

REFINED, BUT NOT WITH SILVER

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“Behold, I have refined you, but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.”
Isaiah 48:10.

THE Lord refines His people, but He exercises great discrimination as to the means by which He does so. A silver furnace is one of the very best for the removal of dross and would seem to be well adapted for refining the most precious things, but it is not choice enough for the Lord’s purpose with His people. It is prepared with extreme care and has great separating power, but the purging away of *sin* needs greater care and more cleansing energy than a silver refinery can supply. The greatest delicacy of skill is exhibited by the refiner who watches over the process and regulates the degree of heat and the length of time in which the precious metal shall lie in the crucible—this, then, might well serve as a figure of the best mode of sanctification—but evidently the figure falls short in its delicacy.

The process of silver refining is, no doubt, one of the best arranged and most ably conducted of the works of man, but when the Lord sits as a Refiner, He executes His work with greater wisdom and art. Silver refining is but rough work compared with the Lord’s purification of His people and, therefore, He says, “I have refined you, but not with silver.” The Lord has a furnace of His own, as it is written, “His furnace is in Jerusalem,” and in this special furnace He purifies His people by secret processes unknown to any but Himself. He has a fire of His own kindling in Zion, compared with which all other flame is strange fire and only in this peculiar fire will He, in His own singular fashion, consume His people’s dross and sin.

His saints are more precious than silver or gold and, therefore, while in one place it is written, “You have tried us as silver is tried,” yet in another He declares that He has gone about it after a more Divine sort and has refined us, “but not with silver.” No one would think of refining silver by the same rough means as they smelt iron, so neither will the Lord purify His precious ones, who are far above silver in value, by any but the choicest methods. More subtle and yet more searching, more spiritual and yet more true, more gentle and yet more effectual are the purifying processes of Heaven! There is no refiner like our Refiner and no purity like that which the Spirit works in us!

Note, then, that distinguishing and discriminating Grace finds room to exercise itself even in the trials of the elect—“I have chosen you in the furnace, yet not in the best furnace that man could make, but in a furnace of My own, which I reserve for My peculiar treasures.” There is distinguishing Grace in all the trials of God’s people. Every man in the world has a measure of trial for, “we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,” but there is a distinction between the sorrows of the wicked and the trials of the righteous—a very grave distinction between the punishments of the ungodly and the chastisements of them that fear God! There is a furnace for each metal, but the more precious the ore, the more special the refining.

There is a furnace for all men—for kings upon their thrones—to whom sickness and bereavement come as freely as to the poor! There is a furnace for the rich in the midst of their wealth—from whom their substance departs or their power to enjoy what they have heaped together! But there is a *special* fire, a reserved furnace into which neither the great ones of the earth nor the wealthy ones shall ever be placed. It is kept for more precious material than the unregenerate children of men! God’s furnace in Zion is especially meant for His own people. Of each of these right royal jewels He says, “I have refined you, not with the precious things of earth—the kings and princes, the silver ones among mortals—but I have refined you in a different manner and thus I make My election to be visible, even in connection with the furnace in which I refine My treasures.”

I will push the thought a little farther, dear Friends, and remark that the Lord has special dealings with each one of His saints and refines each one by a process peculiar to the individual. He does not heap all His precious metals into one furnace of silver, but refines each metal by itself. You do not know *my* trials—I am glad you do not—and neither do I know yours, nor do I wish to bear that which *you* may have to suffer. There is a common sympathy, for we all go into the

furnace—but there is a distinction in the case of each one, for to each one the furnace differs. Some tender hearts would be utterly crushed if they were afflicted as others are. Does not even the farmer teach us this? He does not beat out the tender cumin and fitches with the cartwheel which he turns upon the heavier grain. No, he has different modes of operating upon the different kinds of seeds.

They must all be thrashed, but not all thrashed in the same way. You, Brother, may be as a sheaf of the best corn. Be grateful! But remember you shall feel the sharp thrashing instrument having teeth. And you, my Brother, may be one of the tender seeds, the minor seeds of the Master's granary. Be grateful, for you shall feel a lighter flail than some others. But do not compliment yourself upon it, for you might regret that gentler flail because it proves that you are of lighter stuff, although still true grain, of the Master's sowing. Beloved, I would venture to go so far as to say that the lines have not fallen to any two men in precisely the same places.

We rejoice as we read the life of David because he seems to set us all forth. David is to the Church of God what Shakespeare is to the world—

*“A man so various, that he seems to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome,”*

and yet David is totally distinct from any of the other saints. There are not and could not be two Davids! So you and I may travel in lines almost parallel and we may, therefore, know each other's griefs and tenderly sympathize, but there is a turning in my life which you have never reached and there is a dark corner in your life which I have never seen. The skeleton in any one person's house is of a different sort to that which haunts any other dwelling. No one man is the exact replica of another.

In all this, Divine Sovereignty operates in connection with Divine love and Divine wisdom, purifying all the sons of Levi, giving to each one his own separate purification according as his need may be. “I have refined you, but not with silver. I have chosen you.” Mark—a distinct personal word is used and is addressed to *each* separate saint. “I have refined *you*, but not with silver; I have chosen *you* in the furnace of affliction.”

Having thus sufficiently shown that distinguishing Grace is to be seen even in the trials of the chosen, we will now turn to the subject of this evening which is the sweet connection which exists between God's election and the furnace. I have many things to say to you and, therefore, I will say them as briefly as I can, asking you to jot them down upon the tablets of your memory and enlarge upon them when you are alone.

I. And first, between God's election and the furnace there is this connection—that THE FURNACE WAS THE FIRST TRYSTING PLACE BETWEEN ELECTING LOVE AND OUR SOULS. God did not choose His people in the furnace in any sense in which it can be said that He never chose them before they were there, for He chose them before the foundation of the world! Before one solitary star had begun to peer through the darkness, the Lord had given over His people unto Christ to be His heritage and their names were in His book. But the first *manifestation* of His electing love to any of us was—where? Well, I venture to say it was in the furnace!

Abraham knew little of God's love to Him till the voice said, “Get you out of your country and from your kindred, and from your father's house, unto a land that I will show you.” This was a grievous trial for him—the breaking up of family ties and associations was a furnace to him—and then it was that he knew that God had chosen him, for the same voice said, “And I will bless you and you shall be a blessing.” I do not think that Isaac knew much about God's choice of him till he went up the mountain's side and said to his father, “Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” When he found out that the burnt sacrifice was to be *himself*, it was there that he, like his father, knew Jehovah-Jireh and learned the Covenant!

So was it with Jacob. Little did he understand the mystery of electing love till he lay down one night with the stones for his pillow, the hedges for his curtains, the skies for his canopy and no attendant but his God. As he slept, even there at the mouth of the furnace—an exile from his parents and his home—he began to understand that God had highly favored him in His electing love. Certainly Israel, as a nation, did not understand God's election till the people were in Egypt. And then, when Goshen, the land of plenty, became a land of brick making and sorrow and grief and the iron bondage entered into their souls—it was then, I say, that they cried unto God and began to understand that secret word—“I have called My son out of Egypt.” They knew, then, that God had put a difference between Israel and Egypt.

The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied. The more they were afflicted, the more God blessed them! They perceived that the hand of God was in this and that He had met with them there in the furnace of affliction. Yes, if you want the trysting place of the electing God with the chosen soul, it is just there—at the back of the desert where the bush burns with fire and yet is not consumed! Now may you take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy ground, while out of the bush there comes the voice—“I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” God finds His people in the place of trial and distress—and there He reveals Himself in His special Character as their God.

Did He not say to Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt and I have heard their cry”? We will settle this matter by personal experience. When did you first know anything about God’s choice of *you*? Was it not when you were in trouble—in many cases in temporal trouble? You had prospered in the world for years and you knew not God, but you were like the prodigal son, wasting your substance in riotous living. By-and-by things went against you and you became poor, sick and sorry. And then it was that you began to think of the Father’s house and resolved to fly to it. Then it was that electing love began to deal with you! I admit that it was not so in *all* cases. With some of us it was very different, but I make no kind of exception to the rule, namely, that we first began to learn electing love when we were in *spiritual* distress.

When that fine righteousness of ours turned out to be a spider’s cobweb; when that hope on which we had built so fondly began to rock and reel beneath our feet; when we found ourselves on the borders of death and at the gates of Hell—it was then that Free Grace and dying love rang out most sweetly in our ears. We had often kicked against the doctrine of Free Grace before, but now we clutched at it as a hungry man at a piece of bread which before he had despised! We saw that it was the only hope for us and we turned to it and, blessed be God, we found salvation! Would our proud wills have ever bent before the scepter of Sovereign Grace if they had not, first, been melted in the furnace of soul-trouble?

Would we have ever known that the Lord kills and makes alive if we had not, ourselves, been slain by the fire of His Word? Had He not permitted us to lie like Nebuchadnezzar’s guards, slain at the furnace mouth, we would never have known the Truth of God! “It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.” While we heard the thunder roll—“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion”—we bowed our heads meekly, accepted the Grace which was in Christ Jesus and, at the furnace mouth, for the first time in our lives, we understood this text, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.”

II. We will now pass on to a second remark which grows out of this. It is very clear that THE FURNACE OF AFFLICTION DOES NOT CHANGE THE ELECTION OF GOD. If He chose us in it, then His choice stands good while we are in it and when we are out of it. If the very first knowledge we had of His electing love found us at the gates of despair, we can never be worse than we were then, nor can His love see less to rest upon. If He loved us at our worst, when we were dead in sin, and yet quickened us, much more, then, now that we are quickened and forgiven, He will continue to love us!

Yet I have known a great many fears cross the mind of God’s anxious people when the smoke of the furnace has brought tears into their eyes. So let me declare plainly—no amount of trouble, no degree of pain, no possibility of grief can change the mind of God towards His people! The furnace may alter the Believer’s circumstances, but not his acceptance with God. You were a fine gentleman once—you had a large house and grounds, but now you have to be satisfied with a small room and scant fare. You were a fine well-built young fellow once—but now you are a gray old man. Everybody bade you good morrow once—nobody knows you now. Forsaken by flatterers and forgotten by friends, you might sit down and weep were it not that the only Being worth caring for loves you, now, as much as ever and selects this as a season for declaring His love towards you!

Ah, your Lord did not love you for your coat, nor for your house, nor for your health and beauty, for He “takes not pleasure in the legs of a man.” He loved you of old for reasons known only to His own sacred heart and He loves you now the same as ever. O dear Soul, do not be at all discouraged because you are going down the hill into deep adversities, for His love will go with you! The Lord’s love does not rise and fall like the thermometer according to the temperature of the surrounding air. Oh no, but it abides the same to His people whatever their condition! The furnace very often alters our friendship. Our friends knew us before we got into the furnace—we were so fresh and fair they were glad to know us! But

we have come out of the furnace so wrinkled and scorched that they are ready to run away from us! Like Job, we have to mourn that our familiar acquaintances forget us.

Yes, but God does not thus change! He is not “a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent.” “I am God,” says He, “I change not.” Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever, and His friendship never turns to hate or to forgetfulness. Blessed be His name, He has known my soul in adversity and made the valley of Achor to be a door of hope to me! And therefore I must and will speak well of His name. Yes, and the furnace changes us very wonderfully. Do you think some of you would know yourselves of 20 years ago if you were to meet yourselves in the street? I hardly think you would. You have undergone a marked change, have you not?

Aches and pains of body have altered you terribly. Your juvenile elasticity of spirit has altogether vanished and your outward appearance is very much the worse for wear. Ah, you have altered, but your God has not! What a mercy it is that though eternal ages roll over His Immutability, they cannot effect the shadow of a turning. He stands fast like the great mountains, but we, like the clouds that melt upon the mountain’s brow, come and go, for we are and are not—the mists of an hour! He is the same and of His years there is no end—and this is our consolation while we sing with Moses, “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.”

I want you to believe very firmly in the permanence of the Divine choice so that when you next enter the furnace you may have no doubt about eternal faithfulness. When you lie sick by the weeks or by the months together, or when you are driven away from home, or plunged in poverty, or bereaved of friends, do not say in your heart, “God has forgotten to be gracious. He has cast me away from His heart.” It cannot be, for the bonds of Divine love cannot be snapped! To prevent its being supposable that the Lord casts away His people because they are in adverse circumstances, the text says the very contrary—“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.”

III. So now we hasten onward to notice another Truth of God. Thirdly, THE FURNACE IS THE VERY ENSIGN OF ELECTION. The escutcheon—the coat of arms—of election is the furnace! You know that it was so in the Old Covenant which God made with Abraham. He gave him a type when the victim was divided. When a deep sleep fell upon the Patriarch, there passed before him a smoking furnace and a burning lamp—two signs that always mark the people of God. There is a lamp to light them, but there is also a smoking furnace to *try* them. “No cross, no crown,” was true of old as it is true now! It is the escutcheon of the Covenant.

If you think of our great Master’s dying will and testament, what is its prominent codicil? “In the world you shall have tribulation.” You may be quite sure that if you belong to Jesus, “in the world you shall have tribulation.” Do you want to erase that sentence from the will? Then you must give up the whole deed of gift! You must give up the sweet blessing as well as that which looks like a bitter warning! The child of God *must* feel the smarting rod. Sooner or later, in some form or other, the Lord sets His mark upon His people—and His mark is the *furnace* mark! Some of you youngsters have not received it yet. You will have it. Before you get to Heaven you are sure to have it. As the king sets a broad arrow on all his stores, so does the King of kings set His mark on all His people!

You must, I say, pass under the rod of the Covenant—it is the ensign of God’s love. Do you not see that thus He shows His love to His own? You do not think of giving a flogging to a boy who is none of yours. A stranger may do as he likes, but if it is *your* own boy who is caught in mischief, you will not spare the rod. If you are a child of the devil, you may go and sin as you please and may even prosper all the more in worldly things. But if you are one of God’s children, you will be scourged as sure as you transgress! Has He not, Himself, said, “You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities”?

That the Lord refines us shows His value of us! A man does not build an elaborate furnace and then cast into it odd stones and heaps of useless slag. You would say, “What are you wasting all your fuel for?” And he could not give you a rational answer. But if you see ingenious contrivances, lavish use of fuel and the application of refining apparatus. And the person who is using them says, “This is silver,” or, “this is gold,” you know at once that the ore is worth the fuel and will repay the labor and expense. So, dear Friends, if we are precious in the sight of the Lord, He will bring us through the fire—rest assured of that!

If He regards us as mere refuse, He may let us rest in quiet. But for precious ore there are many torturing processes in store! A man does not take his knife and go through the wood and prune all the dog roses, the blackberries and the haw

thorns—he does not care anything about them! But if he is a gardener, see how he purges the vines and cuts the fruit trees! My gardener cut my roses back so very much that I thought no flowers could ever come, but when I saw the luxuriant roses, I acknowledged that he and his knife knew more than I! Good roses must be cut back! And God's saints must be afflicted! God's people will pay for pruning, but wild vines will not. So it is a *type* and *mark* of the love which God has for them that He chooses them in the furnace of affliction.

And it is a mark, in another way, that when God afflicts His children, it shows that He is not going to let them have their portion in *this* life. It was a deed characteristic of Martin Luther when a great man called to see him and, having spent some few hours with him, gave him, I think, a hundred crowns. Martin said, "I must get rid of this. I will *not* have my portion in this life—I must give this to the poor at once!" He used to talk in this fashion—"God gives His dogs plenty. See how rich the Pope and the Grand Turk are—they can have any quantity of gold and silver—but I am not His dog and I am not going to be fed so. He is not going to put me off with gold and silver. I am looking for my heritage in the world to come!"

Now, my Brothers and Sisters, the Lord does not try many of you in that manner. He keeps you on short commons, embitters your bread and mingles wormwood with your cup. Why is this? Why, because you are not to have your portion *here*! You once half thought you might have *two* heavens, but you were deceived. The other day you began feathering your nest, but a sharp thorn has been put into it of late. You are one of the Lord's birds and He wants you to be much on the wing and little in the nest—therefore does He make it uneasy for you. *This* is not your rest—make it as comfortable as you may—this world is not your rest!

Though godliness has the promise of the life that now is, yet this is not our rest and woe unto us if we try to make it so! All the trees in this forest are marked with the axe and they are all to come down! You may build up there, Sir Crow, as fine a nest as you desire, but it must come down! Build your nests, my Brothers and Sisters, on the everlasting rocks where God's eagles make *their* nests—high above the reach of time and change, in the eternal purpose and everlasting love of God—for your portion is not for the present, neither can you be satisfied with the world, try as you will!

Enough upon this point—it is plain that the furnace is one of the ensigns of the election of Grace.

IV. Fourthly, THE FURNACE IS THE WORKSHOP OF ELECTING LOVE. What are we elected to, if God has chosen us? Why, He has chosen us unto *holiness*. There is no man in this world chosen to go to Heaven apart from being made fit to go there! We are chosen to be made the children of God; chosen to be made like Christ. Well, now, in the hands of God, the blessed Spirit, the furnace often becomes very helpful to this end, for it consumes much of our dross! Do you ask me what sort of dross does a man lose in the furnace? I answer, affliction helps to remove many a superfluity of naughtiness, but there is one which I will tell you of at once and that is mushroom faith and wild-fire joy.

We have a great store of the fictitious and unreal, especially when we begin. Then we are mighty big Christians and are likely to surpass all that have gone before us! I do not know whether we have not reached the higher life, but certainly we are quite near it, for we are very rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing! It is wonderful what fine saints we are until we are *tried*—and then our beauty consumes away like a moth. The Lord puts us into the furnace three or four days and we wonder where one-half of us has gone! He keeps us there another week or two and we shrivel in a most satisfactory manner.

What have we lost? Any Divine Grace? No, Brothers and Sisters, no man ever lost any Grace in the furnace! What have we lost? Well, we have lost what we *thought* was Grace—we have lost spiritual gas. We have parted with vast accumulations of self-conceit, self-confidence and self-esteem—and instead of glorying in ourselves, we begin to cry for mercy out of the very dust! I have known a child of God so big that he could hardly get inside the door of any ordinary Meeting House and by the time that the Lord had given him a twist or two, he was glad enough to creep into a mouse hole, so long as he might be somewhere near the people of God!

Sanctified affliction is a wonderfully diminishing process, but that is the way we grow—we grow by becoming less and less in our own esteem! The Lord uses the furnace on purpose to this end—to take away fictitious Grace! Some of our young friends all of a sudden descend into the pit of despair and we are very grieved for them—but it is the best thing that can happen to them—for when they find their feet, again, they will have learned how to walk in a much more careful and godly manner than they did before! So you see that electing love uses the furnace to consume our dross.

The Lord uses the furnace to also prepare the soul for a more complete fashioning. The metal must be melted before it can be poured into the mold and affliction is used by the Holy Spirit to melt the heart, to make it tender and pliable and to fit it to receive the fashion and take the shape of the sacred mold into which heavenly wisdom delivers it. Besides, affliction has much to do in loosening a Christian from this world—and this is a great and necessary part of his education, seeing that he is not to be here long—and yet is as apt to cling to earth as if he would dwell here eternally! He is soon to be up and away to his estates on the hilltops, yet he clings to this poor earth and would hug it yet more if it were not that the Lord makes it bitter to him!

One said of old, “My soul is even as a weaned child.” A great many might far more truly say, “My soul is even as a *weaning* child—very fretty and very willful—but not at all ready to give up its childish delights.” A blessed thing it is when there has been enough furnace work to make a man say, “I have done with the world. Now all my thoughts rise towards the world to come, for *there* my treasure, by God’s Grace, is laid up.”

My time flies so rapidly that I cannot stop long on any one branch of this very fruitful topic. There is no doubt that electing love does use the furnace as its workshop and that there the vessels of mercy are made to receive many a line of beauty and marks of Divine Grace.

V. But now, fifthly, THE FURNACE IS A GREAT SCHOOL IN WHICH WE LEARN OF ELECTION ITSELF. First, in the furnace we learn the *graciousness* of election. When a child of God, in the time of trouble, sees the corruption of his heart—the little Hell, the perfect Sodom which reeks within his nature—he begins to say, “How can the Lord ever love *me*? If He has loved me, His affection must be traced to Grace, Free Grace, Sovereign Grace, Divine Grace and nothing but Grace.” Now that is a great thing to learn!

Then, too, we learn the *holiness* of election, for while we lie suffering, a voice says, “God will not spare you because there is still sin in you. He will cleanse you from every false way.” Then we learn what a holy thing God’s election is! Then we learn how clean they must be who are to stand in His Presence. Then we see how He would have His favorites loathe every sin! Then we learn how God sees it better that His children should always smart than that they should *sometimes* sin! He will sooner make them bleed at every pore than He will allow their hearts to go after their idols. What a holy thing election is when it involves rebukes and chastisements in order to our perfecting!

Then, too, in the furnace we see what a *loving* thing election is, for never is God so loving to His people consciously as when they are in the flames of trouble. How tenderly He presses them to His bosom in their hour of grief! The mother always loves her child, but let that child be ill, let it pine away, let it become weaker and weaker and you will see the mother’s heart! She loves that child better than the others because it needs more love! And when the Lord allows His dear children to grow poor, or to become distressed in mind or in body, then He lets out His heart to them—then will He show them His love in such choice and delicate ways as perhaps they never knew before. It is at such times that God’s people know the power of electing love!

“Ah,” cries the instructed Believer, “I can now see how the decrees of God preserve my soul! I am in the furnace and if He had not kept me, the vehement heat would long ago have utterly consumed me.” If you want to see what the power of God can do for a Believer you must stand where Nebuchadnezzar stood and look into the red mouth of the furnace! Those who threw in the holy children perished by reason of the vehemence of the flames so that there was no fancy about the fire—it was a real and killing flame! Look steadily in—your eyes can bear the gaze. You see three men walking. They were cast in bound, but they are walking loose!

Three, did I say? There are four! There is a mystic Stranger with them—One who wears a crown brighter than all the crowns of earth—but who is He? “The fourth is like unto the Son of God.” Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had never seen the Son of God so near them as when they trod the glowing coals! Is it not written, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction”? When you go through the fire you shall not be burned. The Lord’s choice of you shall be shown by His bearing you company! Yes, Beloved, and it is at such times that the sweetness of God’s electing love comes home to the Christian heart, for he joys and rejoices in his tribulation while he is conscious of the love of God! I would not change my estate—no, not in the furnace—with the bravest worldling that lives! When everything else is gone, if electing love remains, I am rich to all the intents of bliss! Let me be sure of almighty love and all the rest is not worth a thought!

So, Beloved, you learn election in the furnace and, though I do not desire any Believer the slightest harm, but wish him every blessing, yet as to some of my Christian Brothers and Sisters who never go very far into the deep things of God

and are very cloudy about the Doctrines of Grace and cannot, indeed, say, “Grace,” without somehow stuttering, “free will,” I would to God that they had a little touch of the furnace for their eternal good! A scorch or two might do them good and they might, perhaps, be better able to speak to the praise of the glory of that infinite eternal Grace which chose the saints of old and will not cast them away!

VI. Now, lastly, by the FURNACE SOME OF THE HIGHER ENDS OF A YET MORE SPECIAL ELECTION ARE OFTEN REVEALED for there is not only an election of Grace, but there is an election from among the elect to the highest position and to the noblest service! Jesus Christ had many choice disciples, but it is written, “I have chosen you twelve.” Out of the 12 there were three—you know their names and out of the three there was one, elect out of the elect—that loving, tender *John*, who leaned upon his Master’s bosom!

The furnace has much to do with this, as a rule, since it usually attends and promotes the higher states of Divine Grace and the wider ranges of usefulness. First with the preacher this truth is seen—affliction makes him eminent. I do not think that the preacher will long feed God’s saints if he does not read in that volume which Luther said was one of the three best books in his library, namely, *affliction*. That book is printed in black letters but it has some wonderful illuminations in it and he who would teach the people must often weep over its chapters. Men never bake bread so well as when the oven is well heated, nor do we prepare sermons so well as when the fire burns around us.

When we have been in heaviness, ourselves, we are able to talk experimentally to the tried children of God. When the Lord means to train any of His servants for eminent usefulness in the building up of His people, He passes him through the fire—edification comes of tribulation. So is it with the Christian hero. He could never lead the host if he had not been chastened of the Lord in secret places. Men who have stood in the front of the armies of God have been trained by adversity. Martin Luther—grand, brave man—have you ever read his private biography? He was a man so tempted, so tried and so frequently the victim of depression of spirits and dire despondency that he was often ready to die in despair!

There were times when he did not know whether he had any part or lot in the glad tidings which he loved so well. Though he went on thundering out the Gospel for other people, he sometimes could get no comfort himself. Those awful conflicts of his with the devil were the means of confirming his spirit in his public controversies! How could he be afraid of the Pope when he had faced the devil, himself? He could not fear to go to Worms because of the devils on the housetops of which he spoke—for he had faced all the infernal legions in his own house and, by God’s Grace, had overcome them!

Look at Calvin, again, that mightiest master in Israel—clear, upright and profound! He suffered daily under a list of diseases, any of which would have made an invalid of a less courageous man and, although always early in the morning at the cathedral, delivering his famous expositions which have enriched the Church of God, yet he always bore about him a body full of anguish. Nor could England find a Wycliffe, nor Scotland a Knox, nor Switzerland a Zwingli, except it were where the Refiner sits at the furnace door!

It must be so! No sword is fit for our Lord’s handling till it has been full often annealed. Well, as it is with the preachers and heroes, so it will be with us if we would rise. I would have you greatly aspire in holy things! Labor after a perfectly consecrated life! Renounce all selfishness and live for the salvation of souls and the glory of God! But remember that you will not reach it except by many a trial! Do you aspire to be Christly? I trust you do. But you never will be like Jesus if you never bear a cross! If your life is one of ease, can you be like He who had no place to lay His head? If you never know self-denial, if you never have reproach heaped upon you—if no man ever calls you devil, or mad—if everything goes swimmingly with you, how can you know fellowship with the Despised and Rejected of Men? God’s true people are opposed by the current of the times, even as their Master was!

Oh, yes, it will cost you many a sorrow, many a tear if you are to follow your Master fully! But do not, therefore, hesitate. Do you want to be heavenly? I know some that are already, in a measure, so. I could indicate some members of this Church whose speech is savored with eternity and glory—they cannot speak half-a-dozen sentences but their speech betrays that they have been with Jesus! Mark well this fact—they are tried people—they are mostly sick people of whom I would dare to say that they are heavenly! We ought all to be so, but oh, my Brothers and Sisters, we are very little what we should be till we are put upon the anvil and the Lord uses the hammer upon us! If He is doing that, now, with any of you and you have crosses to bear, do not repine, but let the soft whisper of the text sustain you—“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.”

There are tokens of consumption about you, dear Sister—I see that hectic flush, but do not dread the future, for the Lord says—“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” You have struggled hard, my Brother, to rise out of your situation, but as often as you have strived, you have fallen back, again, with broken wings to your somewhat hard lot. Do not be despondent, but abide in your calling with contentment since the Lord has said—“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” Young man, you have been to college and you were near taking your degree, but your health is failing you and you will never become a renowned scholar as you hoped. Do not distress yourself because your part will be passive rather than active, for the Lord says—“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.”

Merchant, your firm is going to pieces—you will be poor—but have faith in God. It is the Lord’s will that you should go struggling through the rest of your life, but He says—“I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” Mother, you have lost three or four little ones and there is another sickening and you say, “I cannot bear it.” Yes, you *will* bear it, for the Lord says, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” And are you here, Hannah? Are you here, tonight, you woman of a sorrowful spirit? Is your adversary bitter of spirit toward you? Are there those about you that grieve you and make you fret? Weep no more, for the Lord loves you when no one else does and He says, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction”!

Some of you are like ferns. You never flourish except in the damp and in the shade. Too much sunlight would not be good for you. Some plants need a marsh and a fog to develop them and, perhaps, you are such. Perhaps your Master knows that if He puts you where you would like to be, it would be deadly to you and therefore He writes, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” Now, I take my leave of you all by a morsel of personal experience. My Lord met me tonight and said, “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction,” and I endeavored to reply to Him, “My Lord, inasmuch as You do graciously condescend to say, ‘I have chosen you,’ I leave the rest of the sentence entirely to Your will and ask not whether it is in the furnace or out of it. Choose me and then choose everything for me. If you choose the furnace, I would choose the furnace, too.”

Remember the good woman who, when they said to her, because she was very ill, “Would you rather live or die?” replied, “I would rather God’s will were done”? “Oh,” they said, “but if God would let it be just as *you* wish, which should it be?” She replied, “If the Lord were to leave it to my will, I would beg Him to be so good as to let it be His will and not mine.” O, Beloved, pray, “Not as I will.” Grief is almost ended when self is slain! Sorrow well near ceases to be sorrow when you take the sting of *self* out of it! The Lord be with you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.