

A WORD FOR THE AFFLICTED

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Come and let us return to the LORD: for He hath torn and He will heal us; He hath smitten and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us: in the third day He will raise us up and we shall live in His sight. Hosea 6:1,2

The God Who is the Father of all who believe in Jesus is a God of infinite grace, boundless love and matchless mercy. But He is also a God of holiness, righteousness and justice. Although these attributes no longer terrify true believers because they know that the just judgment of God has been satisfied by the sacrifice of their Substitute, yet they know that it is taught in scripture that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth” (Hebrews 12:6).

The text above emphasises this truth. It reveals a God who tears and smites but also a God who heals and binds up. It may seem strange to read of God “tearing and smiting,” but when He does so we may be sure that He tears His children in order to teach them and smites them in order to sanctify them. Yet, because He loves His own with an everlasting love, His promise is that however hard the affliction He lays upon them, He will heal and He will bind up the very wounds He has Himself inflicted.

We should learn firstly from this text that our trials come from God. Some may put them down to ill-fortune, others may blame their fellow men or the devil, but it is a wise course to recognise that ultimately all trials come from God. Whether He permits them, as when He gave Satan permission to afflict Job, whether He allows circumstances to work against us or whether He intervenes immediately in our lives, it is all the same for it is God alone who “worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Ephesians 1:11).

We will do well in any and every difficulty to say with Eli, “It is the LORD: Let Him do what seemeth Him good” (1 Samuel 3:18). Remember what we read of Aaron: he “held his peace” when his two sons were slain by fire because it was “the fire of the Lord” (Leviticus 10:2-3). Similarly the psalmist said, “I opened not my mouth because Thou didst it” (Psalm 39:9).

If we learn this lesson, it will deliver us from unnecessary and sinful murmuring and will be an incentive to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and to learn from trials the lessons He would teach us.

We may draw a lesson from natural history. The Psalmist wrote, “I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green bay tree” (Psalm 37:35). No axe is laid against such a one, no disease rots his leaves. But believers are compared to the vine which bears fruit and every year at the proper season the pruner ruthlessly cuts away many of its branches and shoots. And why? “That it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2).

Now it is apparent from the context of the verse (see Hosea 5:14 and cf 13:7f) that when we read of the Lord “tearing,” there is a comparison to a lion rending its prey. The Lord seems suddenly to bring us down by terrible trials. When Hezekiah was afflicted he compared God’s dealings with him to a lion breaking his bones (Isaiah 38:13). But Hezekiah also gives the reasons for God’s dealings with His children in so apparently harsh a manner, “Oh Lord, by these things men live and in all these things is the life of my spirit; so wilt thou recover me and make me to live” (Isaiah 38:16).

Similarly, when we read that the Lord not only tears, but smites, it indicates again the severity of a trial - as though we are beaten black and blue. But once again the word of God

provides the key: "The blueness of a wound cleanseth away evil" (Proverbs 20:30). There is always a purpose in the trials our loving Father lays upon his children.

But what shall our response be if we feel that the Lord has been tearing and smiting us? Our text tells us: "let us return to the Lord" - to that very God who has torn and smitten us. And if we have been exercised by the trials laid upon us, He will receive us, He will heal us, He will bind us up again. As the surgeon, who lays his patient upon the operating table and cuts him deeply, intends that his patient be healed, so our gracious God, "Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (Lamentations 3:32). God never afflicts without having an intention to heal and bind up. Though we may feel troubled and cast down, yet the text contains a blessed promise, "After two days He will revive us." There may be a period of darkness but it will end, for the text goes on, "in the third day He will raise us up and we shall live in His sight." As the Scottish Paraphrase says:

*Come let us to the Lord our God
With contrite hearts return;
Our God is gracious, nor will leave
The desolate to mourn.*

*His voice commands the tempest forth,
And stills the stormy wave;
And though His arm be strong to smite,
Tis also strong to save.*

*Long hath the night of sorrow reigned;
The dawn shall bring us light;
God shall arise and we shall rise
With gladness in His sight.*

Oh my dear friends, our God is abundantly willing to pardon, to heal, to bind up. We must seek to imitate Him. Do any of us consider that we have been more greatly offended by *anyone* than our God has by *every one* of us? And if He, the glorious, thrice-holy sovereign of heaven and earth will receive us: if we read of Him, "To the Lord or God belong mercies and forgivenesses though we have rebelled against Him," what possible reason can we have for acting coldly towards any of our fellows? Let us dread the thought of being like that unhappy servant who, having been forgiven a huge debt by his master went out and refused to forgive one of his fellow servants a very trifling debt (Matthew 18:23-35).

Let us take courage in all our afflictions - we are in the hand of the God who loves us. As David said, after his foolish decision to number the Israelites, "Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord for very great are His mercies" (1 Chronicles 21:13). However He deals with us, it is for our good. Though He has torn, He will heal us; though He has smitten, He will bind us up. Let us seek to learn and profit from our trials.

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11).