

Night of Weeping

Why GOD's Children Suffer

by Horatius Bonar

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CHAPTER 7

THE PROVING

THERE ARE NO BEINGS about whom we make so many mistakes as our own selves. "**The heart is deceitful above all things,**" and besides this, the "**deceitfulness of sin**" is unsearchable. So that when the deceitfulness of our heart and the deceitfulness of sin come together, we need not wonder that the effect should be ignorance of ourselves.

Besides, we are unwilling to search. We shrink from the exposure which such a scrutiny would make. No doubt the consciousness of being forgiven takes away much of this reluctance. We are not so unwilling to know the worst when we are assured that however hideous the pollution thus dragged to light, it can never come between us and GOD. For with GOD all is peace.

The blood that sprinkles us has made it a simple impossibility for GOD ever to be angry with us again. So that we come to realize in some degree the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven; our spirit is "**without guile.**" We have no object now in concealing anything from GOD or ourselves. We become open, frank, straightforward. Still the search is a painful one, and we would rather postpone it. It might bring many things to light which would shock and humble us. It might alarm us with the extent of the evil which still remains in us, even though it could not bring us into condemnation. Hence, we are slow to learn, or even to inquire into, the evil that cleaves to us still.

Moreover, we are not at all persuaded that there is so very much evil in us. We do not know ourselves. Our convictions of sin have been but shallow, and we are beginning to imagine that the conflict between the flesh and the spirit is not so very fierce and deadly as we had conceived it to be.

We think we have rid ourselves of many of our sins entirely, and are in a fair way speedily getting rid of all the rest.

The depths of sin in us we have never sounded; the number of our abominations we have never thought of marking. We have been sailing smoothly to the kingdom, and perhaps at times were wondering how our lot should be so different from the saints of old. We thought, too, that we had overcome many of our corruptions. The old man was crucified. It seemed dead, or at least feigned itself to be so in order to deceive us. Our lusts had abated. Our tempers had improved. Our souls were calm and equable. Our mountain stood strong, and we were saying, "**We shall never be moved.**" The victory over self and sin seemed, in some measure, won. Alas, we were blind! We were profoundly ignorant of our hearts.

Well, the trial came. It swept over us like a cloud of the night, or rather through us like an icy blast, piercing and chilling us to the vitals. Then the old man within us awoke, and, as if in response to the uproar without, a fiercer tempest broke loose within. We felt as if the four winds of Heaven had been let loose to strive together upon the great deep within us.

Unbelief arose in its former strength. Rebelliousness raged in every region of our soul. Unsubdued passions resumed their strength. We were utterly dismayed at the fearful scene. But yesterday this seemed impossible. Alas, we know not the strength of sin nor the evil of our hearts till GOD thus allowed them to break loose.

It was thus He dealt with Israel; and for this end He led them into the desert.

"The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart" (Deuteronomy 8:2). Their desert trials put them to the proof. And when thus proved, what iniquity was found in them!

What sin came out which had lain hidden and unknown before! The trial did not create the evil: it merely brought out what was there already, unnoticed and unfelt, like a torpid adder. Then the heart's deep fountains were broken up, and streams of pollution came rushing out, black as Hell. Rebellion, unbelief, fretfulness, atheism, idolatry, self-will, self-confidence, self-pleasing - all burst out when the blast of the desert met them in the face and called Egypt to remembrance with its luxurious plenty. Thus they were proved.

Even so it is with the saints still. GOD chastens them that He may draw forth the evil that is lying concealed and unsuspected within. The rod smites us on the tenderest part, and we start up in a moment as if in arms against GOD. The flesh, the old man, is cut to the quick, and forthwith arouses itself, displaying all of a sudden much of its former strength. When it was asleep we did not know its power, but now that it has been awakened, its remains of strength appall us.

It is not till the sea is "**troubled**," that "**its waters cast up mire and dirt**." When all was calm, there seemed naught but purity pervading it, and ripple folded over ripple in the still brightness of its transparent green. But the winds break loose, the tempest stirs its lowest depths, and then all is changed.

Thus we see it in the saints. When calamity breaks over them like a tempest, then the hidden evils of their hearts awaken. Sins scarcely known before display themselves. The heart pours out its wickedness. Hard thoughts of GOD arise. Atheistical murmurings break out and refuse to be restrained.

Questionings both of His wisdom and of His love are muttered; yea, how often do they assume a more explicit form, and we ask, "If GOD be so loving and wise, why is it thus?"

We could not have expected such treatment at His hands. Distrust and unbelief assume the mastery, and we refuse to acquiesce to His will. It seems hard to be smitten so severely and laid so low. For a while it seems as if the heart were determined to think evil thoughts of GOD and never to think well of Him again. And, though a calm ensues and we become both ashamed and

terrified at our rebelliousness, still the heart has given forth its pollution. We have learned its unsearchable depths of evil. We are led, on the one hand, into deeper views of our own amazing and incredible vileness; and on the other, into fuller discoveries of the abounding grace of GOD. We learn to prize more the open fountain, and we betake ourselves anew for covering to the righteousness of the Righteous One.

It is remarkable that when the saints of old were tried and proved, there was found in them not only evil but the very evil we should least of all have anticipated.

We should have said of Noah, for instance, that he was one whose sobriety and self-restraint would be carried with him to his grave. He stood alone amid a luxurious, sensual, intoxicated world, condemning their lasciviousness and revelry. Yet no sooner is he placed in circumstances of temptation than he falls. Noah becomes drunken!

Again, Abraham stands out preeminent for faith and courage; yet, when he goes to Egypt and Gerar, his faith gives way, and he utters lies through fear.

Lot had withstood all the sensuality and filthiness of Sodom, and his righteous soul mourned over their abominations; yet, scarce is he delivered from the city's destruction than he falls into drunkenness and lust equal to that of the cities that had been consumed.

Job, though marked for his patience, gave way to impatience in the day of trial.

Moses, the meekest of all men, displayed his anger and "**spake unadvisedly with his lips.**"

David was one of the bravest that ever fought the battles of the Lord in Israel, and he had gone out against Goliath with a sling and a stone, yet when he fled before Saul and came to King Achish at Gath, his courage was gone, and he feigned himself a madman through fear of his enemies.

Elijah had stood before kings without trembling to pronounce the sentence of judgment, to shut up the heavens, and to wield the sword of Jehovah's vengeance, though alone amid tens of thousands. Yet he flees before a woman's threat, he gives up all for lost and requests to die.

Ezekiel, whose character shines out as one of singular holiness and obedience, yet records against himself a strange instance of unsubmitiveness, when sent by GOD on an errand of judgment to Israel: "**I went in bitterness, in the heat [marg. hot anger] of my spirit; but the hand of the Lord was strong upon me**" (Ezekiel 3:14).

Peter's attachment to his Lord is one of his peculiar characteristics, yet it was Peter who denied Him.

John was the disciple who seems to have been most like his Master in gentleness and love, yet it was John who wanted to call down fire from Heaven upon the Samaritan village.

Lord, what is man! And what is a human heart - the heart even of thy saints when proved and held up to view? "O heart, heart," said John Berridge of himself, "what art thou? A mass of

fooleries and absurdities, the vainest, wickedest, craftiest, foolishest thing in nature." What deep-hidden evil, what selfishness, what pride, what harsh tempers, what worldliness come out in a moment, when the stroke goes deep into the soul!

How long Job remained steadfast, holding fast his integrity and confidence in GOD! Stroke after stroke laid him prostrate, yet he gave glory to GOD in the midst of desolation and sorrow. The inner circle of self had not been reached. But when a loathsome disease drove him to the dunghill, and his friends rose up against him and addressed him as a man marked out by GOD as guilty then his faith and patience gave way. The very center of his being had been reached and probed; and forth came the stream of impatience and unbelief.

It takes a sharp arrow and a strongly drawn bow to pierce into the inmost circle; yet GOD in kindness spares not. The seat of the disease must be reached, and its real nature brought out to the light.

Of all the evils which are thus drawn forth from the heart of the saint, the worst, and yet the commonest, are hard thoughts of GOD. Yet who would have expected this?

Once, indeed, in our unbelieving days our souls were full of these. Our thoughts of GOD were all evil together. When the HOLY SPIRIT wrought in our hearts the mighty change, the special thing which He accomplished was teaching us to think well of GOD, showing us how little He had deserved these hard thoughts from us, how much He had deserved the opposite. The wondrous tale of manifold love, which the Gospel brought to us, won our hearts and made us ashamed of our distrust. We said then, Surely we shall never think ill of GOD again. **"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."** We thought that affliction would only make us cleave to Him the more. Yet scarcely does He begin to smite us than our former thoughts return. We wonder why He should treat us thus. We suspect His love and faithfulness. Our hold of His grace seems to loosen, as if at times it would wholly give way.

We are like Jonah with his withered gourd. We think we do well to be angry even unto death. GOD does not seem the same loving GOD as when first we believed and tasted forgiveness from His gracious hands. Alas, the treachery of our hearts has been at length discovered. We find that we were not serving GOD for naught.

May He not expostulate with us and ask us, **"Doest thou well to be angry?"**

Would not this question close our lips forever? Doest thou well to be angry or desponding, when GOD hath forgiven all thine iniquities and removed them from thee, as far as the East is from the West?

Doest thou well to be angry when thou art delivered from the wrath to come, as well as from a present evil world, and safely lodged within the clefts of the rock with JESUS as thy companion there?

Doest thou well to be angry when the Father's love is thine assured portion, and the kingdom of the Son thine inheritance forever?

Doest thou well to be angry when the night is far spent and the day is at hand, when the distant eastern clouds are taking on their rosy fringes, and the days tar is preparing to arise? *

* GOD's chastened ones will find many precious words of counsel and consolation in Samuel Rutherford's letters. Having been tried, he knew how to speak a word in season to the weary. Hear some of them, "I wonder many times that ever a child of GOD should have a sad heart, considering what the Lord is preparing for him." "When we shall come home, and enter into the possession of our brother's fair kingdom, and when our heads shall find the weight of the eternal crown of glory, and when we shall look back to pains and sufferings, then shall we see life and sorrow to be less than one step or stride from a prison to a glory, and that our little inch of time-suffering is not worthy of our first night's welcome home to heaven."

"However matters go, the worst shall be a tired traveller, and a joyful and sweet welcome home."

~ end of chapter 7 ~
