cast down, they murmur and fret and are dejected, as if there were no divine providence that ruled the world.

18. A Christian will not do even common things but first he sanctifies them, he dedicates himself, his person and his actions to God, and so sees God in all things, whereas a carnal man sees reason only in all that he himself does. But a Christian sees God in crosses to humble him, and everything he makes spiritual; yet because there is a double principle in him, there will be some stirring of the flesh in his actions, and sometimes evil will appear most; but here is the excellency of a Christian's state, that the Spirit will work it out at the last; He will never let his heart and conscience alone till it be wrought out by little and little.

19. There is not only a mystery but a depth in the mystery, as of election and reprobation, so of providence. There is no reason can be given why some of God's children are in quiet and others are vexed, why one should be poor and another rich. "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Psalm 97.2); you cannot see Him; He is hid in a cloud, but "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne." Howsoever He may wrap Himself up in a thick cloud that none can see Him, yet He is just and righteous; therefore when anything befalls us for which we can see no reason, yet we must reverence the Lord and adore His counsels and submit to Him who is infinitely wiser than we.

20. Gracious persons in times of peace and quiet often underprize themselves and the graces of God in them, thinking that they lack faith, patience and love, who yet when God calls them out to suffer crosses, eminently by His grace shine forth in the eyes of others in the example of meek and quiet subjection.

Taken from *Divine Meditations*