

**THE SOUL'S CONFLICT
AND VICTORY OVER
ITSELF BY FAITH**

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The Soul's Conflict and Victory Over Itself by Faith by Richard Sibbes

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RICHARD SIBBES

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BY THE
Rev. RICHARD SIBBES, D.D.

PSALM cxvi.—Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt
bountifully with thee.

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TO THE CHRISTIAN READER.

THERE be two sorts of people always in the visible Church; one that Satan keeps under with false peace, whose life is nothing but a diversion to present contentments, and a running away from God and their own hearts, which they know can speak no good unto them, these speak peace to themselves, but God speaks none. Such have nothing to do with this Scripture; the way for these men to enjoy comfort, is to be soundly troubled. True peace arises from knowing the worst first, and then our freedom from it. It is a miserable peace that ariseth from ignorance of evil. The angel *troubled the waters*, John v., and then cured those that stepped in. It is Christ's manner to trouble our souls first, and then to come with healing in his wings.

But there is another sort of people, who being drawn out of Satan's kingdom and within the covenant of grace, whom Satan labours to unsettle and disquiet: being the *god of the world*, he is vexed to see men in the world, walk above the world. Since he cannot hinder their estate, he will trouble their peace, and damp their spirits, and cut asunder the sinews of all their endeavours. These should take themselves to task as David doth here, and labour to maintain their portion,

and the glory of a Christian profession. For whatsoever is in God, or comes from God, is for their comfort. Himself is the God of comfort; his Spirit most known by that office. Our blessed Saviour was so careful that his disciples should not be too much dejected, that he forgot his own bitter passion to comfort them, whom yet he knew would all forsake him: *let not your hearts be troubled*, saith he. And his own soul was troubled to death, that we should not be troubled: *whatsoever is written is written for this end*; every article of faith hath a special influence in comforting a believing soul. They are not only food, but cordials; yea, he put himself to his oath, that we might not only have consolation but strong consolation. The sacraments seal unto us all the comforts we have by the death of Christ; the exercise of religion, as *Prayer, Hearing, Reading, &c.*, is that *our joy may be full*: the *communion of saints* is chiefly ordained to *comfort the feeble minded* and to *strengthen the weak*. God's government of his Church tends to this. Why doth he sweeten our pilgrimage, and let us see so many comfortable days in the world, but that we should serve him with cheerful and good hearts? As for crosses, he doth but cast us down, to raise us up, and empty us that he may fill us, and melt us that we may be *vessels of glory*, loving us as well in the furnace, as when we are out, and standing by us all the while. *We are troubled, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken.* 2 Cor. iv. 8. If we consider from what *fatherly love* afflictions come, how they are not only moderated, but sweetened and sanctified in the issue to us, how can it but minister matter of comfort in the greatest seeming discomforts? How then can

we let the reins of our affections loose to sorrow without being injurious to God and his providence? as if we would teach him how to govern his Church.

What unthankfulness is it to forget our consolation, and to look only upon matter of grievance? to think so much upon two or three crosses, as to forget a hundred blessings? To suck poison out of that, from which we should suck honey? What folly is it to straiten, and darken our own spirits? and indispose ourselves from doing or taking good? A limb out of joint can do nothing without deformity and pain; dejection takes off the wheels of the soul.

Of all other, Satan hath most advantage of discontented persons, as most agreeable to his disposition; being the most discontented creature under heaven, he hammers all his dark plots in their brains. The discontentment of the *Israelites in the wilderness* provoked God to *swear that they should never enter into his rest*. Psalm xcv. ult. There is *another spirit in my servant Caleb*, saith God; the spirit of God's people is an encouraging spirit. Wisdom teaches them, if they feel any grievances, to conceal them from others that are weaker, lest they be disheartened. God threatens it as a *curse to give a trembling heart, and sorrow of mind*, Deut. xxviii. 65; whereas on the contrary, joy is as oil to the soul, it makes duties come off cheerfully and sweetly from ourselves, graciously to others, and acceptably to God. A prince cannot endure it in his subjects, nor a father in his children, to be lowering at their presence. Such usually have stolen waters to delight themselves in.

How many are there that upon the disgrace that follows religion, are frightened from it? But what are discouragements to the encouragements religion brings

with it? which are such as the very angels themselves admire at. Religion indeed brings crosses with it, but then it brings comforts above those crosses. What a dishonour is it to religion to conceive that God will not maintain and honour his followers? as if his service were not the best service; what a shame is it for an heir of heaven to be cast down for every petty loss and cross? to be afraid of a man whose breath is in his nostrils, in not standing to a good cause, when we are sure God will stand by us, assisting and comforting us, whose presence is able to make the greatest torments sweet?

My discourse tends not to take men off from all grief and mourning; *Light for the righteous is sown in sorrow.* Our state of absence from the Lord, and living here in a vale of tears, our daily infirmities, and our sympathy with others, requires it; and where most grace is, there is most sensibleness, as in Christ. But we must distinguish between grief and that sullenness and dejection of spirit, which is with a repining and taking off from duty; when Joshua was overmuch cast down at Israel's turning their backs before their enemies, God reproves him, *Get thee up, Joshua, why liest thou upon thy face?* Joshua vii. 10.

Some would have men after the committing of gross sins to be presently comfortable, and believe without humbling themselves at all; indeed when we are once in Christ, we ought not to question our state in him; and if we do, it comes not from the Spirit; but yet a guilty conscience will be clamorous and full of objections, and God will not speak peace unto it till it be humbled. God will let his best children know what it is to be too bold with sin, as we see in David and Peter, who felt no peace till they had renewed their