

Concerning the Consolation of God.

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee?—Job 15: 11.

These are the words of Eliphaz, one of those three friends of Job who blundered dreadfully over his case. Their words are not to be despised; for they were men in the front rank for knowledge and experience. Eliphaz says, "With us are both the grayheaded and very aged men, much older than thy father." Their errors were not the superficial mistakes of fools, but the profound reasonings of men of light and leading. Their utterances are, at least, equal to anything our learned men may have to say on the same problem. May God the Holy Spirit enable us to consider these questions that we may be profited thereby!

If we are indeed believers in the gospel, and are living near to God, our consolation should be exceeding great. Passing through a troubled world, we have need of consolations; but these are abundantly provided by our God, and their influence upon us should be exceeding great. We ought not to be unhappy, for we have joy urged upon us by the precept, "Rejoice in the Lord always;" and that precept is in substance often repeated. It is both the duty and the privilege of Christians to be of good cheer; if we are not glad, even amid our trials, there is a reason for it, and we shall do well, at this time, to use the text as a candle by which to search out that reason. "Are the consolations of God small with thee? is there any secret thing with thee?"

I. Our first question follows the interpretation given by most authorities: "Do you regard the consolations of God as small?" Do you judge that the comforts of faith are insignificant? "Are the consolations of God too small for thee?"

What are these consolations of God? The more you know of them the more ground will you see for believing that they must be great. They are the "consolations of God." If God himself designs to comfort men will he not greatly cheer them? Knowing human sorrow, and stepping from the height of his glory to comfort it, is it conceivable that he will labor in vain? Do you think that the All-sufficient cannot provide consolation equal to the affliction? The consolations we speak of are applied by the Spirit of God; and to prove how earnestly he performs his work, he has taken the name of "Comforter." Will the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, think you, come to any human heart with insufficient consolations? Will he trifle with our griefs? Can it be that he does not know how to give sunlight when our day is dark with sorrow? Think not so. Moreover, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God, is the substance of those consolations. He is called "The consolation of Israel." Can man have Christ to be his portion and yet be poor? Can a man have Jesus for his joy and yet be weighed down with sadness? Might he not well ask, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" I cannot for a moment dream of a joyless Christ.

See again, my friend, these consolations of God deal with the source of sorrow. Whence came the curse, but from the sin of man? Jesus has come to save his people from their sins. Those thorns and thistles which now rend our flesh are not the natural fruits of the earth as God created it. Sin sowed all these. The consolations of God deal with sin. As for the guilt which we have incurred, and the inevitable punishment, both are removed by pardon full and free. Jesus bore the guilt of sin and put it all away by his death upon the cross; and, in consequence, sin can be blotted out. Is not this the grandest of all consolations—the consolation of God? When we lay hold on Jesus and receive forgiveness, affliction may remain, but sin is gone forever; and hence the affliction itself loses its bitterness. Sin reigning in the heart is the death of peace, but the dethronement of the usurper is provided for, and hence another divine consolation. Until we get the mastery over evil we must be uncomfortable; but the consolations of God assure us of a new heart and a right spirit, and of a power supreme and divine, which enters the nature of the believer, and subdues, destroys, and at last annihilates the propensity to sin. Is not this a rich and rare consolation? Comfort which left us under the power of evil would be dangerous comfort; but comfort which takes away both the guilt and the power of sin is glorious indeed. Dream not that it can be small!

Remember, too, that the consolations of God reveal to us a reason for the sorrow when it is allowed to remain. There is a needs-be that we are in heaviness. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." If suffering be a fire, the consolations of God assure us that it is a refining fire, which only consumes our dross. Do you not think that the comfortable fruits of righteousness, which are brought forth in those believers who are exercised by trial, are the source of great comfort to the afflicted of the Lord?

Another reflection sweetly cheers the heart of the tried one during his tribulation, namely, that he has a comrade in it. We are not passing through the waters alone. We have a fellow-sufferer, of whom we read, "In all their

affliction he was afflicted." Our Lord drank long ago of that cup whereof we sip. He knows the sting of treachery, the stab of calamity, the spit of scorn, for he was "in all points tempted like as we are." Many of us have found this to be an eminent comfort. Do you not think it must be so? Has not many a man, at the sound of another's voice, been cheered in the darkness of the night when pursuing a dangerous way? Has not the presence of a stronger and wiser one acting as guide been quite enough to remove all dread? If the Son of God be with us, surely there is an end of every sort of fear.

Does he not use this as his own note of cheer, saying, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee?"

Besides, "the consolations of God" lie also in the direction of compensations. You have the rod; yes, but this is the small drawback to heavenly sonship, if drawback indeed it be. You have become a son of God, and "what son is there whom his father chasteneth not?" You are an heir of God, joint heir with Jesus Christ; and in accepting heirship will you not cheerfully take the cross therewith, seeing it is part of the entail? It is true that you have special sorrow; but then you have the royal nature to which that sacred sorrow is a witness. God has given to you a nature that wars against evil; hence these tears!

Would you be of the seed of the serpent and have your meat as plentiful as dust? Would you not far rather be of the seed of the woman, and have your heel bruised? What is the bruising of the heel compared with the eternal dominion to which that seed is predestined? Compensations abound in every case of trouble. You have lost your child, but you believe in the resurrection. You will die yourself, it may be; but you shall rise again from the dust. You have lost your property, but you are an heir of all things in Christ Jesus. You have been persecuted; but in this you rejoice as a partaker of the sufferings of Christ. The compensations of the covenant of grace are so overflowing that we call our troubles "light afflictions, which are but for a moment," and they work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Besides, there is one consolation, with which I finish; not because I have completed my list, but because time does not permit me to enlarge; there is the consolation that you are on your journey home, and that every moment you are coming closer to the eternal rest. When we once reach heaven we shall forget the trials of the way. An hour with our God will make up for a life of pain. You languish on that bed, but if you languish into immortality you will no more remember your anguish. When your head wears the crown and your hand waves the palm, you will count it all joy that you were thought worthy to be persecuted for Christ's sake.

O sirs, we have the best of it! Whatever trouble may come to us as Christians, so much more of joy comes with it, that we have the best of the bargain. We give up drops of poisonous delight, but we dive into rivers of ineffable joy. The Christian's joy far excels the best that earth can afford. Grace is the dawn of glory. Faith brings heaven down to us, while love bears us up to heaven. Celestial fruits are gathered upon earthly ground by those who look up for the manna. Let us begin the song which with sweeter voices we shall continue, world without end—"Unto him that loved us and saved us in his own blood, be glory forever!"

Still I fear there are some to whom it appears as if the joys of religion and the consolations of God were small. Let them correct their mistake, for the truth is far otherwise.

II. But now a second question comes up which will come home to many Christian people. Have these consolations been small in their effect upon you? Have these consolations, though great in themselves, been small in their influence upon you?

But it may be, dear friend, that you once did joy and rejoice. Well, then, is it of late that you have lost these splendid consolations, and come down to feel them small with you? I suggest to you that you observe what alteration you have made of late. Is it that you have more business and have grown more worldly? You cannot get out to prayer-meetings now, nor to week night services. "No," you say, "I cannot; and if you knew what I have to do you would not blame me." Just so, a little while ago you had not so much to do, but you chose to load yourself with an extra burden, knowing that you would not be able to get so much of spiritual food as of old. Somewhere in that line you will find the reason why your joy has declined. If anybody said to me, "The days are darker now than they used to be," I should remember that the sun is still the same. Perhaps my friend has not lately cleaned his windows, or he has not drawn up his blinds, and that is why he thinks there is less light. It is very possible to be much more in the dark than you need to be. The gloom may be in the eyes rather than in the heavens. May I suggest a little looking at home, that you may see why your former blessedness is gone?

Do you reply to me that you do use the means of grace? Do the outward means fail to bring you the consolation they once did? To what means do you refer? Are you as much in prayer as ever? and is prayer

less refreshing than it used to be? Do you read the Scriptures as you formerly did, with the same regularity, attention and devotion? Do you no longer draw the waters of comfort from these wells of salvation? Do you really go on hearing the Word as you once did, with the same hunger for it, and love to it, and yet do you find it unsatisfactory to you? I must again remind you that these things have not altered in themselves, for the ministry is the same to other saints, the Scriptures must be the same and the mercy-seat is not removed. The fault is not in these, but in yourself. Surely, dear friend, some evil thing within you has curdled the milk of blessing and stopped the flow of joy. Search yourselves, I pray you, if the consolations of God are small with you. He has not forgotten to be gracious, neither has he ceased to hear prayer and to speak to his servants through his sacred Word. You shut the door from within; he bars it from without.

It may be that while you are thus without the enjoyment of divine consolation Satan is tempting you to look to other things for comfort. I pray you, touch not the wine-cup if this be placed before you as a means of consolation. A dark hour is often the crisis in the history of a man of God; if he can weather this storm he will have fair sailing. Satan will now be busy to get you to act hastily, or wickedly. It will be whispered to you, "Put your pen to that accommodation bill. Borrow, though you cannot pay. It may be wrong, but you can put it right afterwards." I pray you, do not dream of any means of help which you cannot lay before God. How often have men in offices of trust been tempted to handle money, for just a little while, and then to put it back again! I beseech you, shake this viper off your hand into the fire, for it is a viper. Better suffer anything than do wrong. Keep in the furnace till God bids you come out of it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they found themselves walking safely in the midst of the flames, and saw Nebuchadnezzar standing at the mouth of the furnace, did not leap out to assail the tyrant. Not they; they stayed till they came out with honor. Brother, seek not consolation in policy, in trickery, in falsehood. Do not seek it in over-haste. Many a man who has run before the cloud has had to slink back again. Many a man who has taken a knife to carve for himself has cut his fingers. Do not be tempted to think that you can find better comforts than God can give you. Look not to man, but let your expectation be in God alone. If you have despised the consolations of God by setting them below your own efforts, you cannot expect that they should be sweet to your taste. Amend this and you will be happy. Your lack of comfort lies not in the consolations themselves, but in your own heart. Pray God the Holy Spirit to revive the work of grace in your soul, and that being done, either the trouble will grow lighter, or your back will be stronger to bear the burden.

III. Our third question is this—Since the consolations of God appear so small to you, have you anything better to put in their place? Perhaps this is what Eliphaz meant when he said, "Is there any secret thing with thee?" He seemed to say to Job, "We cannot tell you anything. You will not hear us. Have you some wonderful discovery of your own? Have you some secret cordial, some mystic support, unknown joy? Have you discovered a balm of greater efficacy than ours, a cure-all for your sorrow?" Let me ask you a similar question. If God's gospel fails you, what will you do?

Have you found out a new religion with brighter hopes? I do not think you have, for the prognostications of modern thought are dreary enough! Moreover, I have been informed by those who know most about it, that the theology of the future has not yet crystallized itself sufficiently to be defined. As far as I can see, it will take a century or two before its lovers have licked it into shape, for they have not yet settled what its shape is to be. While the grass is growing, the steed is starving. The new bread is baking; the arsenic is well mixed within it; but the oven is not very hot, and the dough is not turned into loaf yet. I should advise you to keep to that bread of which your fathers ate, the bread which came down from heaven. Personally, I am not willing to make any change, even if the new bread were ready on the table; for new bread is not very digestible, and the arsenic of doubt is not according to my desire. I shall keep to the old manna till I cross the Jordan, and eat the old corn of the land of Canaan. Are you hopeful of finding comfort in new speculations? Is that the "secret thing?" Then you feed upon the wind.

Are you hoping to find comfort in the world? Will you be happy if you manage to get that position? If you pass that examination? if you save so much money? I beseech you, do not play the fool: there is no consolation in all this. Observe for yourselves. The richest men have often been the most miserable, and those who have succeeded best in rising to places of honor have been worn out in the pursuit and disgusted with the prize. Wealth brings care, honor earns envy, position entails toil, and rank has its annoyances. Vain is the hope of finding a spring of consolation in anything beneath the moon. Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

IV. Here comes the most practical question of all, and with this I close. If it be so, that you have hitherto