



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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Letters of Encouragement

by John Newton

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Feelings vs. Spiritual Well-Being

January 11, 1777.

Dear Sir,

We all need, and at the seasons the Lord sees best, we all receive chastisement. I hope you likewise have reason to praise Him, for supporting, sanctifying, and delivering mercy. The cowardly flesh presently sinks under the rod, but faith need not fear it, for it is in the hand of One who loves us better than we do ourselves, and who knows our frame, that we are but dust, and therefore will not suffer us to be overdone and overwhelmed.

I feel as a friend should feel for Mr. B——; were I able, I would soon send him health. If the Lord, who is able to remove his illness in a minute, permits it to continue, we may be sure, upon the whole, it will be better for him. It is, however, very lawful to pray that his health may be restored, and his usefulness prolonged. I beg you to give my love to him, and tell him that my heart bears him an affectionate remembrance; and I know the God whom he serves will make every dispensation supportable and profitable to him.

If, as you observe, the Song of Solomon describes the experience of his church, it shows the dark as well as the bright side. No one part of it is the experience of every individual at any particular time. Some are in his banqueting-house, others upon their beds. Some sit under His banner, supported by His arm; while others have a faint perception of Him at a distance, with many a hill and mountain between. In one thing, however, they all agree, that He is the leading object of their desires, and that they have had such a discovery of His person, work, and love, as makes Him precious to their hearts. Their judgment of Him is always the same, but their sensibility varies. The love they bear Him, though rooted and grounded in their hearts, is not always equally in exercise, nor can it be so. We are like trees, which, though alive, cannot put forth their leaves and fruit without the influence of the sun. They are alive in winter as well as in summer; but how different is their appearance in these different seasons! Were we always alike, could we always believe, love, and rejoice, we should think the power inherent and our own; but it is more for the Lord's glory, and more suited to form us to a temper becoming the Gospel, that we should be made deeply sensible of our own inability and dependence, than that we should be always in a lively frame. I am persuaded, a broken and a contrite spirit, a conviction of our vileness and nothingness, connected with a cordial acceptance of Jesus as revealed in the Gospel, is the highest attainment we can reach in this life. Sensible comforts are desirable, and we must be sadly declined when they do not appear to us; but I believe there may be a real exercise of faith and growth in grace when our sensible feelings are faint and low. A soul may be in as thriving a state when thirsting, seeking, and mourning after the Lord, as when actually rejoicing in Him; as much in earnest when fighting in the valley, as when singing upon the mount; nay, dark seasons afford the surest and strongest manifestations of the power of faith. To hold fast the word of promise, to maintain a hatred of sin, to go on steadfastly in the path of duty, in defiance both of the frowns and the smiles of the world, when we have but little comfort, is a more certain evidence of grace, than a thousand things which we may do or forbear when our spirits are warm and lively. I have seen many who have been upon the whole but uneven walkers, though at times they have seemed to enjoy, at least have talked of, great comforts. I have seen

others, for the most part, complain of much darkness and coldness, who have been remarkably humble, tender, and exemplary in their spirit and conduct. Surely were I to choose my lot, it should be with the latter.

I am, &c.

The Benefits of Affliction

My dear Madam,

I have often preached to others of the benefit of affliction; but my own path for many years has been so smooth, and my trials, though I have not been without trials, comparatively so light and few, that I have seemed to myself to speak by rote upon a subject of which I had not a proper feeling. Yet the many exercises of my poor afflicted people, and the sympathy the Lord has given me with them in their troubles, has made this a frequent and favourite topic of my ministry among them. The advantages of afflictions, when the Lord is pleased to employ them for the good of his people, are many and great. Permit me to mention a few of them; and the Lord grant that we may all find those blessed ends answered to ourselves, by the trials he is pleased to appoint us.

Afflictions quicken us to prayer. It is a pity it should be so; experience testifies that a long course of ease and prosperity, without painful changes, has an unhappy tendency to make us cold and formal in our secret worship; but troubles rouse our spirits, and constrain us to call upon the Lord in good earnest, when we feel a need of that help which we only can have from him.

They are useful, and in a degree necessary, to keep alive in us a conviction of the vanity and unsatisfying nature of the present world, and all its enjoyments; to remind us that this is not our rest, and to call our thoughts upwards, where our true treasure is, and where our conversation ought to be. When things go on much to our wish, our hearts are too prone to say, It is good to be here. It is probable, that had Moses, when he came to invite Israel to Canaan, found them in prosperity, as in the days of Joseph, they would have been very unwilling to remove; but the afflictions they were previously brought into made his message welcome. Thus the Lord, by pain, sickness, and disappointments, by breaking our cisterns and withering our gourds, weakens our attachment to this world, and makes the thought of quitting it more familiar and more desirable.

A child of God cannot but greatly desire a more enlarged and experimental acquaintance with his holy word; and this attainment is greatly promoted by our

trials. The far greater part of the promises in Scripture are made and suited to a state of affliction; and, though we may believe they are true, we cannot so well know their sweetness, power, and suitableness, unless we ourselves are in a state to which they refer. The Lord says, “ Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver.”— Now till the day of trouble comes, such a promise is like a city of refuge to an Israelite, who not having slain a man, was in no danger of the avenger of blood. He had a privilege near him, of which he knew not the use and value, because he was not in the case for which it was provided. But some can say, “ I not only believe this promise upon the authority of the speaker, but I can set my seal to it: I have been in trouble; I took this course for relief, and I was not disappointed. The Lord verily heard and delivered me.” Thus afflictions likewise give occasion of our knowing and noticing more of the Lord’s wisdom, power, and goodness, in supporting and relieving, than we should otherwise have known.

I have not time to take another sheet, and must therefore contract my homily. Afflictions evidence to ourselves, and manifest to others, the reality of grace. And when we suffer as Christians, exercise some measure of that patience and submission and receive some measure of these supports and supplies, which the Gospel requires and promises to believers, we are more confirmed that we have not taken up with mere notions; and others may be convinced that we do not follow cunningly devised fables. They likewise strengthen by exercise our graces: as our limbs and natural powers would be feeble if not called to daily exertion; so the graces of the Spirit would languish, without something provided to draw them out to use! And, to say no more, they are honourable, as they advance our conformity to Jesus our Lord, who was a man of sorrows for our sake. Methinks, if we might go to heaven without suffering, we should be unwilling to desire it. Why should we ever wish to go by any other path than that which he has consecrated and endeared by his own example? especially as his people’s sufferings are not penal; there is no wrath in them; the cup he puts in their hands is very different from that which he drank for their sakes, and is only medicinal to promote their chief good. Here I must stop; but the subject is fruitful, and might be pursued through a quire of paper.

I am, &c.

John Newton

The School of Suffering

Long and often I have thought of writing to you; now the time is come. May the Lord help me to send a word in season! I know not how it may be with you, but He does and to Him I look to direct my thoughts accordingly. I suppose you are still in the school of the cross, learning the happy art of extracting *real* good out of *seeming* evil, and to grow tall by stooping. The *flesh* is a sad untoward dunce in this school; but grace makes the spirit willing to learn by suffering; yea, it cares not what it endures, so sin may be mortified, and a conformity to the image of Jesus be increased. Surely, when we see the most and the best of the Lord's children so often in heaviness, and when we consider how much He loves them, and what He has done and prepared for them, we may take it for granted that there is a need-be for their sufferings. For it would be easy to His power, and not a thousandth part of what His love intends to do for them should He make their whole life here, from the hour of their conversion to their death, a continued course of satisfaction and comfort, without anything to distress them from within or without. But were it so, should we not miss many advantages?

In the first place, we should not then be very conformable to our Head, nor be able to say, "As He was, so are we in this world." Methinks a believer would be ashamed to be so utterly unlike his Lord. What! the master always a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, and the servant always happy and full of comfort! *Jesus* despised, reproached, neglected, opposed, and betrayed, and *His people* admired and caressed; *He* living in the want of all things, and *they* filled with abundance; *He* sweating blood for anguish, and *they* strangers to distress! How unsuitable would these things be! How much better to be called to the honour of experiencing a measure of His sufferings! A cup was put into His hand on our account, and His love engaged Him to drink it for us. The wrath which it contained He drank wholly Himself; but He left us a little affliction to taste, that we might pledge Him, and remember how He loved us, and how much more He endured for us than He will ever call us to endure for Him.

Again, how could we, without sufferings, manifest the nature and truth of Gospel-grace! What place should we then have for patience, submission, meekness, forbearance, and a readiness to forgive, if we had nothing to try us, either from the hand of the Lord, or from the hand of men! A Christian without trials would be like a mill without wind or water; the contrivance and design of the wheel-work within would be unnoticed and unknown, without something to put it in motion from without. Nor would our graces grow, unless they were called out to exercise; the difficulties we meet with not only prove, but strengthen, the graces of the spirit. If a person were always to sit still, without making use of legs or arms, he

would probably wholly lose the power of moving his limbs at last; but by walking and working he becomes strong and active. So, in a long course of ease, the powers of the new man would certainly languish; the soul would grow soft, indolent, cowardly, and faint; and therefore the Lord appoints His children such dispensations as make them strive and struggle, and pant; they must press through a crowd, swim against a stream, endure hardships, run, wrestle, and fight; and thus their strength grows in the using.

By these things, likewise, they are made more willing to leave the present world, to which we are prone to cleave too closely in our hearts when our path is very smooth. Had Israel enjoyed their former peace and prosperity in Egypt, when Moses came to invite them to Canaan, I think they would hardly have listened to him. But the Lord suffered them to be brought into great trouble and bondage, and then the news of deliverance was more welcome, yet still they were but half willing, and they carried a love to the flesh-pots of Egypt with them into the wilderness. We are like them: though we say this world is vain and sinful, we are too fond of it; and though we hope for true happiness only in Heaven, we are often well content to stay longer here. But the Lord sends afflictions one after another to quicken our desires, and to convince us that this cannot be our rest. Sometimes if you drive a bird from one branch of a tree he will hop to another a little higher, and from thence to a third; but if you continue to disturb him, he will at last take wing, and fly quite away. Thus we, when forced from one creature-comfort, perch upon another, and so on; but the Lord mercifully follows us with trials, and will not let us rest upon any; by degrees our desires take a nobler flight, and can be satisfied with nothing short of Himself; and we say, "To depart and be with Jesus is best of all!"

I trust you find the name and grace of Jesus more and more precious to you; His promises more sweet, and your hope in them more abiding; your sense of your own weakness and unworthiness daily increasing; your persuasion of his all-sufficiency, to guide, support, and comfort you, more confirmed. You owe your growth in these respects in a great measure to His blessing upon those afflictions which He has prepared for you, and sanctified to you. May you praise Him for all that is past, and trust Him for all that is to come!

I am, &c.

Doubts and Fears—The Source of Assurance

Though I have the pleasure of hearing of you, and sending a remembrance from time to time, I am willing, by this opportunity, to direct a few lines to you, as a more express testimony of my sincere regard.

I think your experience is generally of the fearful doubting cast. Such souls, however, the Lord has given particular charge to his ministers to comfort. He knows our infirmities and what temptations mean, and as a good Shepherd He expresses a peculiar care and tenderness for the weak of the flock (Isa. xl. 1). But how must I attempt your comfort? Surely not by strengthening a mistake to which we are all too liable, by leading you to look into your own heart for (what you will never find there) something in yourself whereon to ground your hopes, if not wholly, yet at least in part. Rather let me endeavour to lead you out of yourself; let me invite you to look unto Jesus. Should we look for light in our own eyes, or in the sun? Is it indwelling sin distresses you? Then I can tell you (though you know it) that Jesus died for sin and sinners. I can tell you that His blood and righteousness are of infinite value; that His arm is almighty and His compassions infinite; yea, you yourself read His promises every day, and why should you doubt their being fulfilled? If you say you do not question their truth, or that they are accomplished to many, but that you can hardly believe they belong to you, I would ask, what evidence you would require? A voice or an angel from Heaven you do not expect.

Consider, if many of the promises are not expressly directed to those to whom they belong. When you read your name on the superscription of this letter you make no scruple to open it: why, then, do you hesitate at embracing the promises of the Gospel, where you read that they are addressed to those who mourn, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, who are poor in spirit, &c., and cannot but be sensible that a gracious God has begun to work these dispositions in your heart?

If you say that though you do at times mourn, hunger, &c. you are afraid you do it not enough, or not aright, consider that this sort of reasoning is very far from the spirit and language of the Gospel; for it is grounded on a secret supposition, that in the forgiveness of sin God has a respect to something more than the atonement and mediation of Jesus; namely, to some previous good qualifications in a sinner's heart, which are to share with the blood of Christ in the honour of salvation. The enemy deceives us in this matter the more easily, because a propensity to the covenant of works is a part of our natural depravity. Depend upon it you will

never have a suitable and sufficient sense of the evil of sin, and of your share in it, so long as you have any sin remaining in you.

We must see Jesus as He is before our apprehension of any spiritual truth will be complete. But if we know that we must perish without Christ, and that He is able to save to the uttermost, we know enough to warrant us to cast our souls upon Him, and we dishonour Him by fearing that when we do so He will disappoint our hope. But if you are still perplexed about the high points of election, &c., I would advise you to leave the disposal of others to the great Judge; and as to yourself, I think I need not say much to persuade you, that if ever you are saved at all, it must be in a way of free and absolute grace.

Leave disputes to others; wait upon the Lord, and He will teach you all things in such degree and time as He sees best. Perhaps you have suffered for taking things too much upon trust from men. Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. One is your master, even Christ. Study and pray over the Bible; and you may take it as a sure rule, that whatever sentiment makes any part of the Word of God unwelcome to you is justly to be suspected. Aim at a cheerful spirit. The more you trust God, the better you will serve Him. While you indulge unbelief and suspicion, you weaken your own hands, and discourage others. Be thankful for what He has shown you, and wait upon Him for more: you shall find He has not said, “Seek ye My face” in vain. I heartily commend you to His grace and care, And am, &c.

Strength in Affliction—The Secret of Loving Christ More

At length, and without farther apology for my silence, I sit down to ask you how you fare. Afflictions I hear have been your lot; and if I had not heard so, I should have taken it for granted: for I believe the Lord loves you, and as many as He loves He chastens. I think you can say, afflictions have been good for you, and I doubt not but you have found strength according to your day; so that, though you may have been sharply tried, you have not been overpowered. For the Lord has engaged His faithfulness for this to all His children, that He will support them in all their trials: so that the fire shall not consume them, nor the floods drown them (I Cor. x. 13; Isa. xliii. 2).

If you can say thus much, cannot you go a little further, and add, in the apostle’s words, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear. I rather glory

in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me: yea, doubtless, I count all things loss and of no regard, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for when I am weak, then am I strong"? Methinks I hear you say, "God, who comforteth those who are cast down, has comforted my soul; and as my troubles have abounded, my consolations in Christ have abounded also. He has delivered, He does deliver, and in Him I trust that He will yet deliver me." Surely you can set your seal to these words. The Lord help you then to live more and more a life of faith, to feed upon the promises, and to rejoice in the assurance that all things are yours, and shall surely work for your good.

If I guess right at what passes in your heart, the name of Jesus is precious to you, and this is a sure token of salvation and that of God. You could not have loved Him, if He had not loved you first. He spoke to you, and said, "Seek My face," before your heart cried to Him, "Thy face, O Lord, will I seek." But you complain, "Alas! I love Him so little." That very complaint proves that you love Him a great deal; for if you loved Him but a little, you would think you loved Him enough. A mother loves her child a great deal, yet does not complain for not loving it more; nay, perhaps she hardly thinks it possible. But such an infinite object is Jesus, that they who love Him better than parents or child, or any earthly relation or comfort, will still think they hardly love Him at all; because they see such a vast disproportion between the utmost they can give Him, and what in Himself He deserves from them. But I can give you good advice and good news: love Him as well as you can now, and ere long you shall love Him better. O when you see Him as He is, then I am sure you will love Him indeed! If you want to love Him better now while you are here, I believe I can tell you the secret how this is to be attained: *Trust Him*. The more you trust Him, the better you will love Him. If you ask, farther, How shall I do to trust Him? I answer, *Try Him*: the more you make trial of Him, the more your trust in Him will be strengthened. Venture upon His promises; carry them to Him, and see if He will not be as good as His word. But, alas! Satan and unbelief work the contrary way. We are unwilling to try Him, and therefore unable to trust Him; and what wonder, then, that our love is faint, for who can love at uncertainties?

If you are in some measure thankful for what you have received, and hungering and thirsting for more, you are in the frame I would wish for myself, and I desire to praise the Lord on your behalf. Pray for us. We join in love to you.

I am. &c.

Disappointment—What is Necessary—God's Patience

August 17, 1767.

It is indeed natural to us to wish and to plan, and it is merciful in the Lord to disappoint our plans, and to cross our wishes. For we cannot be safe, much less happy, but in proportion as we are weaned from our own wills, and made simply desirous of being directed by His guidance. This truth (when we are enlightened by His Word) is sufficiently familiar to the judgment; but we seldom learn to reduce it to practice, without being trained awhile in the school of disappointment. The schemes we form look so plausible and convenient, that when they are broken, we are ready to say, What a pity! We try again, and with no better success; we are grieved, and perhaps angry, and plan out another, and so on; at length, in a course of time, experience and observation begin to convince us, that we are not more able than we are worthy to choose aright for ourselves. Then the Lord's invitation to cast our cares upon Him, and His promise to take care of us, appear valuable; and when *we* have done planning, *His* plan in our favour gradually opens, and he does more and better for us than we either ask or think.

I can hardly recollect a single plan of mine, of which I have not since seen reason to be satisfied, that had it taken place in season and circumstance just as I proposed, it would, humanly speaking, have proved my ruin; or at least it would have deprived me of the greater good the Lord had designed for me. We judge of things by their present appearances, but the Lord sees them in their consequences, if we could do so likewise we should be perfectly of His mind; but as we cannot, it is an unspeakable mercy that He will manage for us, whether we are pleased with His management or not; and it is spoken of as one of his heaviest judgments, when He gives any person or people up to the way of their own hearts, and to walk after their own counsels.

Indeed we may admire His patience towards us. If we were blind, and reduced to desire a person to lead us, and should yet pretend to dispute with him, and direct him at every step, we should probably soon weary him, and provoke him to leave us to find the way by ourselves if we could. But our gracious Lord is long-suffering and full of compassion; He bears with our forwardness, yet He will take methods to both shame and to humble us, and to bring us to a confession that He is wiser than we. The great and unexpected benefits He intends us, by all the discipline we meet with, is to tread down our wills, and bring them into subjection to His. So far as we attain to this, we are out of the reach of disappointment; for when the will of God can please us, we shall be pleased every day, and from morning to night; I mean with respect to His dispensations. O the happiness of

such a life! I have an idea of it; I hope I am aiming at it, but surely I have not attained it. Self is active in my heart, if it does not absolutely reign there. I profess to believe that one thing is needful and sufficient and yet my thoughts are prone to wander after a hundred more. If it be true that the light of His countenance is better than life, why am I solicitous about anything else? If He be all-sufficient, and gives me liberty to call Him mine, why do I go a-begging to creatures for help? If He be about my path and bed; if the smallest, as well as the greatest events in which I am concerned, are under His immediate direction; if the very hairs of my head are numbered then my care (any farther than a care to walk in the paths of His precepts, and to follow the openings of His providence) must be useless and needless, yea, indeed, sinful and heathenish, burdensome to myself, and dishonourable to my profession. Let us cast down the load we are unable to carry, and if the Lord be our Shepherd, refer all and trust all to Him. Let us endeavour to live to Him and for Him to-day, and be glad that to-morrow, with all that is behind it, is in His hands.

It is storied of Pompey, that when his friends would have dissuaded him from putting to sea in a storm, he answered, It is necessary for me to sail, but it is not necessary for me to live. A pompous speech, in Pompey's sense! He was full of the idea of his own importance, and would rather have died than have taken a step beneath his supposed dignity. But it may be accommodated with propriety to a believer's case. It becomes us to say, It is not necessary for me to be rich, or what the world accounts wise; to be healthy, or admired by my fellow-worms; to pass through life in a state of prosperity and outward comfort,—these things may be, or they may be otherwise, as the Lord in His wisdom shall appoint;—but it is necessary for me to be humble and spiritual, to seek communion with God, to adorn my profession of the Gospel, and to yield submissively to His disposal, in whatever way, whether of service or suffering, He shall be pleased to call me to glorify Him in the world. It is not necessary for me to live long, but highly expedient that whilst I do live I should live to Him. Here, then, I would bound my desires; and here, having His word both for my rule and my warrant, I am secured from asking amiss. Let me have His presence and His Spirit, wisdom to know my calling, and opportunities and faithfulness to improve them; and as to the rest, Lord, help me to say, “What Thou wilt, when Thou wilt, and how Thou wilt.”

I am, &c.

When We Awake in Glory

Dear Madam,

What a poor, uncertain, dying world is this! What a wilderness in itself! How dark, how desolate, without the light of the Gospel and the knowledge of Jesus! It does not appear so to us in a state of nature, because we are then in a state of enchantment, the magical lantern blinding us with a splendid delusion.

Thus in the desert's dreary waste,
By magic power produced in haste, As old romances say,
Castles and groves, and music sweet,
The senses of the traveler cheat,
And stop him in his way.
But while he gazes with surprise,
The charm dissolves, the vision dies;
'Twas but enchanted ground
Thus, if the Lord our spirit touch,
The world, which promised us so much,
A wilderness is found.

It is a great mercy to be undeceived in time; and though our gay dreams are at an end, and we awake to everything that is disgustful and dismaying, yet we see a highway through the wilderness; a powerful guard, an infallible Guide at hand to conduct us through; and we can discern, beyond the limits of the wilderness, a better land, where we shall be at rest and at home. What will the difficulties we meet by the way then signify? The remembrance of them will only remain to heighten our sense of the love, care, and power of our Saviour and Leader. O how shall we then admire, adore, and praise Him, when He shall condescend to unfold to us the beauty, propriety, and harmony of the whole train of His dispensations towards us, and give us a clear retrospect of all the way, and all the turns of our pilgrimage!

In the mean while, the best method of adorning our profession, and of enjoying peace in our souls, is simply to trust Him, and absolutely to commit ourselves and our all to His management. By casting our burdens upon Him, our spirits become light and cheerful; we are freed from a thousand anxieties and inquietudes, which are wearisome to our minds, and which, with respect to events, are *needless* for us, yea *useless*.

But though it may be easy to speak of this trust, and it appears to our judgment perfectly right and reasonable, the actual attainment is a great thing; and especially

so, to trust the Lord, not by fits and starts, surrendering one day and retracting the next, but to abide by our surrender, and go habitually trusting through all the changes we meet, knowing that His love, purpose, and promise are unchangeable. Some little faintings, perhaps, none are freed from; but I believe a power of trusting the Lord in good measure at all times, and living quietly under the shadow of His wing, is what the promise warrants us to expect, if we seek it by diligent prayer; if not all at once, yet by a gradual increase. May it be your experience and mine!

I am, &c.

Comments on an Accident

September 4, 1777.

My Dear Sir,

———Poor little boy! It is mercy indeed that he recovered from such a formidable hurt. The Lord wounded, and the Lord healed. I ascribe, with you, what the world calls accident, to Him, and believe, that without His permission, for wise and good ends, a child can no more pull a bowl of boiling water on itself, than it could pull the moon out of its orbit. And why does He permit such things? One reason or two is sufficient for us: it is to remind us of the uncertainty of life and all creature-comforts, to make us afraid of cleaving too closely to pretty toys, which are so precarious, that often while we look at them they vanish; and to lead us to a more entire dependence upon Himself; that we might never judge ourselves or our concerns safe from outward appearances only, but that the Lord is our keeper, and were not His eye upon us, a thousand dangers and painful changes, which we can neither foresee nor prevent, are lurking about us at every step, ready to break in upon us every hour. Men are but children of a larger growth. How many are labouring and planning in the pursuit of things, the event of which, if they obtain them, will be but like pulling scalding water upon their own heads! They must have the bowl by all means, but they are not aware what is in it till they feel it.

I am, &c.

Medical Decisions—Providence and Health

[Note: Smallpox was a terrible disease, with a high fatality rate in Newton's day. Vaccination against smallpox was then a relatively new and dangerous procedure. While the inoculations were usually effective, there was a chance of fever, scarring or even death. As an example of the risk, Jonathan Edwards died following a smallpox vaccination in 1758.]

June 3, 1777

Dear Sir,

It seems I must write something about the smallpox, but I know not well what: not having had it myself, I cannot judge how I should feel if I were actually exposed to it. I am not a professed advocate for inoculation; but if a person who fears the Lord should tell me, "I think I can do it in faith, looking upon it as a salutary expedient, which He in His providence has discovered [revealed], and which, therefore, it appears my duty to have recourse to, so that my mind does not hesitate with respect to the lawfulness, nor am I anxious about the event; being satisfied, that whether I live or die, I am in that path in which I can cheerfully expect His blessing," —I do not know that I could offer a word by way of dissuasion.

If another person should say, "My times are in the Lord's hands; I am now in health, and am not willing to bring upon myself a disorder [the vaccination was a sort of controlled disease], the consequences of which I cannot possibly foresee: If I am to have the small-pox, I believe He is the best Judge of the season and manner in which I shall be visited, so as may be most for His glory and my own good; and therefore I choose to wait His appointment, and not to rush upon even the possibility of danger without a call. If the very hairs of my head are numbered, I have no reason to fear that, supposing I receive the small-pox in a natural way, I shall have a single pimple more than He sees expedient; and why should I wish to have one less? Nay, admitting, which however is not always the case, that inoculation might exempt me from some pain and inconvenience, and lessen the apparent danger, might it not likewise, upon that very account, prevent my receiving some of those sweet consolations, which I humbly hope my gracious Lord would afford me, if it were His pleasure to call me to a sharp trial? Perhaps the chief design of this trying hour, if it comes, may be to show me more of His wisdom, power, and love, than I have ever yet experienced. If I could devise a means to avoid the trouble, I know not how great a loser I may be in point of grace and comfort. Nor am I afraid of my face [a common feature of smallpox was

disfiguring of the face]; it is now as the Lord has made it, and it will be so after the small-pox. If it pleases Him, I hope it will please me. In short, though I do not censure others, yet, as to myself, inoculation is what I dare not venture upon. If I did venture, and the issue should not be favourable, I should blame myself for having attempted to take the management out of the Lord's hand into my own, which I never did yet in other matters without finding I am no more able than I am worthy to choose for myself.

Besides, at the best, inoculation would only secure me from one of the innumerable natural evils the flesh is heir to; I should still be as liable as I am at present to a putrid fever, a bilious cholic, an inflammation in the bowels or in the brain [relatively common and often fatal diseases of the 18th Century], and a thousand formidable diseases which are hovering round me, and only wait His permission to cut me off in a few days or hours: and therefore I am determined, by His grace, to resign myself to His disposal. Let me fall into the hands of the Lord (for His mercies are great) and not into the hands of men."

If a person should talk to me in this strain, most certainly I could not say, "Notwithstanding all this, your safest way is to be inoculated."

We preach and hear, and I hope we know something of faith, as enabling us to entrust the Lord with our souls: I wish we had all more faith, to entrust Him with our bodies, our health, our provision, and our temporal comforts likewise. The former should seem to require the strongest faith of the two. How strange is it, that when we think we can do the *greater*, we should be so awkward and unskilful when we aim at the *less*!

Give my love to your friend. I dare not advise; but if she can quietly return at the usual time, and neither run intentionally into the way of the small-pox, nor run out of the way, but leave it simply with the Lord, I shall not blame her. And if you will mind your praying and preaching, and believe that the Lord can take care of her without any of your contrivances, I shall not blame you; nay, I shall praise Him for you both. My prescription is, to read Dr. Watts, Psal. cxxi. every morning before breakfast, and pray it over till the cure is effected. *Probatum est.* (It is a good thing.)

Hast Thou not given Thy word
To save my soul from death?
And I can trust my Lord,
To keep my mortal breath.
I'll go and come
Nor fear to die,

Till from on high
Thou call me home.

Adieu. Pray for yours, &c.

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