

## No Reason for Discouragements

by William Bridge <sup>1</sup>

*The saints and people of God have no true reason for their discouragements, whatever their condition may be.*

David had as much cause and reason for his discouragements here as any other, for he lacked ordinances, indeed, he was kept from the ordinances; therefore, he said in Psalm 42:1-2, “As the hart pants after the water-brooks, so my soul pants after you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” Indeed, after he had known the sweetness of them he was deprived of them, verse 4, “For I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God.” And in this condition he had many enemies; he was in a state of affliction and persecution; his enemies reproached him; they reproached him in the matter of his God, and did that daily, verses 3 and 10, “While they continually say to me, Where is your God? “As with a sword in my bones my enemies reproach me, while they say daily to me, Where is your God?”

And he was now under great desertions. Though the enemies reproached him in the matter of his God, yet if God had been present with him, he would have been well enough; but they said, “Where now is your God?”; and his own heart said so too, that God had left and forsaken him, which was his failing, verse 9, “I will say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me?” Yet for all this he says, “Why are you cast down, O my soul?” As if he were to say, Not only do your enemies reproach you in the matter of your God, but your own heart as well. You are now kept from those precious ordinances which you once enjoyed; yet why should you be disquieted or cast down? There is no reason for it. So that the words speak this truth plainly: A godly, gracious man has no true Scriptural reason for his discouragements, whatever his condition may be.

It was a sad condition that the prophet Habakkuk presented to himself, yet he says, chap. 3, “I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation,” verse 18. But oh, you servant of God, you are now under a threatening, and not under a promise, which makes your very belly tremble; and will you, can you now rejoice? Yes, he says, verse 16, “When I heard, my stomach trembled, my lips quivered at the voice, rottenness entered into my bones; *yet* I will rejoice in the Lord.” But it may be you think this threatening will never be fulfilled. Yes, he says, verse 17, “Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, nor fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the field shall yield no food; though the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no cattle in the stalls: *yet* I will rejoice in the Lord.” But a man may rejoice, though he has no wine to drink or olive to eat, because these are but creature benefits which are for our refreshment: but will *you* rejoice, O prophet, if you lack your daily bread, and such earthly good as there is for our daily nourishment?

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Yes, he says, “Although the field shall yield no food, and the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stall, *yet* will I rejoice in the Lord.” So that whatever a godly man’s condition is, he may rejoice, and there is no true reason for his discouragement.

Indeed, there is no sin so unreasonable, but the sinner thinks he has reason for it; and so the saints and people of God may think that they have reason for their discouragements: hence it is that they have so many whys and wherefores: “Why have you forgotten me?” “Why do I go mourning?” Indeed, they may not only *seem* to have some reason, but, in a natural way, they *have* reason for their discouragements; and therefore David says, “When I saw the prosperity of the wicked, I said, I have cleansed my hands in vain; until I went into the house of the Lord,” Psalm 73. So that, as long as he was in the house of nature, and using natural reason, he saw reason for his discouragement.

Indeed, not only is this so, but take things separately, and consider things piece by piece, one from another, abstracting the means from the end, and thus the saints may have a true and real reason for their discouragements, for every affliction is grievous. If the farmer looks only at the breaking up of his ground, without respect to the harvest, he may well be discouraged; but take both together, and he will not. Thus if the saints consider their breaking up, apart from their harvest, then they may see cause for their discouragements; but if they consider their breaking up and their harvest *together*, the means and the end *together*, I say, take it all together and then, whatever their condition may be, they have no reason to be cast down or disquieted.

What is there *in* or *for* the saints that may be a sufficient bulwark against all discouragements?

I answer: A godly, gracious man has property and an interest in God Himself. There are some special men and women in the world, whom the great God of heaven and earth reveals Himself to, and those who have Him for their God and portion have no reason to be disquieted whatever their condition may be. Thus it is with the saints, and therefore the Psalmist does not merely say that he would rejoice, but that God was “his *exceeding* joy,” Psalm 43:4. Satan may darken this light and joy for a time, but he can never put it out; all the saints and people of God possess this. It is written of Antoninus the Roman Emperor, one of the persecutors in primitive times, that being environed and surrounded by his enemies, by which he and his entire army in the field were likely to be lost for lack of water, he commanded the Christians of his army to pray for rain. Immediate relief came to him, his army was preserved, and his enemies destroyed; upon which he wrote a letter to the Roman senate in favour of the Christians, and gave this commendation of them, “That they were a people who were, *Deo contenti* (content with God) *quem circumferunt secum in pectore* (whom they always carried about with them in their heart)”: indeed, he said in that same letter, “It is very credible, that although we think they are wicked men, *Deum pro munimento habere in conscientia* (they have God in their conscience for their bulwark).” This was a heathen, an enemy, who once confessed he was a persecutor — and shall we not say as much as he did?

Oh, but, say some, *tolle meum et tolle Deum* (take away that word ‘my,’ and take away that word ‘God’); He is no God to me unless He is *my* God; and there are many of God’s people that cannot say, God is *my* God, for they lack assurance; and therefore how can they have comfort in this?

Yes, if my very resting on God makes Him mine, I may have comfort in Him too. Now the saints and people of God may always, and do rest on God; and though Satan says by way of temptation, You have not believed, you have not rested on God; yet they may say, Oh, but now I *do* rest on God; and so they may always have comfort in their property and interest in God.

God always knows them and their conditions. “I know your works, and your tribulation, and your poverty,” says Christ to the church of Smyrna, Rev. 2:9-10: and Christ says this as a relieving comfort to that church, which was in a sad condition; for Christ says, “Satan shall cast some of you into prison ten days. Yet be of good comfort, Smyrna; I know you and your tribulation and poverty; whatever your condition may be, I know you in it.” And it seems this is a general cordial,<sup>1</sup> for it is given to *all* the churches; I know your works, O Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia: it is spoken as a terror, indeed, to Laodicea, for what is most comfortable to the good is most terrible to the wicked, such as the presence of God, the omniscience of God, etc. But to the godly, this is a great comfort: whatever my condition may be, yet God my Father knows it, and knows me in it.

God would not have His people discouraged; and if God their Father and Jesus Christ their Saviour would not have them discouraged, then there is no true reason for their discouragements *whatever* their condition may be. “Let not your heart be troubled,” said our Saviour to His disciples, John 14:1. It was as if to say, I am now to die, to leave you all, to go to my Father; and when I am gone, you will meet with many troubles, but I would not have you discouraged; *let not your heart be troubled*. But, Lord, if You die, we shall then lose Your presence; and what greater trouble or affliction can there be than the loss of Your presence? Well, says Christ, yet I would not have you troubled at heart; *let not your heart be troubled*. But if we lose You, O Lord, we shall lose all the ordinances, and those many sweet opportunities to receive good for our souls which we have enjoyed by your presence. Though it is so, says our Saviour, yet I would not have you troubled at heart; *let not your heart be troubled*. But, Lord, if we lose You we shall be like scattered sheep; some will deny you, all will forsake you; and when the Shepherd is struck, we all, like sheep, shall be dispersed and fall into sad temptations, afflictions and desertions. Well, he says, however it may be, yet I would not have you troubled at heart; *let not your heart be troubled*. This is Christ’s mind, will and pleasure concerning His disciples.

But, you may ask, How does it appear that God the Father would have His people be of the same mind and disposition, never to be discouraged? I answer: It appears plainly, because God has provided promises of comfort, succour and relief, suitable to all conditions. I dare boldly challenge all men to show me any one condition for which God has not provided a promise of comfort, mercy and succour suitable to it.

Indeed, if you look at the promises, and ponder them well, you will find they are so laid out, worded, and moulded, that all discouraging objections may be fully answered, and taken away as they arise. For example, suppose the Church of God is under persecution by enemies. Isa. 54:17, “No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper.” But you will say. Our enemies, O Lord, are many, they rise up against us, and gather into bodies, and unite against your servants; He removes that objection this way in verse 15. “Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not

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<sup>1</sup> A diffusing warmth and friendliness.

by me; whoever gathers together against you shall fall for your sake.” But, you say again, O Lord, they have obtained instruments of death, the whole power of the militia, and ammunition is in their hands. Though it is so, says the Lord, verse 16, “Behold, I have created the smith that blows the coals in the fire, and that brings forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy: no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper.” But, O Lord, they have authority on their side, and they rise against us in judgment. Mark then what follows, verse 17, “And every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment, you shall condemn.” But, you object, this is a promise made to the Jewish Church only, and not to us. Not so; “This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,” verse 17. So that if you are the servants of the Lord, then this promise tells you that it is made to you. But, you object again, we are in an unbelieving condition, and are not able to lay hold of this promise. Well, this promise yet says, “this is the heritage of the servants of the Lord.” Children shall have their inheritance, though for the present they are not able to sue for it; it falls to them in due course. Oh, once more you say, but we may sin against the Lord, and cut ourselves off from this promise and this inheritance. Mark then what follows, “And their righteousness is from *Me*,” says the Lord. Not only is this *promise* from Me, but the *righteousness*, by which they shall believe, and lay hold of it, and walk under it, is from Me, says the Lord. Oh, how graciously this promise is laid out, by which all unbelieving objections may be taken away! So it is with *all* the promises; just observe and mark them. They are so moulded, ordered, and worded, that every word of the promise holds out a distinct answer to your objections. Now if God has so laid out His promises that all unbelieving objections may be removed as they arise, what does this argue, except that God our Father would not have His people discouraged, whatever their condition may be? Therefore they have no reason for it.

There is no matter of *discouragement* which the saints do or can meet with, but there is a greater *encouragement* bound up with it, or comes along with it. God never more graciously appears to His people, than when there is a matter for their greatest discouragement. John lay some years in the heart of Jesus Christ, *while Christ lived*, but he did not have the Revelation given to him then. Christ dies. John is afflicted, persecuted, driven to the Isle of Patmos as an exile; and *there* Christ appears to him, and gives him that blessed book of comfort, the Book of the Revelation. We read of Jacob, who at one time so specially saw the Lord, that he called the name of the place, Peniel, “for I have seen the Lord” (Gen. 32:30), he says. And when was that? It was when churlish Laban was on one side of him, and his rough brother Esau was on the other side, coming against him in a hostile way. Once he had a vision of a ladder, the top of which was in heaven, and its foot on earth; angels were ascending and descending on it. In John 1:51, Christ interprets this to be Himself: “You shall see the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.” But when did Jacob have this vision? Not all the while he was in his father’s house, but after he had fled from the anger of his brother, and was lying in the open field at night, with no pillow but a hard stone to lie on. *Then* Christ appears to him, and makes such a revelation and manifestation of Himself, as he had never made before. And when was it that Mr. Robert Glover was so filled with heavenly joys, that he cried out, “He has come, he has come”? You read of him in the *Book of Martyrs*,<sup>1</sup> that for five years together he was worn out and consumed with fears and troubles. He could neither eat nor sleep, he was so afflicted in his soul upon the apprehension of some backsliding. He thought he must be thrown down to hell when he died. Indeed, he thought, says the story of him, that he could not despair more in hell; yet after this long time of wrestling with this temptation, it pleased God to come in with comforts. But when was this? Why, it was

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<sup>1</sup> Foxe’s *Book of Martyrs* (Knight and Son, London 1856, Rev. Ingram Cobbin, ed.), p. 786.

especially when he came within sight of the stake; then he cried out with clapping hands, “He is come, He is come.” Thus God — with whom there are reserves of mercies — reserves His sweetest consolations for the time of our sourest afflictions, and tempers the one with the other in the most fit proportion.

Indeed, the Lord not only gives encouragement in time of discouragement, and proportions His encouragements to our discouragements, but He turns our discouragements into encouragements and comforts. The Lord caused a deep sleep to come upon Adam, and then He took a rib from his side with which He made a help for him; so God causes a deep sleep to come upon you in your discouragements, out of which He takes a rib, and builds up a help for you, making the very discouragements of the saints contribute to their encouragements. “Behold, says the Lord, I will allure her (that is the church, His people) and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably to her, and *I will give her her vineyards from there*, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope,” Hosea 2:14. But a wilderness condition is a lost condition, and what comfort can one have in a lost condition? True, says God, you cannot — in and by yourselves; but here I will speak friendly and comfortably to her. And of all the times that I choose to preach the gospel to a poor soul, I choose to do it in a wilderness and lost condition. But, you say, though the Lord speaks comfortably to us, yet if we are in a dry and barren wilderness where no food or comfort exists, how can we be anything but discouraged? No, says the Lord, but “*I will give her her vineyards from there*.” But you say again, if we sin and murmur in the wilderness, as the Israelites did, the Lord will cut us off as He did them; and a wilderness is a place of trouble, in which we are apt to murmur, and be discouraged. No, says the Lord, “But *I will give her her vineyards from there*, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope.” The valley of Achor was the valley of perturbation, trouble, and of great discouragement, when the men of Israel fled and fell before the men of Ai for the sin of Achan (Joshua 7:26). Yet it was an inlet to the land of Canaan, to the land of rest. Now, says the Lord, see how it was with them; though the valley of Achor was a valley of trouble and perturbation, yet it was the door by which the Israelites came into the land of rest: so it shall be with you; I will make your troubles and discouragements the very door of your hope. The valley of your discouragements shall be the door and inlet to all your rest and comfort. God takes the same way with the members as He took with their Head; *Christ’s cross was an inlet of glory*. His suffering time was the valley of Achor to His disciples; was it not a door of hope to them, and to all the saints? This is God’s way; discouragements bring encouragements; and the more discouragements the saints have, the more encouragements they shall have. Indeed, their discouragements shall contribute to their encouragements, and be a door of hope to them. Now if the valley of Achor shall be a door of hope by promise, why should we be discouraged whatever our valley of Achor may be, and whatever our condition may be?

A praying man can never be very miserable, whatever his condition may be, for he has the ear of God; the Spirit within to compose it, a Friend in heaven to present it, and God Himself to receive his desires as a Father. It is a mercy to pray, even if I never receive the mercy prayed for; by prayer God comes down to us, and we go up to God. It is the soul’s converse with God on earth, and a great ease to a burdened, troubled spirit; for thereby he may go and empty all his heart into the bosom of his best Friend. Every godly, gracious man is a praying man. More or less, “he prays.” It is spoken of as a proof of Paul’s conversion, “Behold, he prays.”<sup>1</sup> As speech is common to all men, so is prayer to all Christians. None of God’s children is born dumb. As soon

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<sup>1</sup> Act 9.11

as one of your children is born, it cries, and it suckles, and it sleeps. So it is with every man that is born of God. As soon as he is born, he cries to God in prayer, he suckles the breast of the promise, and he sleeps in the bosom of God by divine contentment, being dead to the whole world. It may be that he cannot pray as he would; but though he cannot pray as he would, nor hear as he would, nor perform any duty as he would, yet it may be said of him, "Behold, he prays." Turn him where you will, and "behold, he prays": sick, yet "behold, he prays"; tempted, yet "behold, he prays"; at home or abroad, yet "behold, he prays"; and can he be miserable while he prays? Surely not! Why then should he be discouraged, whatever his condition may be?

If the matter of the saints' discouragements is just a cloud that will blow over and melt away, then is there no reason for their discouragements, whatever their condition may be. Now thus it is with the people of God. Though they are in a very dark condition, yet their darkness is just the darkness of a cloud, and as he said, "Nubecula est, cito transibit" (it is but a cloud, it will soon be over), so they may say concerning every matter of their discouragement. It is dark indeed, but this darkness will soon be over; a storm has come down upon us, but we shall see land again, the shore again; it is just a cloud, just a cloud! And on this account David comforted his own heart here, and checked his soul for his immoderate dejection: "Why are you cast down?" "Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him." I *shall* be delivered; this cloud *will* pass over; it will *not* last, it is just the darkness of a cloud.

But, say you, how shall it appear that it is just a cloud, and the darkness of a cloud? I think it is night, and it is dark night with my soul; indeed, it is such a night that it will never know morning. Indeed, if I did know that the matter of my discouragement was just a cloudy darkness, then I would conclude and say that there is no reason for this discouragement: but how will I know whether this darkness is the darkness of a cloud, or of the night?

If the darkness is such that it comes immediately after the rising and shining forth of the promise, then it is only the darkness of a cloud, not of the night. The sun does not rise to set immediately; and therefore if darkness comes immediately after sun-rising, it is certainly the darkness of an eclipse, or of a cloud, but not of the night. A fair promise rose and shone upon Joseph, when the Lord said, "that his sheaf should be higher than all the sheaves of his brethren." Yet immediately after that a darkness arose upon him; but it was the darkness of a cloud, and not of the night. Why so? Because he had a promise first, which shined upon him. So also David had a fair promise of the kingdom, when he was anointed by Samuel. Yet a darkness soon rose upon him; but it was the darkness of a cloud only, and not of the night. Why? Because it was such a darkness that it arose immediately after the shining forth of a promise. And I ask you to show me any Scripture where you find that any darkness ever arose very soon after the shining forth of a promise, which was more than the darkness of a cloud which vanished away? Or where do you find in all the Scripture that any poor soul ever came into the dark, immediately after the giving of a promise, unless that soul came to the light again? Now as for the darkness that covers the saints, it is usually a darkness that comes after the giving and shining out of a promise; and therefore that darkness is only the darkness of a cloud, and therefore they may say, It is just a cloud — a cloud — and it will pass away.

If a man is somewhat in the dark, yet can see to work and dig pits, then it argues that the darkness is just the darkness of a cloud. A man cannot see to work artificially in the night; but

though there is much darkness because of a cloud, yet he may see to work, and to dig pits, because it is day. Now in Psalm 84 the Psalmist says, at verse 5, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in you, and in whose heart are the ways of those who, passing through the valley of Baca, dig pits; the rain also fills the pits; they go from strength to strength, till they appear before God in Zion.” It is an allusion to a practice of the Jews. When some of them went up to Jerusalem, their way lay through the valley of Baca, which was a very dry valley, where no houses existed, where no water was to be found for their relief and refreshment; upon which they dug pits. And as the rain fell and they were refreshed, they got strength, and went on to Jerusalem, where they saw the Lord in His ordinances. So the Psalmist says, “Blessed are those in whose heart the law of God is found.” There is a generation of men in the world that have the law of God in their hearts, though they cannot act and work towards God as they would like. These sometimes are in a dry and barren condition, where no water or comfort is to be found; yet if in this condition, they dig pits, go to prayer, and wait upon God in duty. Though they find no comfort springing up in their duty for the present, yet in due time the rain of God’s blessing will fill those dry pits and empty duties, by which their life will be like a pool of water, and they will go from strength of grace to strength of grace, until they see the Lord. Know, therefore, any man that is in this valley of Baca, where no water is to be found: yet if he can find in his heart to dig pits, to pray, read, hear, meditate, confer, and perform duties — then even though those duties are empty of comfort for the present, yet the rain of grace and mercy will fall upon those pits, and he will go from strength to strength until he appears before the Lord in Glory. Now this is how it is with the saints. Though darkness, and a great darkness, is upon them, yet in that dark condition they are still digging pits; and therefore this darkness is not the darkness of the night, but the darkness of a cloud, and they may say, This is just a cloudy darkness, and it will be over before long.

If the darkness which a man is under is such that there are some openings of light accompanying it, then it is the darkness of a cloud, and not of the night. Though the cloud may cause much darkness, yet ever and before long it opens, and there are some interims of light. But the night does not open, and there are no interims of light then. Now interims and intermissions of light are sure and certain pledges of a greater light which is yet to come. You know that when David fled from Absalom, he was in a dark condition, for the text says, “He went, and he wept,” and he went barefoot. His own son persecutes him, drives him from his throne; a great confederacy is raised against him by wicked men, with the child of his own loins. Here was darkness upon darkness, a matter of great discouragement — but it was a cloud, and no more.

You will say, How could David have known that it was only the darkness of a cloud?

David prayed the Lord to turn the counsels of Ahithophel into folly; and before David had overcome Absalom, and was restored to his kingdom, Ahithophel hanged himself. David singled out Ahithophel to pray against, and the Lord heard his prayer. That judgment of Ahithophel was the answer to David’s prayer. Here the cloud opened, and this answer of his prayer in the interim was a seal to David of the full deliverance that came afterwards: for God seals various matters with the same seal. So when a man is in the dark by reason of some temptation, affliction, or desertion, which he cannot see the end of — if in this interim, before the full deliverance comes, he has some lesser deliverance — then that lesser deliverance is a seal to him of the future deliverance. And he may say, Here is a pledge of my full deliverance, for here is the opening of

the cloud. Now it is always thus with the people of God. They are never in any affliction, temptation, or desertion, unless before their great deliverance comes, they have some special providence, some reviving in the midst of their trouble, some interim of light, some openings of the cloud. And therefore, in the midst of it all, they may say, Surely this my darkness is not the darkness of a night, but of a cloud. I say, there is no discouragement that befalls the saints, unless the matter of it is a cloud. And they may say, It is only a cloud, it will pass over; and therefore why should we be discouraged? Surely there is no reason for their discouragements, whatever their conditions may be.

If these things are so, then how heavily this doctrine falls in reproof upon some — I wish I might not say, upon some of the servants and people of God! A godly man has no true reason for his discouragements, whatever his condition may be, however sad it is; and some are *always* discouraged, whatever their condition may be, and however good it is. Whatever befalls them, the saints should not be discouraged, no, not by anything — and yet many are discouraged at every thing and on every occasion. Oh, what unworthy walking this is! how contrary to God you walk! And do you know what it is to walk contrary to Him? Has He not said, “If you walk contrary to me, I will walk contrary to you?”<sup>1</sup>

But someone may say, I have reason to be discouraged, for I have no sense and feeling of God’s love.

We do not live by *feeling*, but by *faith*. It is the duty of a Christian to begin with faith, and so to rise up to feeling. You would begin with feeling, and so come down to faith; but you must begin with faith, and so rise up to feeling. And I ask you to tell me, is it not sufficient to be as our Master was? Did not Christ lack the sense of God’s love, when he said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Indeed, did Christ not have the sense of God’s anger upon Him when He performed the greatest act of obedience that the sun ever saw? Yet did He then say, I am not the child of God, because I lack the sense of God’s love, because I am under the sense of God’s anger? No! But with the same breath that He said He was forsaken, He said, “My God, my God”; and at the same time he called God Father, “Father, forgive them,” etc. So you may do, even though God has forsaken you, even though you lack the sense of His love — indeed, even though you are under the sense of God’s *anger*. Yet at the same time you may say, “The Lord is my Father,” and you may go to him as your Father. And if you can say, “God is my Father,” then do you have any reason for your discouragements? Yet how often God’s own people are discouraged and cast down! Oh, you that are the disciples of Christ, labour more and more to follow your Master; and as David did here, you should often say, “Why are you cast down, O my soul?”

What a mighty, vast difference there is between a godly man and a wicked on this account. A godly, gracious man, has no reason for his discouragements, whatever his condition may be; a wicked man has no reason for his encouragement, whatever his condition may be. A gracious man is apt to be greatly discouraged, but he has no true reason for it; a wicked man is apt to be greatly encouraged, but he has no true reason for it. It is said of the wicked, Psalm 7:11, “God is angry with the wicked every day.” Whatever the day is, God is angry with them. Though it is a day of fasting and prayer, yet then God is angry with them; though it is a day of praises and of

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<sup>1</sup> Lev 26.23-24.



thanksgiving, then God is angry with them. When a wicked man sins most, and when he sins least, God is angry with him. Not one day goes over his head, that God is not angry with him; and one blow or another, God's anger reaches out to him every day. He does not always feel those blows, but God is striking him, and is angry with him every day; and therefore, whatever his condition may be, there is no reason for his encouragement.

Suppose a man were in prison, committed for some great offence, and condemned to die under the displeasure of his prince or government; and his servant were to come to him, saying, Sir, be of good comfort, your wife is well at home, you have very sweet children, an excellent crop of corn, your neighbours love you dearly, your sheep and cattle thrive, and all your houses are in good repair and order. Would he not answer that servant, and say, What is all this, so long as I am condemned to die? Thus it is with every wicked man: he is a condemned man, under the displeasure of the great God, and God is angry with him every day. If his heart were sensible of it, he would say, You tell me of my friends and goods and name and trade; but what is all this, so long as I am a condemned person, and God is angry with me every day? But for the present he does not feel God's displeasure; he is not sensible of it. Yet let him know that there is a day coming, when he will find the truth of this matter. And as Saul once cried out, saying, "God has forsaken me, and the Philistines are upon me," so shall he cry out and say, God has forsaken my soul, temptations are now upon me; my sins and guilt are upon me; God has forsaken me, and the devils are now upon me. But as for a godly, gracious man, even though his present condition may be ever so sad, and his soul ever so much cast down, yet he has no reason to be discouraged — I say, *whatever* his condition may be. What a glorious condition the saints are in! Who would not be in love with this condition! Who would not be in Christ! Who would not leave the ways of the wicked! Who would not be godly! Oh, you that are ungodly, *labour* to become godly.

The exhortation, however, is specially directed to the saints; and with you I must leave a word of exhortation. Take heed and beware of discouragements, of being cast down: you have no reason for it, and much reason against it.

By being discouraged you rejoice the heart of Satan. He claps his hands and laughs to see you cast down. Now, oh now, he says, this man is like me; I am a despairing spirit, and so is he; I am discouraged and cast down, and so is he. He stands triumphing over you, to see you under these discouragements. When you are *sad*, he is *glad*.

And as you rejoice the heart of Satan, so you grieve the heart of God. One friend is grieved at the grief, sorrow and discouragement of another. The more real the friendship, the greater the affliction and trouble of the one, if the other is grieved. Now just as God was the friend of faithful Abraham, the "friend of God," actively and passively—God was a friend to him, and he was a friend to God—so it is with all believers. Christ is their friend. "From now on I do not call you servants, but friends," Christ said.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Ghost is their friend, for it is the Spirit that comes and dwells in them, and manifests Himself to them. And we are said to grieve the Spirit. As God is the worst enemy, so the Spirit is the best friend, the truest friend, the most real friend in all the world. Therefore when you are cast down and discouraged, you grieve Him; you grieve the Father, you grieve the Son, you grieve the Spirit; and do you know what you do when you grieve the Lord? Is it *nothing* to grieve such a friend?

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<sup>1</sup> Joh 15.15.

Thereby, in some measure, indeed, in great measure, you make void and frustrate the purpose of Christ's coming, who came not only to free us from hell, but also from our present fears: "That being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, we might serve him without fear," Luke 1:74. And will you then go drooping, discouraged, and bowed down under your fears all your days?

Thereby you make yourselves unfit for the service of Christ. The Passover of old was not to be eaten with any old leaven; the old leaven was to be purged out, and none that were sad and sorrowful were to eat of the holy things. Now, the apostle says, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us not keep the feast" (that is, the gospel feast) "with old leaven."<sup>1</sup> And yet, will no bread serve your needs but *leavened* bread, *sour* bread, the bread of *mourning*? Will you keep your Passover, your Christian feast, in this way? Some of you have been doubting, fearing, trembling, cast down, discouraged for many years: and is it not yet time to bewail your unbelief and to honour free grace? What, will you *always* grieve the Spirit, the Father and Christ; *always* be frustrating Christ's work? Will you *always* be eating old leaven? Is it not yet time to say, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in him, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."<sup>2</sup>

I know indeed, you say, that I have no just and Scriptural reason for my discouragement. I see that there is much reason against it; and yet I am one of a troubled spirit. I would willingly have it otherwise, that at last I might glorify free grace. What should I do that I may bear up against all discouragements, that I may not be discouraged, whatever my condition may be?

The only way which the Psalmist teaches here is to hope, trust, and believe in God. And after follows how we should use our faith in Christ so that we may not be discouraged. For the present, take these directions:

1. If you would not be discouraged in any condition, then never make your comforts depend on your condition, nor be in love with any condition for itself; do not let your condition itself be the cause or ground of your encouragements. Hang a cloak or a garment on a rotten peg, and that will break, and the garment will fall down. Now there is no condition that is not a rotten peg. Every condition is alterable; no condition so firm and fast that it is not exposed to many changes; it is a rotten hold. God is a pillar, no, *pillars*. His name is *Adonai*, which signifies as much, and in Isa. 26 we are commanded to trust in the Lord, "For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength," or "the Rock of Ages." And, the Psalmist says, "My flesh fails, and my heart fails, but God is the Rock of my heart forever" (so the Hebrew reads) Psalm 73:26. Base your comforts on your own condition, and you only build on the sand, which will be carried away with every wind, and storm, and tempest; but if you build on Christ Himself, on God Himself, you build on the Rock. And though the floods, and storms, and winds rise and beat against you, yet you shall not lose your comforts, because they are built upon a rock.

2. Be sure that you think of Christ in a right way and manner, as He suits your condition, and as He is presented in the gospel. We are very apt to have wrong thoughts of Christ. As Satan sometimes transforms himself into an angel of light, so he would transform Christ before you

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<sup>1</sup> 1Cor 5.7-8.

<sup>2</sup> Psa 42.11.

into an angel of darkness. But the Scriptures present Christ in terms that make Him very amiable to poor sinners. Are you accused by Satan, the world, or your own conscience? Christ is called your *Advocate*. Are you ignorant? He is called the *Prophet*. Are you guilty of sin? He is called a *Priest*, and *High Priest*. Are you afflicted with many enemies, inward and outward? He is called a *King*, and *King of kings*. Are you in straits? He is called your *Way*. Are you hungry or thirsty? He is called *Bread* and *Water of Life*. Are you afraid that you will fall away, and be condemned in the end? He is our second Adam, a public person, in whose death we died, and in whose satisfaction we satisfied justice. Just as there is no temptation or affliction, that does not have some promise or other that especially suits it, so there is no condition, that does not have some name, some title, some attribute of Christ that especially suits it. And as you do not look to Christ, except in reference to your condition, so you are not to look upon your condition alone, but *also* upon Christ's attribute that is suitable to it. If you look at Christ's attribute of love without looking at your condition, you may presume incorrectly; if you look at your condition without looking at Christ's attribute of love, then you may despair. Therefore think about both together and you will not be discouraged.

3. If your discouragements begin to rise and press upon you, check yourself, and say, Why should I multiply thoughts without knowledge? <sup>1</sup> Why should I tire out my soul with these thoughts? Am I able to add one cubit to my spiritual stature? <sup>2</sup> Am I, by all my anxiety, able to alter my condition? Indeed, does my anxiety not set me at a farther distance from the mercy desired? The truth is, the only way to lose the comfort desired, is to be solicitous <sup>3</sup> about it. Just as the only way to have an outward blessing is to be content to go without it, so the only way to have a spiritual or outward affliction removed, is to be content if it continued, if God and Christ will have it so. But you say you must have your affliction immediately removed, and you must immediately know that you are in the state of grace and a child of God, or else you will be discouraged. Like the bird in the net, the more it strives, the more it is entangled; so it is with you also. Therefore, if temptations, afflictions, and desertions come, and Satan joins with them, and says to your soul, "This will always be," then answer him, "Well, I therefore believe the contrary, because you say so, Satan, you who are a liar; yet if God will have it so, I am content, I leave it to Him. Whether I will always be in this condition or not, is not my question. But now, O Lord, let me serve You; that is all my desire; Let me see You as You please, when You please. I am done, Lord, I am done. I have been questioning and questioning my condition these many years; I see there is no end of that; indeed, the more I do, the more I may; I get nothing by it. Why, therefore, oh, my soul, should I wear myself out with this kind of anxiety?" Thus check yourselves.

4. Whenever you think of anything which is, in itself, terrible, or a matter of discouragement, be sure that you mingle its consideration with those sweet things which God has given and prescribed to you. There is nothing terrible that God has not joined some comfortable thing with it. The name of God is terrible. He is called the great and dreadful God. But to sweeten this, He is called the God of all consolations. Death is terrible; it is called the king of terrors; but to sweeten this, it is called a sleep. The Day of Judgment is terrible; but to sweeten that, our present Advocate, indeed, our best Friend, will be our future judge. Now if you abstract the terror of any

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<sup>1</sup> Job 35.16.

<sup>2</sup> Mat 6.27.

<sup>3</sup> Full of anxiety and concern.

object from the sweetness of it, no wonder if you are greatly discouraged! It is our duty to behold things as God presents them, and to take things as God gives them. What God has joined together, no man may put apart. If you consider the sweetness of an object or condition, without its *sourness*, then you may grow too wanton. If you consider the terror of an object or condition, without the *sweetness* of it, then you may be too fearful. But if you think about both together, then you will fear and believe, and believe and fear, and so be kept from discouragement.

5. If you would not be discouraged whatever your condition may be, then labour more and more to get your self-love mortified, even religious self-love. All your discouragements are from self-love, not from the venom of your condition, but from the poison of self-love. Oh, but I am discouraged, you say, because I have no *assurance*. Well, but suppose you had assurance, what then? Then I would have comfort. Is not *self* to be seen here? Oh, but I am discouraged about my everlasting condition. And is not that *self*? Does that word “condition” not sound like *self*? I dare boldly say, there is no tumult or immoderate discouragement in the soul, that does not have *self* at the bottom of it. If you could leave your *self* and your *condition* with God and Christ, and mind His service, glory, and honour more, then God would take care of your comfort. But when you mind your *self* and your *condition* so much, and His service, glory and honour so little, then it is no wonder that you are so greatly discouraged. Therefore, labour more and more to mortify self-love, and so you will never be discouraged, whatever your condition may be.

6. In case temptation presses in upon you, and urges you to sad discouragements, speak to your own soul with this purpose: Why should I buy my repentance at so dear a rate? There is none of all these doubts, unbelieving fears, and discouragements, that you will not be ashamed of and repent of afterwards. You know how it is with the traveller: he thinks the sun is not yet up, and so he loiters and sits down. But the sun, creeping up behind the cloud, at last breaks out on his face and has gotten ahead him. And then he says, O what a fool was I, to think the sun was not up, because I did not see it; what an unwise man I was to loiter this way and sit down! So it will be with you. You now lie down upon the earth, and your belly clings to the dust by reason of your discouragements; but the grace of God and the love of Christ is creeping up behind the dark cloud; and at last it will break out upon you, and shine into your face with the golden beams of mercy. It will go before you, and be before you, and then you will say, Oh, what a fool I was to be discouraged in this way; what an unworthy creature I am, to doubt God’s love this way. I have sinned; I have sinned by all my unbelief. Now may the Lord pardon me for all my doubts! I am, O Lord, ashamed of these doubts and questions about your love. Pardon them, O Lord, to my soul. This is what you must come to; you must at last be ashamed and repent of your unbeliefs, doubts and fears. And therefore, whenever they press in upon you, say to yourself at the first, Why should I buy my repentance at so dear a rate, by yielding to these discouragements? And for this very reason, because discouragements are to be repented of, therefore the saints and people of God have no reason to be discouraged, whatever their condition may be.

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Taken from *A Lifting up for the Downcast*  
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*Modernized and annotated*  
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