

THE SHEEP BEFORE THE SHEARERS

NO. 1543

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*“As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opens not His mouth.”
Isaiah 53:7.*

It is very suggestive of the way in which our Lord Jesus took the sinner's place that we are here, in the context, compared to sheep—“All we like sheep have gone astray,” and then He who comes to take our place is also compared to a sheep—“As a sheep before her shearers is dumb.” It is wonderful how complete was the interchange of positions between Christ and His people so that what they were He became in order that what He is they may become! See how closely He became like His brethren? I can very well understand how we should be compared to the sheep and He to the shepherd, but I should never have dared to coin the comparison which likens Him to a sheep! I dare try to explain, but I should never have dared to utter it if I had not found it here.

To liken the Son of the Highest to a sheep would have been unpardonable presumption had not His own Spirit employed the condescending figure. Though the emblem is very gracious, it is by no means novel, for our Lord had been long before Isaiah's day typified in the Lamb of the Passover. To call Him, “the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world,” is a very frequent mode of explaining to us how He made expiation for our transgressions and, indeed, even in His Glory He is the Lamb in the midst of the Throne before whom angels and the redeemed are bowing. I delight to bring before your minds the amazing communion between yourselves and Jesus—you “like sheep” and He “as a sheep”—you like sheep in your wanderings, He like a sheep in His patience. You more like sheep—I mean myself and you—more like sheep for foolishness, but He only like a sheep for the sweet submissiveness of His Spirit, so that beneath the shearer's hand, “He opens not His mouth.”

I. I will not keep you with any preface, but invite you to consider, first, OUR SAVIOR'S PATIENCE under the figure of a sheep before her shearers. Let us view our Lord's patience by the help of the Holy Spirit. I do not think I will preach to you, but I will set before you as open a window as I can and ask you to look in and behold the Lamb of God. Our Lord was brought to the slaughter and brought, in another sense, by another figure, to the shearers. He was brought to the slaughter that He might die—to the shearers that He might be shorn of His comfort and of His honors—shorn, even, of His good name and shorn, at last, of life itself.

While He was before the slaughterers He was quiet as a lamb that is led—when He was under the shearers He was as silent as a sheep that lies to be shorn. You know the story of how patient He was before Pilate and Herod and Caiaphas and on the Cross. You have no record of His groaning, or of His uttering any exclamation as though impatient of the pain and shame which He received at the hands of wicked men. You have not one bitter word, one hard speech. Pilate cries, “Answer You nothing? Behold how many things they witness against You!” And Herod is bitterly disappointed, for he expected to see some miracle worked by Jesus. All that He says is like the bleating of a sheep, only so infinitely more full of meaning. He utters sentences like these—“For this purpose was I born and came into the world, that I might bear witness to the Truth” and, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” He is all patience and silence.

Now remember, first, that our Lord was silent and opened not His mouth against His adversaries and did not accuse one of them of cruelty or injustice. They slandered Him, but He replied not. False witnesses arose, but He answered them not. He did not say, like Paul, “God shall smite you, you white wall.” I am not going to condemn Paul, but I certainly am not going to commend him, either. In contrast with the Master, how differently he behaves! Jesus lets not fall a word against anybody, though they are doing everything that malice can invent against Him. For Pilate He even makes a half apology, “He that delivered Me unto you has the greater sin.”

One would have thought He must have spoken when they spat in His face. Might He not have said, “Friend, why are you doing this? For which of all My works do you insult Me?” But the time for such expostulations was over. When they struck Him on the face with the palms of their hands, it would have been understandable if He had said, “Why do you strike Me so?” But no, He speaks not. He brings no accusation to His Father. He had only to have lifted His eyes to Heaven, or to have felt a wrathful *wish* and legions of angels would have chased out the ribald soldiers—one flash of a seraph’s wing and Herod had been eaten by worms and Pilate had died the death he well deserved as an unjust judge!

The hill of the Cross might have become a volcano’s mouth to swallow up the whole multitude who stood there jesting and jeering at Him. But no, nothing of the kind—there was no display of power, or rather there was so great a display of power over Himself that He did not use His might against His most bitter foes! He restrained Omnipotence, itself, with a strength which can never be measured, for His mighty love availed even to restrain Divine Wrath! He kept back the natural indignation which must have come over His spirit against the injustice, the lies, the shameful malice of His foes. He held it all back and was patient, meek, silent to the end.

Again, as He did not utter a word against His adversaries, so He did not say a word against any one of us. You remember how Zipporah said to Moses, “Surely a bloody husband you are to me,” as she saw her child bleeding? And surely Jesus might have said to His Church, “You are a costly spouse to Me, to bring Me all this shame and blood shedding.” But He gives liberally, He opens the very fountain of His heart and He upbraids not. He had reckoned on the uttermost expenditure and endured the Cross, despising the shame—

*“This was compassion like a God,
That when the Savior knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity never withdrew.”*

No doubt He looked across the ages, for those eyes of His were not dim even when bloodshot on the Cross and He might have looked at your indifference and mine, at our coldness of heart and unfaithfulness—and He might have left on record some such words as these—“I am suffering for those who are utterly unworthy of My regard; their love will be a very poor return for Mine. Though I give My whole heart for them, how lukewarm is their love to Me! I am sick of them. I am weary of them and it is woe to Me that I should be laying down My heart’s blood for such a worthless race as these, My people, are.”

But there is not a hint of such a feeling, not a trace of it! He is silent before the shearers. They shear away everything from Him. They strip Him to the last rag, till, as He hangs upon the tree, He says, “I can count all My bones, they look and stare upon Me,” and yet He murmurs not against our cruel sins! He was stripped because we were naked, that He might cover our nakedness and yet He makes no complaint against us, nor utters a single syllable by way of regret that He had entered upon so severe an enterprise and that He was paying so heavy a price. No. “For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross, despising the shame,” and not a syllable is uttered that looks like murmuring, or wishing that He had not commenced the work.

And again, as there was not a word against His adversaries, nor a word against you or me, so there was not a word against His Father or of repining at the severity of the punishment of our sin. You know how Cain said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear,” and yet to me he seems to have been treated with strange leniency, that first red-handed murderer. Sometimes you and I have cried, when under a comparatively light grief, “Surely my grief cannot be weighed in the scales, nor measured in the balances!” We have thought ourselves treated very harshly. We have dared to cry out against God, “My face is foul with weeping and on my eyelids is the shadow of death; not for any injustice in my hands: also my prayer is pure.”

But not so the Savior. In His mouth were no complaints. And yet it is quite impossible for us to conceive how the Father pressed and bruised Him. How often did that olive press revolve? How was the screw tightened again and again, to bring the stones together, to bruise out of Him His very life! “It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief.” He, alone, of all mankind could truly say, “All Your waves and Your billows have gone over Me.” Yet there is not a complaint, for, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” is a cry of *grief*—it is not a cry of repining. It shows manhood in its weakness, but not manhood in revolt! There is the cry of grief, but there is not the voice of rebellion there, nor even of despair.

We have the Lamentations of Jeremiah, but where are the lamentations of Jesus? Jesus wept and Jesus sweated great drops of blood, but He never murmured nor felt rebellion in His heart. Beloved, I feel as if I cannot preach upon this, but ask you just to look in there, within the open door and see Jesus, the Lamb, waiting in the shambles. He is not struggling when the knife is at His throat, but waiting there to die and dying with His own consent—laying down His life willingly for our sakes. Look again and see your Lord and Savior lying down stretched out in passive resignation beneath the shearers as they take away everything that is dear to Him and yet He opens not His mouth!

I see in this, in Christ our Lord, complete submission. He gives Himself up. There is no reserve about it. The Sacrifice did not need binding with cords to the horns of the altar. How different from your case and mine! He stands there willing to suffer, to be spit upon, to be shamefully treated and to die, for in Him there was a complete surrender. There was no reserve about His body, soul, or spirit. He was wholly given up to do the Father's will and work out our redemption. There was a complete self-conquest, too. In Him no faculty arose to plead for liberty and ask to be exempted from the general strain. No limb of the body, no portion of the mind, no faculty of the spirit complained—all submitted—a *whole* Christ giving up His *whole* being unto God that He might perfectly offer Himself without spot for our redemption.

There was not only self-conquest, but there was a complete absorption in His work. The sheep, lying there, thinks no more of the pastures. It just gives itself up to the shearer. And Christ forsook His Father that He might be one flesh with *us*—that was at the very first and, therefore, He came here and was joined unto us at Bethlehem. He kept up the union to the end and, therefore, He was one with us in *death*. The zeal of God's house did eat Him up in Pilate's hall as well as everywhere else, for there He witnessed a good confession. No thought had He but for the clearing of the Divine honor and the salvation of God's elect.

His powers were concentrated into one desire and the passion of love to men made His heart hot within Him till it melted and ran out in a stream of love and blood. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, I wish *we* could always get to this—to submit our whole spirit to God, to resign ourselves completely, to learn self-conquest and then the delivering up of conquered self entirely to God—the absorption of it all in one desire, the burning up of the sacrifice till it should be like Elijah's sacrifice on Carmel when the fire came down from Heaven and consumed not only the bullock, but the wood and the stones of the altar and licked up the water that was in the trenches and the whole sacrifice went up in one vast cloud of fire and smoke to Heaven, a whole burnt offering to the living God!

This is just what one could wish might happen to us, even as it happened unto the Lord's Christ on that day. The wonderful serenity and submissiveness of our Lord are still better set forth by our text, if it is, indeed, true that sheep in the east are even more docile than with us. Those who have seen the noise and roughness of many of our washings and shearings will hardly believe the testimony of that ancient writer Philo-Judaeus when he affirms that the sheep came voluntarily to be shorn. He says—"Woolly rams laden with thick fleeces put themselves into his hands [the shepherd's] to have their wool shorn, being thus accustomed to pay their yearly tribute to man, their king by nature. The sheep stands in a silent inclining posture, unconstrained under the hand of the shearer. These things may appear strange to those who do not know the docility of the sheep, but they are true."

II. Thus I have very feebly, indeed, set before you, dear Friends, the patience of our beloved Master. Now I want you to follow me, in the second place, to view our own case under the same metaphor as that which is used in reference to our Lord. Did not I begin by saying that because we were sheep, He deigns to compare Himself to a sheep? Now, just go back again. Our Lord was as a sheep under the shearers and as He is, so are we, also, in this world. Though we shall never be offered up like a lamb in the temple by way of expiation, yet the saints, for ages, were the flock of slaughter, as it is written, "For Your sake we are killed all the day long, we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter!" Jesus sends us forth as sheep in the midst of wolves and we are to regard ourselves as living sacrifices, ready to be offered up.

I dwell, however, more particularly upon the second symbol—we can go and *do* go as sheep under the shearers' hands. I want to speak to you a little, this evening, about this figure, as I have no doubt it has been worked out in the lives of many here present and may perhaps be worked out at this present time and in future days in the rest of you. Just as a sheep is taken by the shearer and its wool is all cut off, so does the Lord take His people and shear them, taking away all their comforts at times—all their *earthly* comforts and leaving them bare as shorn sheep. I wish when it came to our turn to undergo this shearing operation it could be said of us as of our Lord, "As a sheep before her shearers, so He opens not His mouth."

I fear that we open our mouths a great deal and make no end of complaint. But now to the figure. We need to be reconciled to the shearing process and to that end I shall speak at this time. First, remember that a sheep rewards its owner for all his care and trouble by being shorn. There is nothing else that I know of that a sheep can do. It yields food when it is killed, but while it is alive the one payment that the sheep can make to the shepherd is to yield its fleece in due season. And so, dear Friends, a sheep, if it were intelligent, might well be reconciled to be shorn because it would say, "The shepherd deserves to be rewarded for his pains and so I am content to go down to the shearing house, to yield my fleece that he may be repaid."

Some of God's people can give to Christ a tribute of gratitude by active service and they should do so gladly every day of their lives, but many others cannot do much in active service and about the only reward they can give to their Lord is to give up their fleece by suffering when He calls upon them to suffer. They can submissively yield to be shorn of their personal comfort when the time comes for patient endurance. And mark you, those who serve Christ *actively* ought to feel that what they do in that way is all too little and if they can supplement it by passive service, by yielding themselves to be shorn as others are, they ought to rejoice that in this way they can show forth to Christ the more abundant gratitude for what He has done for them.

Here comes the shearer. He takes the sheep and begins to cut, cut, cut, cut, taking away the wool by wholesale. Affliction is often used as the big shears. The husband is taken away, or perhaps the wife. Little children are taken away, property is taken away, health is taken away. Sometimes the shears even cut off your good name—slander comes—everything seems to come and remove your consolations till all comforts vanish. Well, this is your shearing time and it may be that you are not able to glorify God to any very large extent except by undergoing this process. And if this is the case, do you not think that you and I, like good sheep of Christ, should surrender cheerfully and say, "I lay myself down with this intent, that You should take from me anything and everything and do what You will with me, for I am not my own—I am bought with a price and so I would cheerfully yield to anything by which You may get some honor out of me.

"O, You great Shepherd of the sheep, clip and shear me as You will, so long as You see some sort of return for all Your tender care and bitter woe." Notice that the sheep is, itself, benefited by the operation of shearing. Before they begin to shear the sheep the wool is long and old and every bush that catches it, every thistle with which it gets entangled, every briar that it passes by, tears off a bit of the wool and the sheep looks ragged and forlorn. If the wool were left on it when the heat of summer came, it would not be able to bear it—it would be so overloaded with clothing that it would be as we, ourselves, are when we have kept on our borrowed wool, our flannels and broadcloths too late.

After the heat of summer has come we have to throw off our thick clothes. We cannot bear them—and so the sheep is the better for losing its wool—it would become a hindrance to it and not a comfort if it had to retain it. So, Brothers and Sisters, when the Lord shears us, we do not like the operation any more than the sheep does, but first, it is for His Glory and secondly, it is really for our benefit and, therefore, we are bound most willingly to submit. There are many things which we should have liked to have kept which, if we had kept them, would not have proved blessings, but curses. Remember, a stale blessing is a curse.

The bronze serpent preserved as a relic became a snare to the people till it was broken up and called Nehushtan, a piece of brass. The manna, though it came from Heaven, was only good so long as God's command made it a blessing and when they kept it over its due time it bred worms and stank and then it was no blessing. I do believe that many persons, if they could, would keep their blessings stinking in the house till they filled their cupboards with worms! But God will not have it so. Up to a certain point for you to be wealthy was a blessing—it would not have been a blessing any longer and so the Lord took your riches away. Up to that point your child was a gift, but it would have been no longer so and, therefore, it fell sick and died. You may not be able to see it, but it must certainly be that God, when He withdraws a blessing from His people, takes it away because it would not be a blessing any longer.

Remember this text, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly," and if that is true, then this is true, "No really good thing will I take away from them that walk uprightly," for that is something more than withholding. When the wool goes, it is because the sheep does not really need it—it is better without it. Mr. Jonatt, who has written upon sheep, tells us, "As the spring advances, the old wool is no longer needed to defend the animal from the cold and it becomes, from its weight and its warmth, a nuisance rather than a comfort." When the Lord Jesus Christ sends afflic-

tion and trial to shear us, while we hope to glory Him in the process, it is also good for us that we should have it cut away. Though we do not like it at the time, it is working our lasting good.

You who know something about sheep will remember that before sheep are shorn they are always washed. Were you ever present at the scene when they drive them down to the brook, to the place where they have dammed up the stream to make a pool for washing? There the men stand in rows, while the shepherd stands in the water, breast high. The sheep are driven down and the men seize them, throw them into the water, keeping their faces above water and swill them round and round and round to wash the wool before they clip it off. You see them come out on the other side frightened to death, poor things, wondering whatever is coming, no doubt under the impression that they are going to be drowned. And when they escape, they stand bleating on the other shore as, one by one, they finish their swim.

I want to suggest to you, Brethren, that whenever a trial threatens to overtake you, before it actually arrives you should ask the Lord to sanctify you. If He is going to clip the wool, ask Him to wash it before He takes it off. Ask to be cleansed in spirit, soul and body. That is a very good custom Christian people have of asking a blessing on their meals before they eat bread. Do you not think it is even more necessary to ask a blessing on our *troubles* before we get into them? Here is your dear child likely to die—will you not, dear parents, meet together and ask God to bless the death of that child if it is to happen? Here are things going badly in trade—would it not be a good thing to hold a special meeting in the family and ask God to bless your declining business to you? There is a bad crop. The harvest fails—would it not be well to say, “Lord, sanctify this poverty, this loss, this year’s bad harvest. Cause it to be a means of Grace to us. The evil is coming and before it comes we would ask a blessing on it.”

Why not ask a blessing on the cup of bitterness as well as upon the cup of thanksgiving? Ask to be washed before you are shorn and if the shearing must come, let that be your chief concern. “Lord, if You are coming to take my wool, make it clean before You take it. Wash what You take and wash me, also, and I shall be clean. Yes, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.” After the washing and the sheep has dried, the sheep actually loses what was its comfort. It is thrown down and you see the shearers. You wonder at them and pity the poor sheep. The sheep is losing what was its comfort. It will happen to you that you shall lose what is your comfort. Will you remember this? Because the next time you receive a fresh comfort you must say it is a loan.

Oh sheep, there is no wool on your back but what will come off! Child of God, there is no comfort in your possession but what will either leave you, or you will leave it! Nothing is our own except our God. “Why,” says one, “not our *sin*?” That *was* our own, I admit that, but Jesus has taken that upon Himself and we call it no more our own. There is nothing our own but our God and there is no blessing that we have but what, when the Lord sends it to us, it is with the agreement that we shall have it only for a time. It is held on lease, terminable at the will of the Lord. We foolishly consider that our mercies belong to us and when the Lord takes them away we half grumble. If you borrow anything of a neighbor, you ought not to send it back with tears, or say, “I am sorry you need it back.”

A loan, they say, should go laughing home and so should what God loans us. We should rejoice. He gives and, blessed be His name, He takes but what He gave. He does not take to Himself anything of ours—He takes to Himself what He lent us. All our possessions are but favors borrowed here to be eventually returned. So as the sheep yields up its wool and loses its comfort, so must we yield up all our comforts one by one. Or if they remain with us till we die, we shall part with them, then—we shall not take so much as one of them across the stream of death. Our spiritual riches are of another kind and they are laid up already in Heaven—but of all things here below we shall take not a thread with us.

The shearers, when they are taking the wool off the sheep, take care not to hurt the sheep. They clip as close as they can, but they do not cut the skin. If possible, they will not make a gash or a wound, or draw blood even in the smallest degree. When they do make a gash, it is because the sheep does not lie still. But a careful shearer has bloodless shears. Of this Thomson sings in his Seasons and the passage is so good an illustration of the whole subject that I will adorn my discourse with it—

*“How meek, how patient, the mild creature lies!
What softness in its melancholy face,
What dumb complaining innocence appears!
Fear not, you gentle tribes! ‘tis not the knife
Of horrid slaughter that is o’er you waved.
No, ‘tis the tender swain’s well guided shears,*

*Who having now, to pay his annual care,
Borrowed your fleece, to you a cumbrous load,
Will send you bounding to your hills again."*

You can be sure that when the Lord is clipping and shearing us He will not hurt us. He will take our comforts away, but He will not really injure us, or cause a wound to our spirits. Has He not said, "In the world you shall have tribulation, but in Me you shall have peace"?

If ever the shears make us bleed, it is because we kick, because we struggle. If we were patient as the sheep, we should just lie still and the process would cost us very little pain. What pain there was would become delightful, seeing we had submitted ourselves entirely to the Divine will. Pain grows into pleasure when you come to feel that God wills it—you are glad to suffer because He ordains you should. It is the kicking and the struggling that make the shearing work at all hard. But if we are silent before the shearers, no hurt can come. The Lord may clip wonderfully close—I have known Him clip some very close who did not seem to have a bit of wool left, for they were stripped entirely, just as Job was when He cried, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return there," but still, he was able to add, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away and blessed be the name of the Lord."

You will notice about sheep shearing that the shearers always shear at a suitable time. It would be a very wicked, cruel and unwise thing to begin shearing sheep in winter time. There is a proverb which talks about God "tempering the wind to the shorn lamb." It may be so, but it is a very wicked practice to shear lambs while winds need tempering. Sheep are shorn when it is warm, genial weather—when they can afford to lose their fleece and are all the better for being relieved of it. As the summer comes on sheep shearing time comes. Have you ever noticed that whenever the Lord afflicts us, He selects the best possible time? There is a prayer that He puts into His disciples' mouths, "Pray that your flight is not in the winter"—the spirit of that prayer may be seen in the seasonableness of our sorrows. He will not send us our worst troubles at our worst times.

I have frequently noticed and I have treasured it up with gratitude, that when I have had strong inclinations to sin, the opportunity has not come—that if ever I have had opportunities of sinning temptingly put before me—then I have had no inward longing towards the sin. When the inward desire and the opportunity meet, that is a very dangerous case, indeed, but the Lord keeps His people from that. So if you notice your soul is depressed, the Lord does not send you a very heavy burden but reserves such a load for times when you have had joy in the Lord and that joy has been your strength. It has got to be a kind of feeling with us that when we have much delight, a trial is near—and when sorrow thickens, deliverance is approaching. The Lord does not send us two burdens at a time, or if He does, He sends double strength.

It is an observation which I suppose no one would make but an Irishman and I am not one, that you never knew the west wind blow when the east wind is troubling you. You never knew the wind blow from the north when it was blowing from the south. As a rule, unless it is in a tornado or a cyclone, the wind blows from some one quarter. "He stays His rough wind in the day of the east wind." He knows how to prevent our suffering more tribulation than we can bear. He shears us, but not to injure us. He clips away the wool, but sends the genial temperature so that we may be able to flourish under our loss. Let that be noted and let God be thanked for it.

There is another thing to remember. When God takes away our mercies He is ready to supply us with more. It is with us as with the sheep—there is new wool coming. Whenever the Lord takes away our earthly comforts with one hand, one, two, three—He restores with the other hand—six, 12, scores, a hundred! He takes away by spoonfuls and He gives by carloads! We are crying and whining about the little loss and yet it is necessary in order that we may be able to receive the great mercy! Yes, it will be so—we shall yet have cause for rejoicing—"joy comes in the morning." There is always as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it and when one set of favors is taken away there are more mercies to come. The great sea of Divine Love has bigger fish in it than ever we have taken out of it. If we have lost one position, there is another position for us.

If we have been driven out of one place, there is yet a refuge for us. God opens a second door when He shuts the first. If He takes away the manna, as He did from His people Israel, it is because there is the corn of Canaan for them to live on. If the water of the Rock did not follow the tribes any longer, it was because they could drink of the Jordan and of the

brooks that flowed in that land of hills and valleys. Yes, there is new wool coming! Do not, therefore, fret at the shearing. I have given these thoughts in brief, that we may come to this last word.

III. Let us, in the third place, endeavor to imitate the example of our blessed Lord when our turn comes to be shorn. Let us be silent before the shearers, submissive, quiescent, even as He was. I have been giving, in everything I have said, a reason for so doing. I have shown that it glorifies God, rewards the Shepherd and benefits ourselves. I have shown that He measures and tempers our affliction and sends the trial at the right time. I have shown you in many ways that we are wise to submit ourselves as the sheep does to the shearer and the more completely we do so the better. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, we shall be happy when we have done with self! It will be well with us, whatever we may have gone through, when we learn that verse of Toplady's—

*“Sweet to lie passive in Your hands
And know no will but Yours.”*

I know we struggle a good deal and we make excuses for struggling. Sometimes we say, “Oh, this is so painful, I cannot be patient! I could have borne anything else, but not this.” When a father is going to correct his child, does he select something that is pleasant? Oh, dear, no! The painfulness of the chastisement is the essence of it and even so the bitterness of your sorrow will be a blessing to you. By the blueness of the wound the heart will be made better. Do not rebel because your trial seems strange. It is as good as saying, “If I have it all my own way I will not rebel, but if everything does not please me I will not endure it.”

Sometimes we complain because of our great weakness. “Lord, were I stronger I would not mind this heavy loss. I am like a sere leaf driven by the storm.” But who is to be the judge of the suitability of your trial? You or God? Since the Lord judges this trial to be suitable to your weakness, depend upon it, it is so. Lie still, lie still, lie quite still! “Alas,” you say, “my grief comes from the most cruel quarter. This trouble did not arise directly from God, it came through my cousin or my brother who ought to have treated me with gratitude. I could have borne it if it had not come in that way, but since it was not an *enemy*, I am unable to bear it!” Then let me tell you, it is not a traitor, after all. *God* is at the bottom of all your tribulation—look through the second causes to the great First Cause!

It is a great mistake when we fret over the human instrument which smites us and forget the hand which uses the rod. If I strike a dog with a stick, he bites my stick—that is because he is stupid. If he thought a little, he would bite *me*, or else take the blow and bow in obedience. Now, you must not begin biting the stick! After all, it is God that uses that staff, though it is of ebony or of blackthorn. It is well to have done with all this picking and choosing and to leave the whole matter in the hands of Infinite Wisdom. A sweet singer has put this matter very prettily, let me quote the lines—

*“But when my Lord did ask me
On what side I were content,
The grief whereby I must be purified,
To me was sent,
As each imagined anguish did appear,
Each withering bliss
Before my soul, I cried,
‘Oh! Spare me here,
Oh, no, not this!’
Like one that having need of,
Deep within, the surgeon’s knife,
Would hardly bear that
It should graze the skin,
Though for his life.
No, then, but He, who
Best does understand
Both what we need,
And what can bear,
Did take my case in hand,
Nor crying heed.*

This is the pith of my sermon—oh sheep, yield yourself, yield yourself! Oh Believer, yield yourself, lie passive, lie passive, struggle not! There is no use in struggling, for our great Shearer, if He means to shear, will do it. If He means to send us trials and troubles He will not spare us for our crying. He will not listen to our whining—He will do His will and carry out His purpose. What is the good, therefore, of rebellion? Did not I say, just now, that the sheep, by struggling, might be cut by the shears? So you and I, if we struggle against God, we shall get two troubles instead of one and after all, there is not half so much trouble in a trouble as there is in our kicking against the trouble!

The Eastern farmer, when he plows, has a goad and pricks the ox to make it move along. He does not hurt it much, but suppose the ox flings out the moment it touches him? He drives the goad into himself and bleeds. So is it with us. If we kick out against Divine Providences, we shall get a sore wound—much more than was ever necessary—we shall endure much more pain than would have come if we had yielded to the Divine will. What is the use of kicking and struggling, then, you fretful ones? You cannot make one hair white or black. You that are troubled, rest with us, for you cannot make shower or sunshine, rain or fine weather with all your groaning.

Did you ever bring a penny into the till by fretting, or put a loaf on the table by complaint, or get a shilling in your pocket by murmuring? Murmuring is wasted breath and fretting is wasted time. I wish that I could be more quiet, calm and self-possessed, but an active mind is apt to turn upon itself to its own wounding when all the cares of a Church and a great work press heavily. I long to cry habitually, “Lord, do *what* You will, *when* You will, *as* You will with me, Your servant—appoint me honor or dishonor, wealth or poverty, sickness or health, exhilaration or depression and I will take all right gladly from Your hands.” A man is not far from the gates of Heaven when he is fully submissive to the Lord’s will.

Though Heaven is uphill, the road to it is downhill—and when a man has gone down so much that he is dead to self, he is not far from entering into that Eternal Life where God shall be All in All, in bliss forever and ever. You that have been shorn have, I hope, received a word of comfort today through the ever blessed Spirit of God. May God bless it to you. Oh that the sinner, too, would submit himself to God, yield himself up and rebel no longer! Submit yourselves to God, let every thought be brought into captivity to Him and the Lord send His blessing, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

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