

## The Fiery Trial

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"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." 1 Pet. 4:12, 13

What various, what strange ideas most people have as to the nature of true religion. I suppose there are few persons in this so-called Christian country, except those whom sin has altogether brutalised, the waifs and strays of humanity, the vagrant outcasts of society, who do not acknowledge the necessity of some kind of religion, by means of which they may hope to escape hell and win heaven. But when we leave vague, general ideas, and come to examine clearly their opinions, what ignorance do we see displayed on every side as to the nature of that religion of which they admit, and are forced, almost in spite of themselves, to admit the necessity. We never see this ignorance more signally manifested than on those occasions when true religion is presented before their eyes. But let me here, before I proceed further, define what I mean by true religion. I understand then, thereby, such a religion as we find laid down in the word of truth. It is not what *I* may think, nor what *you* may think to be the true religion which determines its nature, but it is, so to speak, what God thinks. Our thoughts, as merely our own thoughts, are valueless; but the thoughts of God's heart are truth itself. But where shall we find these thoughts expressed except in his own word, in and by which he has revealed his mind to the sons of men? Take this then as my plain and fixed meaning, that when I speak now or at any other time of true

religion, I mean nothing less and nothing more than that religion which God has revealed in the Scriptures, and which he works by his own power in the hearts of his people. Now when this religion is presented before the eyes of man, it is so different from their fixed conceptions of it that some at once pronounce it as little less than a species of mental extravagance, a kind of insanity, the end of which is almost sure to be the lunatic asylum. Others who will not go to such a length as to call it actual derangement, yet think that religion is a poor, gloomy, miserable affair, which cuts men off from all the pleasures and enjoyments of life, and makes this world, instead of being a happy world, as God intended it to be, a scene of unnecessary, self-inflicted gloom, sadness, and melancholy. Having no idea of any other pleasure or of any other happiness than what this life affords, and not being able to enter into anything which is spiritual and heavenly, and as such has a glory of its own, they shrink from a system which seems to deprive them at a stroke of every source of worldly enjoyment. Others again—and these are chiefly professors of religion—take just an opposite view of the case, and think that true religion consists in being always happy, being always comfortable in one's mind, always able to believe in Jesus Christ, having no doubt nor fear as to our state and standing, and taking matters pretty well for granted that all is right between God and the soul. This they say is both our duty and our privilege, upon the simple ground that we ought to take God at his word, and believe the promises without any particular anxiety to know whether they belong to us, or any special application of them to our heart.

But I need not dwell any longer on the various and erroneous ideas generally entertained as to the nature of true religion. When, however, we consider the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, and that the natural man cannot receive nor

understand the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, we need not wonder at this almost universal ignorance. What seems more surprising is, that even those in whom the work of grace is begun, and of whom we should expect better things, are often very ignorant as to the real character of the kingdom of God. We have a remarkable instance of this in the case of the disciples of our Lord previous to the day of Pentecost. We find continually in the gospels proof of their carnal views, and how little at that time they entered into the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God which our Lord came to establish. As an instance, immediately after Peter's noble confession that Christ was "the Son of the living God," when our Lord began to speak of his "suffering many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and being killed and rising again the third day," how was this preaching of the cross received by Peter? We read that he took him and began to rebuke him, saying, "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." He would thus have diverted our Lord from the cross, from the very work of redemption which he came to accomplish. But how instantaneously the gracious Lord rebuked his ignorant disciple: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." (Matt. 16:22, 23.) Take another instance. Two of his most favoured disciples, the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were so ignorant of the spiritual nature of the Lord's kingdom, that they asked that one might sit on his right hand and the other on his left in his glory. This glory they believed to be the glory of an earthly kingdom, for at that time they had no idea of any other; and in that royal reign over all nations their carnal ambition prompted them to desire the highest and most exalted place in preference to all the other disciples. Nay, even after the resurrection, the disciples generally put to our Lord this question, whether he would at that time

restore the kingdom to Israel: as if they were all looking for a worldly kingdom, in which Israel should have dominion over the nations of the earth.

But though we wonder at their ignorance, still it is instructive to see from their example that there may be true grace in the heart, real faith and hope and love, even where there is much ignorance in the understanding; and I have no doubt that there are now many persons whose judgments are extremely weak and whose minds are on many points much uninstructed, who yet possess the fear of God and believe in his dear Son. This does not imply, much less sanction a state of permanent ignorance. Childhood is one thing, but to be always a child is another. With the disciples, this ignorance was only for a season, until the day of Pentecost was fully come, when they were baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire. When that sacred Comforter and holy Teacher came down with his gifts and graces into their souls, he corrected all these misconceptions, and showed them that the kingdom of God was not in word but in power; that it was not meat and drink, or anything carnal and earthly, but "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." What a conspicuous change, for instance, it made in Peter! With what decision, power, and boldness he spoke, who a short time before had trembled before a servant maid; and what an evidence was thereby afforded that the Lord who had gone up on high had received gifts for men, and had sent them down with power from heaven.

Now it is this same Peter who, in after years, nearly 30 perhaps, wrote this precious Epistle to the Church of God. He writes as "an elder," both in age and station, who had been a witness in the past of the sufferings of Christ and would be in the future of the glory that should be revealed. But observe the language in which, as matured by the furnace and

ripened by the Holy Ghost for the crown of martyrdom, which he was soon to wear, he writes in the words of our text to the saints. He bids them not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial which was to try them, as though some strange thing happened to them; but on the contrary, rather to rejoice as being thereby partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when his glory should be revealed, they might be glad also with exceeding joy.

This is the subject which, with God's help and blessing, I shall bring before you this evening; and in opening up the mine of experimental truth which here lies before us, I shall endeavour,

I.—*First*, as the Lord may enable, to enter a little into *the fiery trial* which is to try the saints of God.

II.—*Secondly*, to show that we are not to *think it strange* concerning this fiery trial, as though some *strange thing* happened unto us when we are put into this fiery furnace; but,

III.—*Thirdly*, rather to *rejoice*, and upon these two grounds: first, as being thereby *partakers of Christ's sufferings*; and, secondly, as thereby fitted to rejoice with *exceeding joy* when his *glory shall be revealed*.

I.—Peter, though he thus speaks, well knew the weakness of our faith, and that we do think it strange when we are first put into the fiery trial. He meets us therefore upon that ground, that we may not be discouraged nor cast down when the day of trial comes, but be prepared for it, as that which is intended by God for us to experience, and which is common with us to all his family to endure.

But though this is most suitable and excellent counsel, yet it is only when we have passed through some measure of the fiery trial, and have learned in it those lessons which God designs us to learn therein and thereby, that we are able to understand or accept this advice. How indeed can it be otherwise? Does it not seem contrary to the very nature and spirit of the gospel as a message of pure mercy, a revelation of the wondrous and unspeakable love of God? Is not the gospel a proclamation of pardon, peace, liberty, and joy? What does it say as such, and where does it speak as such of fiery trials? How contrary too is it to the experience of new-born souls and the joys of manifested salvation. When the soul is first blessed with any enjoyment of gospel blessings, how little it expects or anticipates that these should be followed by any trial so fierce as to be called "fiery." And yet so certain is the trial, sooner or later, to come that Peter prepares us beforehand to expect it, and bids us not think it strange, as if some strange thing happened to us, and we were the only persons called upon to experience it.

But my object at present is not so much to dwell upon the strangeness of the trial, which will come before us presently, as to set before you in some measure and describe the fiery trial itself.

i. And first, as to the *reason* why it is so named. It is so called mainly for two reasons: first, on account of its *fiery nature* or inflammatory character, as containing a fire in it, or bringing a fire with it. Now our heart being full of combustible material, when this fire comes, it finds *that* in our nature which it at once lights up, and often puts into a state of fervid combustion. But secondly, it is called a fiery trial in allusion to the usual way of *purifying metals*, there being no other mode generally practised whereby the dross can be separated from the ore except the furnace. Bear then these

two things in mind when I speak of the fiery trial which God brings upon his people, as we may be better prepared thereby to enter feelingly and experimentally into its true nature and character.

1. The first fiery trial which God brings upon them is by the application of *his holy law*, which is called in the word of truth "a fiery law." "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints; from his hand went a fiery law for them." (Deut. 33:2.) And well is it called "a fiery law," for when it was given, we read: "And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly." (Exod. 19:18.) It was in this fire that the Lord descended, for he "came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount," to manifest the character of that fiery dispensation. To this David seems to allude when he says, "A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." (Psa. 97:3, 4, 5.) And thus the apostle says, "Our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:29.) This part of the divine character is little known. He is thought to be a God all mercy; but his holiness, his purity, his justice, his majesty, his greatness, his sovereignty, his anger against sin, his determination by no means to clear the guilty, the awful vengeance which he takes upon his enemies, his eternal and unspeakable displeasure against the unbelieving and the impenitent are little apprehended. He is at present long-suffering and forbearing, and is waiting to be gracious; for "behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." His dear Son is now sitting upon a throne of mercy and grace, able to save them to the

uttermost that come unto God by him. But it will not always be so. When he leaves the throne of grace and takes his seat upon the throne of judgment, then a fiery stream will issue and come forth from before him, then "all the proud, yea, and all they that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." (Mal. 4:1.) And be assured that when his indignation bursts forth against sin, it will burn to the lowest hell. What is hell but the manifestation of the fiery indignation of God against sin? What is Tophet, with all its burning flame, but the pouring out of the wrath of God upon guilty sinners to all eternity? Now the law is a manifestation of this displeasure, a revelation of this righteous anger of God; so that when the law enters a sinner's conscience as a revelation of the wrath of God against sin, it is a fiery law, because it manifests the anger and indignation of him who is a consuming fire. What then does it effect? It burns up the combustible material which it finds already laid in the heart. Our pride, our self-righteousness, our creature strength, our free-will, our legal hopes and fleshly expectations, with everything in us to which we can look or on which we can hang, that they may save us or recommend us to the favour of God, all are burnt and consumed in this fire: for it spares nothing which it can reach or destroy.

But I said that it was called "a fiery trial," not only because it met with and set on fire our combustible material, but because it instrumentally purged away the dross and tin, and brought forth the gold, liberated from this drossy material. As then the furnace does not burn up or destroy the gold, though it purges away the dross, so the law never consumes any true faith which God may have given, but by removing from it the dross with which it is surrounded makes it shine all the brighter.



2. But take another instance of this fiery trial, viz., *temptation*.

All God's saints do not go into the same depths under the fiery trial of the law, for we must not in this, or in other points, set up a rigid standard. They know sufficiently of the guilt, bondage, and condemnation which it produces in their conscience to burn up their self-righteousness, and to convince them thoroughly that there is no salvation by the works of the law, and that by it no flesh can be justified. But all the quickened saints are not equally burnt in this flame, nor pass through an equal measure of condemnation and guilt under its weight and burden. Yet as there must be some kind of equality amongst the family of God, we often find, what I may call, a law of compensation, so that what they fall short of in one thing they seem to make up in another. Thus I have often thought, that those who at the first outset do not go so deep under the law, are often far more deeply exercised with the fiery trial of temptation. Thus what they seem to lose in one point they gain in another—the defect in one scale being made up by a greater weight put into the other.

Now what does temptation meet with in my breast but everything which is suitable to its nature? I am a heap of combustible material; I have everything in my nature alive to sin, yea, in itself nothing but sin. Temptation is the spark to the gunpowder; temptation is the torch to the sheaf; temptation is the lightning to the conductor; temptation is the midnight adulterer that enters into close embrace with the evils of my heart, and by their adulterous union, sin is begotten, conceived, and brought forth. James has opened this point very clearly: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust

hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:14, 15.) Now do not mistake me. I do beg and entreat you not to misunderstand, and still more not to misrepresent my meaning. I am only speaking of the natural tendency of temptation, as meeting the evils of our heart. I am not saying that a child of God complies with, gives way to it, or is overcome by it. But he is tempted, which is his misery more than his sin. James tells us to "count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations," which he could not do if temptations were sins; nay, he adds, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." (James 1:12.) But temptation would have no effect or influence, unless I had that in my breast to which temptation was fully suitable. If I had no pride, no unbelief, no infidelity, no covetousness, no lust, no presumption, no despondency, temptation to pride, to unbelief, to infidelity, to covetousness, to lust, to presumption, to despair, could have no influence upon my mind, and would not deserve the name of temptation. But my nature being a mass of combustible material, ready to go off with the faintest spark, when temptation comes, unless God interpose, the spark and the gunpowder meet together, and what an awful explosion there would be unless the showers of heaven wet the powder and prevent the catastrophe.

But what a purifying effect experience of temptation produces; what a separation it makes of the dross from the ore. If a man has a grain of faith in his soul, temptation will discover it; if he has a particle of living hope, temptation will bring it to light; if he has a grain of love, temptation will extract it from the ore; if he has any patience, any humility, any fear of God, any desire to be right, any dread to be wrong, any honesty, any sincerity, any integrity, in a word, if

he has any vital power in his soul, anything of the grace of God in his heart, temptation will make it manifest, as the hot flame of the furnace, acting upon the crucible, manifests the gold by breaking up its alliance with the dross. You scarcely know whether you are a believer or an unbeliever until you pass through temptation. You do not know what the nature of faith is as a divine gift and a spiritual grace, unless you have passed through this fiery trial. You do not know the worthlessness of creature religion, the emptiness of everything in self, until you have been put into the furnace of temptation. We are tempted sometimes, perhaps, to doubt the truth of the Scriptures, the Deity of Christ, the efficacy of his atonement, and many things which I will not even hint at in your ears lest I unwittingly sow infidel seeds in your heart. Now when we are thus exercised, temptation as a fire burns up everything that stands in the wisdom and strength of the creature, and brings us to this point, that nothing but that which is of God in the soul can live in the flame. If then we find there is that in our heart which lives in the flame, that there is a faith which temptation cannot burn up, a hope it cannot destroy, a love it cannot consume, a fear of God which it cannot conquer, then we see there is that in our heart which is like pure gold in the midst of the dross, and can say in some measure with Job, "When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

3. But take again the wide range of *personal trials*, since they also in their connection and in their consequences form a part of the fiery trial. You have all your trials. Some of you, like myself, have bodily trials, an afflicted tabernacle, a weakly body, shattered nerves, a sickly frame; and this is your daily cross, bound hard and fast upon your shoulders, which gives birth to many exercises, and is the fruitful parent of many severe sufferings and painful feelings. Others of you have deep family trials, either in the way of bereavement of

those so near and dear by nature's ties that the separation has been almost rending your heart asunder; or circumstances may have been so distressing as to render their life worse than their death, and the conduct of the living more afflicting than the bereavement of the dead. Through them disgrace may have come into your family, or reproach cast upon the truth of God; or you may have ungodly children, riotous and dissolute, whom neither love nor anger can restrain, who only grieve your heart, injure your property, and bring a blot upon your reputation. This is your trial. Others have pecuniary trials, being deeply tried in providential circumstances. These heavy providential trials are not confined, as people often think, to the poor of the flock who live on wages or alms; but many in better circumstances of life, who maintain, and are obliged to maintain, even for business sake, a respectable appearance, are more deeply tried in providential matters than the day labourer or skilled mechanic who receives his weekly wages, and has no heavy bills to meet, no payments to provide for, rates and taxes to make up, servants and assistants to feed and pay, no unsaleable stock, sinking credit, or loss of customers. I have often thought that none feel the pressure of providential trials more than persons in a small way of business, or so overborne by the weight of a bad situation, heavy losses, and unlooked for circumstances, that they are daily expecting they must close their shutters. And I do believe also that though other trials may be more keen, yet none are, if I may use the expression, so *gnawing* as trials in providence. They rest with such a weight upon the mind, so occupy and engross the thoughts, and are often attended with such forebodings that they seem to eat up a man's very heart. Like a worm in a bud, they lie concealed from peering eyes, for they can rarely be spoken of, and yet are eating out the very vitals of comfort. These, then, also form a part of the fiery trial, and for this reason: they work so much upon

the corruptions of our heart, meet with so much of that unbelief and infidelity, that doubt and distrust, despondency and foreboding of future ill, all which lie deeply embedded in our very nature, and form materials so combustible and so easily set on fire. O the unbelief, the despondency, the trembling apprehension, sometimes painful rebellion. O the peevishness, murmuring, fretfulness, discontent, and almost worse than all, that miserable self-pity which seems like a gangrene to eat into the very vitals of all rest, happiness, and peace. May we not well call this a fiery trial, as setting on fire those wretched evils of our nature, which, if not sins in the eyes of men, are flagrant sins in the eyes of a tender conscience, and flagrant sins in the eyes of him who readeth the heart?

But I cannot enlarge further upon the various fiery trials which form a part of that furnace of affliction in which God hath chosen Zion—that fire through which the Lord has promised he will bring the third part. In former days, open persecution, even martyrdom, imprisonment, loss of all earthly goods, tortures, and cruel mockings were a large part of the fiery trial. These outward persecutions have in a great measure now ceased; and yet while the enmity of the heart against God and his people remains the same, there will always be "the scourge of the tongue," and the feeling if not the expression of scorn and contempt against all who live godly in Christ Jesus.

But though these fiery trials often set on fire the combustible materials of our corrupt nature, yet what a purging, cleansing efficacy there is in them when we come to examine the effect produced by them. How, for instance, they bring to light any grace of the Spirit which God may have implanted in your breast. How faith and hope and love, how prayerfulness, watchfulness, humility, brokenness, contrition,

separation from the world, spirituality of mind, and communion with God in prayer and meditation,—how these graces of the Spirit, these fruits of his divine operation are called as it were into living exercise, as the inward spirit becomes separated from the dross of self-righteousness and the tin of creature religion. There is no greater clog in the exercise of spiritual acts than the intermixture with it of a carnal religion. It is like tying together a dove and a vulture, like yoking to the same plough a wild horse and a tame one, a mad bull and a patient ox, or, according to the scriptural figure, like dross mingled with pure ore. How can your faith rise into view and brightly shine whilst mingled with the dross? How little are the grains of gold seen when they are interspersed through a vast mass of useless ore! It is as in Australia and California where the stones broken for the roads had gold in them, of which nobody knew till a skilful eye discovered the shining grains. But when the ore is put into the furnace and the gold is separated from it by the skill of the refiner, how bright it appears, with what lustre it shines. So in grace. Give me an exercised child of God; give me one who knows the fiery trial: I shall see the grace of God shine brightly in him. I shall see him purged from that miserable self-righteousness, that arrogance of spirit, that towering presumption, and that daring claim upon God which so many make who have never been in the furnace. I shall see him humble and broken, tender and childlike, and what religion he has, though small it be in bulk or appearance, yet to experienced eyes bright and shining, because of the life, power, and reality of God stamped upon it.

But there are other trials besides those which I have already mentioned, and which I may especially call *spiritual* trials, as connected with a man's inmost spirit, and what he suffers from as possessed of a new and divine nature. These spiritual trials form a very large and influential portion of the

fiery furnace, in which God tries his people as by fire; I mean thereby the chastisements of God as holding in his hand the rod of the covenant, the hidings of his face, the suspension of his visible and manifested favour, and tokens of his displeasure against us. These indeed are a fiery trial, because they in a peculiar way set on fire the many evils of our heart, such as peevishness, fretfulness, murmuring, bitter complaints, often causing great dejection of mind, with despondency of spirit, and almost the casting away of our confidence in God. One would think that when the Lord chastises us for our follies and makes us sorely smart for our backslidings, we should be patient, resigned, and submissive, kiss the rod, and acknowledge how justly we have brought it down upon our own backs. And so, indeed, in God's own time, we shall do, for he will lay it on until he brings us thoroughly down, and will sometimes mingle drops of sweetness with it, which will break the heart and soften the spirit. But this is not done at once, nor for the most part at the first. It requires time for the medicine to work and for the rod to produce its effect. Meanwhile the fiery trial is stirring up the deep corruptions of our fallen nature, and will do so till the fire has spent itself, begins to burn low, and the corruptions rather smoke and smoulder than maintain their former flame.

Still with all this we come to the same point. A blessing is couched in this fiery trial, as manifested by the results and consequences. How sin is thereby manifested as exceedingly sinful; how base backslidings are brought to view, repented of, confessed, and mourned over; what tenderness of walk is created before God, lest we should again offend, and be brought into the same circumstances of his visible displeasure; what a sight and sense of our case, state, and condition by nature as so utterly ruined and completely undone, and what a view of the thorough fall of man, with all

its consequent inability and helplessness. What views, too, as favoured at times, of the sovereignty of God in salvation; what discoveries of the Person and work, blood and righteousness, sufferings, sorrows, and dying love of the Lord the Lamb; what faith in him, hope in his mercy, and love to his name are brought to light and brightly shine as the fruit of the furnace. Thus, this fiery trial, though on one side it discovers, and sets on fire every evil of the heart; yet on the other, how it cleanses and purifies the soul from all its dross and tin, brings to light, and blessedly manifests where and what the grace of God is, and how it can live in the midst of the flame.

II.—But if this be the case, well might Peter, to come to our second point, write, "*Think it not strange* concerning the fiery trial, as though *some strange thing* happened unto you." But why are we not to think it strange? For several reasons.

1. First, we are not *the only persons* who are thus exercised; we are not the only individuals who ever have been or ever will be in the furnace of affliction. It is common to the whole election of grace; it is the appointed lot and portion of all the dear family of God. If therefore we belong to the election of grace; if we have a part and lot in the family of God, we are not to think it strange if that comes upon us which comes universally upon them. We should rather think it strange if we were not so tried. Exemption from affliction would be not a mark for us, but a mark against us. If the Lord has "chosen Zion in the furnace of affliction;" if "the fire is to try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3:13); if "many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psa. 34:19); if "he bring the third part through the fire" and "the other two parts are cut off and die;" if "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6); if we have "to suffer with Christ that we may be also glorified



together" (Rom. 8:17), then to be out of the way of affliction would be to be out of the way of life and salvation. This may teach us rather to hug the cross than try to thrust it away, and rejoice in tribulation rather than fret and murmur under it.

2. Again, we are not to think it strange, as if there were something in the dispensation *contrary to the wisdom and mercy of God*; as if God went out of his way in some extraordinary manner, and it was inconsistent with the general purport of his dealings. When we are first put into the furnace, we think it strange. We may not have had much intercourse with those of the family of God who have passed through the same trial; or if we have, their conversation may have fallen upon inattentive ears. We have heard them tell about their trials; but we not having had hitherto any experience of them listen carelessly, nor do their words much touch our conscience or much reach our heart. We therefore prefer for our companions those who like ourselves are young in the way, and seem to know more of the sweetness of the gospel than of its trials and afflictions. When then we are for the first time put into the fiery furnace, how strange it seems to be, from our previous ignorance of it. And is not this true of almost every new path into which we are led? Is it not something like entering for the first time into a foreign country, where everything and everybody seem alike new and strange? The first time the light of conviction entered your conscience, did you not think it strange work that the law to which you had looked to save was now the law that condemned; that the ladder which you thought would land you in heaven would be more likely, from your inability to mount it, to let you down into hell; and what you hoped to gain God's favour by was only a means of manifesting his awful displeasure? Was not that strange? And was it not strange, too, that the law, which is holy and just and good,

should stir up sin in your heart, set on fire your combustible nature, and, as it appeared to you, give birth to a host of evils that you had never seen or felt before? Do you suppose that Paul did not think it strange when he found "the commandment which was ordained to life to be unto death?" Would not he who had been so zealous for the law, and "touching the righteousness" which it commanded, had considered himself "blameless," be surprised to find that this very law was the strength of sin, and that sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived him and by it slew him? Had not you something of the same experience, and wondered how it was that you could not keep the law, and that the more you tried the worse you were? So in a similar way when you were put into Peter's fiery bath of temptation and trial, when sins that you had never dreamed of were stirred up in your heart, and you were tempted by night and by day to do things from which you would have shrunk, even in your carnal state—was this not altogether strange? When, too, all sorts of blasphemies kept running through your mind, temptations to infidelity, to use language that had never entered your conception, or to doubt the being of a God in whom you had, as you thought, believed from infancy, and of the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures which you had always received at the hand of your parents as God's book; was not this not only strange, but contrary, as it seemed to you, to the wisdom and goodness of God that you should be so exercised? What! that you, a religious man, a man whose whole soul was in search of God and heaven, whose mind was exercised night and day with divine things, who was endeavouring, with all the strength in his power, to be holy, and to have done for ever with sin inwardly as well as outwardly, should be tempted with such thoughts as you believed never found a place except in an infidel, and such blasphemies as you had no conception of, for an oath, it may be, had never passed your lips for many years, if ever, nor

even a desire to utter one. Now for you to have all these things working in your mind, how dreadful it seemed; that a man who had lived a moral life from his boyhood should feel tempted to all manner of profligacy, and that one who had been a believer, as he conceived, of every word that God had spoken, to be tempted to doubt this or that and the other part, if not all, of the word of truth,—was not that strange? You might have had during this fiery trial no one who from the pulpit or in private conversation ever named or alluded to such temptations, or ever brought them before you as an interpreter of the secrets of your heart. You might never have heard any one speak, or might never have read any book from which you could gather that any of the children of God had been so exercised; nor did you know that this was a part of the fiery trial which few of them escape. All this made it seem more contrary to the wisdom and goodness of God. It was this which so puzzled Job, exercised Asaph, distressed Heman, and half killed Jeremiah. All these had to walk in this path of temptation and trial, and for the most part without friend or companion. How mournful are the words of Job, "Thou hast made desolate all my company;" "My friends scorn me, but mine eye poureth out tears unto God." Heman cried out in the bitterness of his soul: "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." (Psa. 88:18.) And Jeremiah, "I sat alone because of thine hand, for thou hast filled me with indignation." Now it is this want of an interpreter, of friends and companions, which much adds to the strangeness of the trial. This indeed, I may add, was much my own case when I was first led into it. I had never heard of experimental ministers, read experimental books, or had any acquaintance with the experience of God's people. What I learnt, whether of law or gospel, misery or mercy, myself or Christ, sin or salvation, I had to learn for myself and by myself, without the intervention of any book or minister, church or chapel. It was

therefore, so to speak, doubly strange to be brought into these trials without having ever heard that such or similar things had been known by any one upon earth. But I remember well what a lift I got in those days from reading Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," and some rough notes of his own experience, which had been, as it were, jotted down by Joseph Milner, the author of the Church History. I found in them both such a description of their temptations and trials, that it was, as Solomon speaks, "as in water face answereth to face so the heart of man to man." But I have no doubt it was good for me to have no such helps from preaching and books, as many have been favoured with; and I have thought some times if ever I have been able as a minister to describe the difference between natural and spiritual religion, to take forth the precious from the vile, and to show the distinction between the mere professor and the living possessor, it has been in the hands of God much for this reason, that it was worked out in my own mind without any human help. I thus saw and felt more plainly and clearly the distinction between the work of faith with power and that natural religion in which hundreds live and die contented. I do not despise, nay, I think highly of the gracious helps which God gives to his tempted and tried people both from the pulpit and from the writings of his servants. But I have always thought that we learn things best when we learn them without human help, and get them directly from the Lord without passing through any other channel. I have long felt so, and feel so still to this day. But some such experience is necessary. How am I to put my hand upon your heart unless I know my own? How can I, like a detective, go into the very courts and alleys of human nature and lay hold of the thief who hides himself in them unless I have a clue by having myself threaded these back slums of the heart; and not lived all my life like a Court lady in a West-end square? Of course I mean only inwardly not outwardly,

experimentally not practically. A minister who does not know the turnings and windings of his own heart can never track out the sins that lie so deep in the hearts of others. In my judgment, the best detective in the pulpit is a man who knows most of his own heart, and can enter into the trials, temptations, and exercises of others by having some personal experience of these things in his own soul. How wistfully, how earnestly is many a poor child of God often listening for a word from the minister which may touch upon his trials and exercises; what relief it often gives him to find that a servant of God is no stranger to his temptations, and is thus able to speak a word in season to him that is weary. Have you not sometimes come with a heavy burden of temptation and trial pressing you down, looking and longing for some relief or help, but have gone away and got nothing? Not a syllable was dropped that touched upon your case, and you went away worse than you came. It is needful therefore that a minister should know for himself the fiery trial, and not deal with it as some strange thing which, not knowing himself, he deems it strange for others to know, but may describe it and open it up as far as he can, so as to speak a word of consolation to the distressed and exercised family of God.

III.—But to pass on to the next point which we proposed to consider, where the apostle bids us *rejoice* under the fiery trial instead of being cast down and distressed by it.

You will observe that he bids us rejoice upon two grounds: 1, first, that we are thereby partakers of Christ's sufferings; secondly, that when his glory shall be revealed we may be glad also with exceeding joy. Let me endeavour to unfold these two blessed causes of rejoicing.

i. God has predestinated all his people to be conformed to

the image of his dear Son. Now that image is twofold: his suffering image as a man of sorrows as when he was upon earth, and his glorified image as he now is at the right hand of the Father in heaven. To both of these images we have to be conformed; for we must be conformed first to his suffering image here, that we may be conformed to his glorified image hereafter; in other words, we must be partakers of his sufferings upon earth that we may be partakers of his glory in heaven. Now the fiery trial puts us into a fellowship with the sufferings of Christ.

1. He knew, as revealed in his conscience, the burning indignation of God in a *fiery law*. Do we not read that he was "made of a woman, made under the law;" yea, that he was himself "made a curse for us?" What else was his experience upon the cross, when the anger of God, due to our transgressions, fell upon him, as standing there in our place and stead? He bare our sins in his own body on the tree. O what a solemn letting down of the wrath of the Almighty into the innocent bosom of our harmless, undefiled Representative when he sustained the whole weight of our sins which would have sunk us into the lowest hell! Then and there our gracious Lord went through the fiery trial, by baring his bosom to the fiery law, and, by fulfilling it to the uttermost, put it for ever away.

2. Again, our gracious Lord experienced *temptation* in every shape and form, for the word of truth declares that "in all points he was tempted like as we are, yet without sin." I wish to speak very cautiously upon this subject, for upon a point so difficult and so mysterious there is great risk of speaking amiss. So long as we keep strictly within the language of the Scripture we are safe, but the moment that we draw inferences from the word without special guidance by the Spirit of truth, we may greatly err. You may think then,

sometimes, that your temptations are such as our gracious Lord never could have been tempted by; but that word of the apostle decides the question—"in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." It is a solemn mystery which I cannot explain, how temptation in every point, shape, and form could assail the holy soul of the immaculate Redeemer. I fully believe it. I see the grace and wisdom of it, and my faith acquiesces in it as most blessed truth. But I cannot understand it. I know also and believe from the testimony of the word and that of my own conscience, that whatever temptation he was assailed with, not one of them could or did sully, stain, or spot his holy humanity. *That was* absolutely and perfectly a pure, unfallen, immortal nature, able to die by a voluntary act, but having in itself no seeds of sickness, mortality, or death. And yet I read that, though thus possessed of a holy, pure, and spotless humanity, in everlasting union with his own eternal Deity, in all points he was tempted like as we are. I cannot explain the mystery—I do not wish to do so. I receive it as a mystery, in the same way as I receive that great mystery of godliness, "God manifested in the flesh." But still I bless God that he was tempted in all points like as we are; for it makes him such a sympathising High Priest with his poor, exercised, tried, tempted family here below. I have sometimes compared the temptations which beat upon the soul of the Lord to the waves of the sea that dash themselves against a pure, white marble rock. The rock may feel the shock of the wave; but it is neither moved by it nor sullied. It still stands unmoved, immoveable in all its original firmness; it still shines in all the brightness of the pure, glittering marble when the waves recede and the sun breaks forth on its face. So none of the temptations with which the Lord was assailed moved the Rock of Ages, or sullied the purity, holiness, and perfection of the spotless Lamb of God.

3. And so with the other trials which our gracious Lord had to experience. He felt them all but was injured by none. Some trials indeed our Lord seemed exempt from; at least so far exempt that he could not have a personal experience of them. Take, for instance, *family* and *domestic* trials. Our Lord had no family, except that there were relatives on his mother's side. But our Lord was so separated from all family ties that he could not be said to have family trials as we have. And yet he had them by sympathy. He wept at the tomb of Lazarus, so as to enter by sympathy into the trial of Martha and Mary, though Lazarus was not brother to him as he was to them. And may we not indeed say that as our near kinsman, our Goel, the Lord has a large family to suffer with? for "in all their afflictions he was afflicted." We are "members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones;" and in this sense the trials and afflictions of the family are the trials and afflictions of their Head, Husband, and Brother.

4. But again, our Lord had no personal experience whatever of *bodily afflictions*. There was no sickness in him; there could not be. Had he had the seeds of sickness, he would have had the seeds of mortality; and had he had the seeds of mortality, he would not have had a spotless, unfallen, but a corrupt nature like our own. He had, therefore, a perfect immunity from all sickness; and yet he bore our sickness by sympathy. We therefore read, that when he healed all that were sick, it was "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." (Matt. 8:17.) He could not have experienced them actually and personally, except by possessing a fallen nature; he therefore entered into them by sympathy. Let me illustrate this. Have not you sometimes had a sick child, a sick husband, or a sick wife; and you, though not ill yourself, yet so sympathised with them in their sickness, that you felt it almost as if it were your own? How



that hacking cough went through you; how that croupy bark pierced you; how that loud groan or suppressed moaning racked you; how that pale, convulsed, dying face haunts your memory still. Perhaps you felt by sympathy more than they felt in reality. Thus we see that there is a suffering by sympathy where there is not a suffering in person. In our gracious Lord this sympathy, from the very purity and exquisite perfection of his sacred humanity, was of the tenderest kind, and therefore beyond all conception and beyond all comparison.

5. But other trials our gracious Lord had a large personal acquaintance with: such as *providential* trials, subsisting as he did upon alms, for a bag was carried by Judas and in that bag were deposited such small sums as were sufficient to procure those necessaries of life which our gracious Lord, as a part of his blessed humility partook of with his disciples.

6. But he had an experience also of *persecution*, opposition, contempt, and all that the malice of man could devise, until it rose to that culminating act of daring iniquity to hang him as a malefactor upon the cross.

Now our gracious Lord had no corruption in him as we have to make his sufferings and temptations a fiery trial to him in the first sense which I explained that it is so to us. It stirred up no corruption in him, for there was none in him to stir up. He could say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" and again, "Behold the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." Yet as calling forth every fruit and grace of the Holy Ghost, who dwelt in him without measure, it eminently drew forth and displayed the fruits of the furnace. When the gracious Redeemer hung upon the cross, what strong faith in God, what depending trust, what holy confidence, what blessed hope, what sweet humility, what

calm resignation to the last breath, before he gave up the ghost and committed his departing spirit into the hands of God. How the fiery trial called forth in him every grace and every fruit of the Holy Ghost; and how all these fruits of the Holy Ghost, for they were such, shone eminently forth in the Redeemer's example when he was wounded for our transgressions and was bruised for our iniquities; when the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we were healed.

We are then to rejoice, inasmuch as by the fiery trial we become partakers of Christ's sufferings, are baptised into his death, drink of his cup, and know what it is in some measure to have fellowship with him in the garden and upon the cross. Thus you have cause to rejoice that God has taken you out of the world, chosen you from among men, and is graciously conforming you to the suffering image of his dear Son, that as you suffer with him you may also be glorified together.

ii. But this leads us to the second reason which the apostle gives why we should rejoice in and under the fiery trial; "that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

The words, I think, will admit of a double interpretation; first, the revelation of his glory *now* as a spiritual, experimental reality; and secondly, the revelation of his glory *hereafter*, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and be admired in all them that believe. We will look briefly at both.

1. There is then a revelation of the glory of Christ upon earth, to be known, seen, felt, and enjoyed *even in this time-state*. Our Lord therefore said of his disciples to his heavenly Father, "The glory which thou hast given me, I have given

them, that they may be one as we are one." Similar is the testimony of John: "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." When Christ is revealed to the soul, he is revealed as a glorious Christ. The glory of his Deity, the glory of his humanity, the glory of his complex Person, Immanuel God with us, all shine into the soul, when he manifests himself. It is as the apostle beautifully expresses it: "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." And see the effect. "We all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." O a revelation of the glory of Christ, what a memorable blessing to those who have ever enjoyed it, as I hope some of us here present have. How it makes up for the fiery trial. How the pain and the suffering vanish, are lost out of sight, and nothing is then seen but the glory of Christ as revealed to the soul.

2. But there is the *coming* glory, when the Lord Jesus shall appear with all his saints in the clouds of heaven; for though he seems to delay his coming, yet surely he will come a second time without sin unto salvation. Yes, he will come attended by thousands and tens of thousands of the saints now in glory; for he will raise their sleeping dust and change into his own likeness those who are still alive at his coming, that they may all enter into his glory and so be for ever with the Lord. O what a day of solemn rejoicing will that be to the saints of God, when those who have carried his cross will wear his crown, when those who have been partakers of his sufferings will be partakers of his glory, when the righteous will shine like the firmament, and those who have turned many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever.

God help you in the furnace, if any here present are now therein, to bear all, to believe all, and patiently endure all that God shall lay upon you. It will be well with you in the end. You will bless him for the furnace, for his helping hand in it, and his deliverance out of it, and the happy result in a personal revelation of the glory of Christ to your soul now, and at the last day of the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, to fill your souls with immortal joy.