

CHAPTER 9

In this and the following chapter we have Job's answer to Bildad's discourse, wherein he speaks honourably of God, humbly of himself, and feelingly of his troubles; but not one word by way of reflection upon his friends, or their unkindness to him, nor in direct reply to what Bildad had said. He wisely keeps to the merits of the cause, and makes no remarks upon the person that managed it, nor seeks occasion against him. In this chapter we have,

- I.** The doctrine of God's justice laid down (v. 2).
- II.** The proof of it, from his wisdom, and power, and sovereign dominion (v. 3-13).
- III.** The application of it, in which,
 - 1.** He condemns himself, as not able to contend with God either in law or battle (v. 14-21).
 - 2.** He maintains his point, that we cannot judge of men's character by their outward condition (v. 22-24).
 - 3.** He complains of the greatness of his troubles, the confusion he was in, and the loss he was at what to say or do (v. 25-35).

~~xxx~~ JOB 9:1-13

THE REPLY OF JOB

Bildad began with a rebuke to Job for talking so much, ~~xxx~~ Job 8:2. Job makes no answer to that, though it would have been easy enough to retort it upon himself; but in what he next lays down as his principle, that God never perverts judgment, Job agrees with him: *I know it is so of a truth*, v. 2. Note, We should be ready to own how far we agree with those with whom we dispute, and should not slight, much less resist, a truth, though produced by an adversary and urged against us, but receive it in the light and love of it, though it may have been misapplied. "*It is so of a truth*, that wickedness brings men to ruin and the godly are taken under God's special protection. These are truths which I subscribe to; but how can any man make good his part with God?" *In his sight shall no flesh living be*

justified, ⁴⁸¹⁰Psalm 143:2. *How should man be just with God?* Some understand this as a passionate complaint of God's strictness and severity, that he is a God whom there is no dealing with; and it cannot be denied that there are, in this chapter, some peevish expressions, which seem to speak such language as this. But I take this rather as a pious confession of man's sinfulness, and his own in particular, that, if God should deal with any of us according to the desert of our iniquities, we should certainly be undone.

I. He lays this down for a truth, that man is an unequal match for his Maker, either in dispute or combat.

1. In dispute (v. 3): *If he will contend with him, either at law or at an argument, he cannot answer him one of a thousand.*

(1.) God can ask a thousand puzzling questions which those that quarrel with him, and arraign his proceedings, cannot give an answer to. When God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind he asked him a great many questions (*Dost thou know this? Canst thou do that?*) to none of which Job could give an answer, Job 38, 39. God can easily manifest the folly of the greatest pretenders to wisdom.

(2.) God can lay to our charge a thousand offences, can draw up against us a thousand articles of impeachment, and we cannot answer him so as to acquit ourselves from the imputation of any of them, but must, by silence, give consent that they are all true. We cannot set aside one as foreign, another as frivolous, and another as false. We cannot, as to one, deny the fact, and plead not guilty, and, as to another, deny the fault, confess and justify. No, we are not able to answer him, but must *lay our hand upon our mouth*, as Job did (⁴⁸⁰⁴Job 40:4, 5), and cry, *Guilty, guilty.*

2. In combat (v. 4): *“Who hath hardened himself against him and hath prospered?”* The answer is very easy. You cannot produce any instance, from the beginning of the world to this day, of any daring sinner who has *hardened himself against God*, has obstinately persisted in rebellion against him, who did not find God too hard for him and pay dearly for his folly. Such transgressors have not prospered or had peace; they have had no comfort in their way nor any success. What did ever man get by trials of skill, or trials of titles, with his Maker? All the opposition given to God is but setting briers and thorns before a consuming fire; so foolish, so fruitless, so destructive, is the attempt, ⁴⁸⁰⁴Isaiah 27:4; ⁴⁸²¹Ezekiel 28:24;

Ⓢ1 1 Corinthians 10:22. Apostate angels hardened themselves against God, but did not prosper, Ⓢ2 2 Peter 2:4. The dragon fights, but is cast out, Ⓢ3 Revelation 12:9. Wicked men harden themselves against God, dispute his wisdom, disobey his laws, are impenitent for their sins and incorrigible under their afflictions; they reject the offers of his grace, and resist the strivings of his Spirit; they make nothing of his threatenings, and make head against his interest in the world. But have they prospered? Can they prosper? No; they are but *treasuring up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath*. Those that roll this will find it return upon them.

II. He proves it by showing what a God he is with whom we have to do: *He is wise in heart*, and therefore we cannot answer him at law; he is *mighty in strength*, and therefore we cannot fight it out with him. It is the greatest madness that can be to think to contend with a God of infinite wisdom and power, who knows every thing and can do every thing, who can be neither outwitted nor overpowered. The devil promised himself that Job, in the day of his affliction, would curse God and speak ill of him, but, instead of that, he sets himself to honour God and to speak highly of him. As much pained as he is, and as much taken up with his own miseries, when he has occasion to mention the wisdom and power of God he forgets his complaints, dwells with delight, and expatiates with a flood of eloquence, upon that noble useful subject. Evidences of the wisdom and power of God he fetches,

1. From the kingdom of nature, in which the God of nature acts with an uncontrollable power and does what he pleases; for all the orders and all the powers of nature are derived from him and depend upon him.

(1.) When he pleases he alters the course of nature, and turns back its streams, v. 5-7. By the common law of nature the mountains are settled and are therefore called *everlasting mountains*, the earth is established and cannot be removed (Ⓢ4 Psalm 93:1) and the pillars there of are immovably fixed, the sun rises in its season, and the stars shed their influences on this lower world; but when God pleases he can not only drive out of the common track, but invert the order and change the law of nature.

[1.] Nothing more firm than the mountains. When we speak of removing mountains we mean that which is impossible; yet the divine power can make them change their seat: *He removes them and they know not*, removes them whether they will or no; he can make them lower their

heads; he can level them, and overturn them in his anger; he can spread the mountains as easily as the husbandman spreads the molehills, be they ever so high, and large, and rocky. Men have much ado to pass over them, but God, when he pleases, can make them pass away. He made Sinai shake, ^{<388>}Psalm 68:8. *The hills skipped*, ^{<389>}Psalm 114:4. *The everlasting mountains were scattered*, ^{<316>}Habakkuk 3:6.

[2.] Nothing more fixed than the earth on its axletree; yet God can, when he pleases, *shake the earth out of its place*, heave it off its centre, and make even *its pillars to tremble*; what seemed to support it will itself need support when God gives it a shock. See how much we are indebted to God's patience. God has power enough to shake the earth from under that guilty race of mankind which makes it groan under the burden of sin, and so to *shake the wicked out of it* (^{<383>}Job 38:13); yet he continues the earth, and man upon it, and does not make it, as once, to swallow up the rebels.

[3.] Nothing more constant than the rising sun, it never misses its appointed time; yet God, when he pleases, can suspend it. He that at first commanded it to rise can countermand it. Once the sun was told to stand, and another time to retreat, to show that it is still under the check of its great Creator. Thus great is God's power; and how great then is his goodness, which causes his sun to shine even upon the evil and unthankful, though he could withhold it! He that made the stars also, can, if he pleases, seal them up, and hide them from our eyes. By earthquakes and subterraneous fires mountains have sometimes been removed and the earth shaken: in very dark and cloudy days and nights it seems to us as if the sun were forbidden to rise and the stars were sealed up, ^{<471>}Acts 27:20. It is sufficient to say that Job here speaks of what God can do; but, if we must understand it of what he has done in fact, all these verses may perhaps be applied to Noah's flood, when the mountains of the earth were shaken, and the sun and stars were darkened; and the world that now is we believe to be reserved for that fire which will consume the mountains, and melt the earth, with its fervent heat, and which will turn the sun into darkness.

(2.) As long as he pleases he preserves the settled course and order of nature; and this is a continued creation. He himself alone, by his own power, and without the assistance of any other,

[1.] *Spreads out the heaven* (v. 8), not only did spread them out at first, but still spreads them out (that is, keeps them spread out), for otherwise they would of themselves roll together like a scroll of parchment.

[2.] *He treads upon the waves of the sea*; that is, he suppresses them and keeps them under, that they return not to deluge the earth (^{<394B>}Psalm 104:9), which is given as a reason why we should all fear God and stand in awe of him, ^{<395D>}Jeremiah 5:22. He is mightier than the proud waves ^{<398A>}Psalm 93:4; 65:7.

[3.] He makes the constellations; three are named for all the rest (v. 9), *Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades*, and in general *the chambers of the south*. The stars of which these are composed he made at first, and put into that order, and he still makes them, preserves them in being, and guides their motions; he makes them to be what they are to man, and inclines the hearts of man to observe them, which the beasts are not capable of doing. Not only those stars which we see and give names to, but those also in the other hemisphere, about the antarctic pole, which never come in our sight, called here *the chambers of the south*, are under the divine direction and dominion. How wise is he then, and how mighty!

2. From the kingdom of Providence, that special Providence which is conversant about the affairs of the children of men. Consider what God does in the government of the world, and you will say, He is *wise in heart* and *mighty in strength*.

(1.) He does many things and great, many and great to admiration, v. 10. Job here says the same that Eliphaz had said (^{<388B>}Job 5:9), and in the original in the very same words, not declining to speak after him, though now his antagonist. God is a great God, and *doeth great things*, a wonder-working God; his works of wonder are so many that we cannot number them and so mysterious that we cannot find them out. O the depth of his counsels!

(2.) He acts invisibly and undiscerned, v. 11. "*He goes by me in his operations, and I see him not, I perceive him not. His way is in the sea,*" ^{<397B>}Psalm 77:19. The operations of second causes are commonly obvious to sense, but God does all about us and yet *we see him not*, ^{<417B>}Acts 17:23. Our finite understandings cannot fathom his counsels, apprehend his motions, or comprehend the measures he takes; we are therefore incompetent judges of God's proceedings, because we know not what he

does or what he designs. The *arcana imperii* — *secrets of government*, are things above us, which therefore we must not pretend to expound or comment upon.

(3.) He acts with an incontestable sovereignty, v. 12. He takes away our creature-comforts and confidences when and as he pleases, takes away health, estate, relations, friends, takes away life itself; whatever goes, it is he that takes it; by what hand so ever it is removed, his hand must be acknowledged in its removal. The Lord *takes away*, and *who can hinder him? Who can turn him away?* (Margin, *Who shall make him restore?*) Who can dissuade him or alter his counsels? Who can resist him or oppose his operations? Who can control him or call him to an account? What action can be brought against him? Or *who will say unto him, What doest thou?* Or, Why doest thou so? ^{<2065>}Daniel 4:35. God is not obliged to give us a reason of what he does. The meanings of his proceedings we know no now; it will be time enough to know hereafter, when it will appear that what seemed now to be done by prerogative was done in infinite wisdom and for the best.

(4.) He acts with an irresistible power, which no creature can resist, v. 13. *If God will not withdraw his anger* (which he can do when he pleases, for he is *Lord of his anger*, lets it out or calls it in according to his will), *the proud helpers do stoop under him*; that is, He certainly breaks and crushes those that proudly help one another against him. Proud men set themselves against God and his proceedings. In this opposition they join hand in hand. *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together*, to throw off his yoke, to run down his truths, and to persecute his people. *Men of Israel, help*, ^{<4023>}Acts 21:28; ^{<3808>}Psalm 83:8. If one enemy of God's kingdom fall under his judgment, the rest come proudly to help that, and think to deliver that out of his hand: but in vain; unless he pleases to withdraw his anger (which he often does, for it is the day of his patience) the proud helpers stoop under him, and fall with those whom they designed to help. *Who knows the power of God's anger?* Those who think they have strength enough to help others will not be able to help themselves against it.

~~104~~ JOB 9:14-21

THE REPLY OF JOB

What Job had said of man's utter inability to contend with God he here applies to himself, and in effect despairs of gaining his favour, which (some think) arises from the hard thoughts he had of God, as one who, having set himself against him, right or wrong, would be too hard for him. I rather think it arises from the sense he had of the imperfection of his own righteousness, and the dark and cloudy apprehensions which at present he had of God's displeasure against him.

I. He durst not dispute with God (v. 14): “*If the proud helpers do stoop under him, how much less shall I* (a poor weak creature, so far from being a helper that I am very helpless) *answer him?* What can I say against that which God does? If I go about to reason with him, he will certainly be too hard for me.” If the potter make the clay into a vessel of dishonour, or break in pieces the vessel he has made, shall the clay or the broken vessel reason with him? So absurd is the man who replies against God, or thinks to talk the matter out with him. No, let all flesh be silent before him.

II. He durst not insist upon his own justification before God. Though he vindicated his own integrity to his friends, and would not yield that he was a hypocrite and a wicked man, as they suggested, yet he would never plead it as his righteousness before God. “I will never venture upon the covenant of innocency, nor think to come off by virtue of that.” Job knew so much of God, and knew so much of himself, that he durst not insist upon his own justification before God.

1. He knew so much of God that he durst not stand a trial with him, v. 15-19. He knew how to make his part good with his friends, and thought himself able to deal with them; but, though his cause had been better than it was, he knew it was to no purpose to debate it with God.

(1.) God knew him better than he knew himself and therefore (v. 15), “*Though I were righteous in my own apprehension, and my own heart did not condemn me, yet God is greater than my heart,* and knows those secret faults and errors of mine which I do not and cannot understand, and is able to charge me with them, and therefore *I would not answer.*” St. Paul speaks to the same purport: *I know nothing by myself,* am not conscious to

myself of any reigning wickedness, and yet *I am not hereby justified*, ~~400~~1 Corinthians 4:4. "I dare not put myself upon that issue, lest God should charge that upon me which I did not discover in myself." Job will therefore wave that plea, and *make supplication to his Judge*, that is, will cast himself upon God's mercy, and not think come off by his own merit.

(2.) He had no reason to think that there was anything in his prayers to recommend them to the divine acceptance, or to fetch in an answer of peace, no worth or worthiness at all to which to ascribe their success, but it must be attributed purely to the grace and compassion of God, who answers before we call and not because we call, and gives gracious answers to our prayers, but not for our prayers (v. 16): "*If I had called, and he had answered, had given the thing I called to him for, yet, so weak and defective are my best prayers, that I would not believe he had therein hearkened to my voice; I could not say that he had saved with his right hand and answered me*" (~~300~~Psalm 60:5), "but that he did it purely for his own name's sake." Bishop Patrick expounds it thus: "If I had made supplication, and he had granted my desire, I would not think my prayer had done the business." *Not for your sakes, be it known to you.*

(3.) His present miseries, which God had brought him into notwithstanding his integrity, gave him too sensible a conviction that, in the ordering and disposing of men's outward condition in this world, God acts by sovereignty, and, though he never does wrong to any, yet he does not ever give full right to all (that is, the best do not always fare best, nor the worst fare worst) in this life, because he reserves the full and exact distribution of rewards and punishments for the future state. Job was not conscious to himself of any extraordinary guilt, and yet fell under extraordinary afflictions, v. 17, 18. Every man must expect the wind to blow upon him and ruffle him, but Job was *broken with a tempest*. Every man, in the midst of these thorns and briers, must expect to be scratched; but Job was wounded, and his wounds were multiplied. Every man must expect a cross daily, and to taste sometimes of the bitter cup; but poor Job's troubles came so thickly upon him that he had no breathing time, and he was filled with bitterness. And he presumes to say that all this was *without cause*, without any great provocation given. We have made the best of what Job said hitherto, though contrary to the judgment of many good interpreters; but here, no doubt, *he spoke unadvisedly with his lips*; he reflected on God's goodness in saying that he was not suffered *to take his breath* (while yet he had such good use of his reason and speech as to

be able to talk thus) and on his justice in saying that it was without cause. Yet it is true that as, on the one hand, there are many who are chargeable with more sin than the common infirmities of human nature, and yet feel no more sorrow than that of the common calamities of human life, so, on the other hand, there are many who feel more than the common calamities of human life and yet are conscious to themselves of no more than the common infirmities of human nature.

(4.) He was in no capacity at all to make his part good with God, v. 19.

[1.] Not by force of arms. “I dare not enter the lists with the Almighty; for *if I speak of strength*, and think to come off by that, *lo, he is strong*, stronger than I, and will certainly overpower me.” There is no disputing (said one once to Caesar) with him that commands legions. Much less is there any with him that has legions of angels at command. *Can thy heart endure* (thy courage and presence of mind) *or can thy hands be strong* to defend thyself, *in the days that I shall deal with thee?* ³²⁴Ezekiel 22:14.

[2.] Not by force of arguments. “I dare not try the merits of the cause. *If I speak of judgment*, and insist upon my right, *who will set me a time to plead?* There is no higher power to which I may appeal, no superior court to appoint a hearing of the cause; for he is supreme and from him proceeds every man's judgment, which he must abide by.”

2. He knew so much of himself the he durst not stand a trial, v. 20, 21. “*If I go about to justify myself*, and to plead a righteousness of my own, my defence will be my offence, and *my own mouth shall condemn me* even when it goes about to acquit me.” A good man, who knows the deceitfulness of his own heart, and is jealous over it with a godly jealousy, and has often discovered that amiss there which had long lain undiscovered, is suspicious of more evil in himself than he is really conscious of, and therefore will by no means think of justifying himself before God. *If we say we have no sin*, we not only *deceive ourselves*, but we affront God; for we sin in saying so, and give the lie to the scripture, which has *concluded all under sin*. “*If I say, I am perfect*, I am sinless, God has nothing to lay to my charge, my very saying so shall *prove me perverse*, proud, ignorant, and presumptuous. Nay, *though I were perfect*, though God should pronounce me just, *yet would I not know my soul*, I would not be in care about the prolonging of my life while it is loaded with all these miseries.” Or, “Though I were free from gross sin, though my conscience should not charge me with any enormous crime, yet would

I not believe my own heart so far as to insist upon my innocency nor think my life worth striving for with God.” In short, it is folly to contend with God, and our wisdom, as well as duty, to submit to him and throw ourselves at his feet.

<K92> JOB 9:22-24

THE REPLY OF JOB

Here Job touches briefly upon the main point now in dispute between him and his friends. They maintained that those who are righteous and good always prosper in this world, and none but the wicked are in misery and distress; he asserted, on the contrary, that it is a common thing for the wicked to prosper and the righteous to be greatly afflicted. This is the one thing, the chief thing, wherein he and his friends differed; and they had not proved their assertion, therefore he abides by his: “I said it, and day it again, that all things come alike to all.” Now,

1. It must be owned that there is very much truth in what Job here means, that temporal judgments, when they are sent abroad, fall both upon good and bad, and the destroying angel seldom distinguishes (though once he did) between the houses of Israelites and the houses of Egyptians. In the judgment of Sodom indeed, which is called *the vengeance of eternal fire* (<K102> Jude 1:7), *far be it from God to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked* (<K185> Genesis 18:25); but, in judgments merely temporal, the righteous have their share, and sometimes the greatest share. *The sword devours one as well as another*, Josiah as well as Ahab. Thus God *destroys the perfect and the wicked*, involves them both in the same common ruin; good and bad were sent together into Babylon, <K245> Jeremiah 24:5, 9. *If the scourge slay suddenly*, and sweep down all before it, God will be well pleased to see how the same scourge which is the perdition of the wicked is the trial of the innocent and of their faith, which *will be found unto praise, and honour, and glory*, <K100> 1 Peter 1:7; <K60> Psalm 66:10.

*Against the just th' Almighty's arrows fly,
For he delights the innocent to try,
To show their constant and their Godlike mind,
Not by afflictions broken, but refined.*
— Sir R. Blackmore

Let this reconcile God's children to their troubles; they are but trials, designed for their honour and benefit, and, if God be pleased with them, let not them be displeased; if he *laugh at the trial of the innocent*, knowing how glorious the issue of it will be, at destruction and famine let them also laugh (^{<RB2>}Job 5:22), and triumph over them, saying, *O death! where is thy sting?* On the other hand, the wicked are so far from being made the marks of God's judgments that *the earth is given into their hand*, v. 24 (they enjoy large possessions and great power, have what they will and do what they will), *into the hand of the wicked one* (in the original, the word is singular); the devil, that wicked one, is called *the god of this world*, and boasts that into his hands it is delivered, ^{<RB6>}Luke 4:6. Or *into the hand of a wicked man*, meaning (as bishop Patrick and the Assembly's Annotations conjecture) some noted tyrant then living in those parts, whose great wickedness and great prosperity were well known both to Job and his friends. The wicked have the earth given them, but the righteous have heaven given them, and which is better — heaven without earth or earth without heaven? God, in his providence, advances wicked men, while he *covers the faces* of those who are fit to be *judges*, who are wise and good, and qualified for government, and buries them alive in obscurity, perhaps suffers them to be run down and condemned, and to have their faces covered as criminals by those wicked ones into whose hand the earth is given. We daily see that this is done; *if it be not God that does it, where and who is he that does it?* To whom can it be ascribed but to him that rules in the kingdoms of men, and gives them to whom he will? ^{<RB2>}Daniel 4:32. Yet,

2. It must be owned that there is too much passion in what Job here says. The manner of expression is peevish. When he meant that God afflicts he ought not to have said, *He destroys both the perfect and the wicked*; when he meant that God pleases himself with the trial of the innocent he ought not to have said, *He laughs at it*, for he doth not afflict willingly. When the spirit is heated, either with dispute or with discontent, we have need to set a watch before the door of our lips, that we may observe a due decorum in speaking of divine things.

~~<K&S>~~ JOB 9:25-35

THE REPLY OF JOB

Job here grows more and more querulous, and does not conclude this chapter with such reverent expressions of God's wisdom and justice as he began with. Those that indulge a complaining humour know not to what indecencies, nay, to what impieties, it will hurry them. *The beginning of that strife with God is as the letting forth of water; therefore leave it off before it be meddled with.* When we are in trouble we are allowed to complain to God, as the Psalmist often, but must by no means complain of God, as Job here.

I. His complaint here of the passing away of the days of his prosperity is proper enough (v. 25, 26): “*My days* (that is, all my good days) are gone, never to return, gone of a sudden, gone ere I was aware. Never did any courier that went express” (like Cush and Ahimaaz) “with good tidings make such haste as all my comforts did from me. Never did ship sail to its port, never did eagle fly upon its prey, with such incredible swiftness; nor does there remain any trace of my prosperity, any more than there does of an eagle in the air or a ship in the sea,” ~~<K&S>~~ Proverbs 30:19. See here,

1. How swift the motion of time is. It is always upon the wing, hastening to its period; it stays for no man. What little need have we of pastimes, and what great need to redeem time, when time runs out, runs on so fast towards eternity, which comes as time goes!

2. How vain the enjoyments of time are, which we may be quite deprived of while yet time continues. Our day may be longer than the sun-shine of our prosperity; and, when that is gone, it is as if it had not been. The remembrance of having done our duty will be pleasing afterwards; so will not the remembrance of our having got a great deal of worldly wealth when it is all lost and gone. “*They flee away, past recall; they see no good, and leave none behind them.*”

II. His complaint of his present uneasiness is excusable, v. 27, 28.

1. It should seem, he did his endeavour to quiet and compose himself as his friends advised him. That was the good he would do: he would fain *forget his complaints* and praise God, would *leave off his heaviness and*

comfort himself, that he might be fit for converse both with God and man; but,

2. He found he could not do it: *“I am afraid of all my sorrows. When I strive most against my trouble it prevails most over me and proves too hard for me!”* It is easier, in such a case, to know what we should do than to do it, to know what temper we should be in than to get into that temper and keep in it. It is easy to preach patience to those that are in trouble, and to tell them they must forget their complaints and comfort themselves; but it is not so soon done as said. Fear and sorrow are tyrannizing things, not easily brought into the subjection they ought to be kept in to religion and right reason. But,

III. His complaint of God as implacable and inexorable was by no means to be excused. It was the language of his corruption. He knew better, and, at another time, would have been far from harbouring any such hard thoughts of God as now broke in upon his spirit and broke out in these passionate complaints. Good men do not always speak like themselves; but God, who considers their frame and the strength of their temptations, gives them leave afterwards to unsay what was amiss by repentance and will not lay it to their charge.

1. Job seems to speak here,

(1.) As if he despaired of obtaining from God any relief or redress of his grievances, though he should produce ever so good proofs of his integrity: *“I know that thou wilt not hold me innocent. My afflictions have continued so long upon me, and increased so fast, that I do not expect thou wilt ever clear up my innocency by delivering me out of them and restoring me to a prosperous condition. Right or wrong, I must be treated as a wicked man; my friends will continue to think so of me, and God will continue upon me the afflictions which give them occasion to think so. Why then do I labour in vain to clear myself and maintain my own integrity?”* v. 29. It is to no purpose to speak in a cause that is already prejudged. With men it is often labour in vain for the most innocent to go about to clear themselves; they must be adjudged guilty, though the evidence be ever so plain for them. But it is not so in our dealings with God, who is the patron of oppressed innocency and to whom it was never in vain to commit a righteous cause. Nay, he not only despairs of relief, but expects that his endeavour to clear himself will render him yet more

obnoxious (v. 30, 31): “*If I wash myself with snow-water, and make my integrity ever so evident, it will be all to no purpose; judgment must go against me. Thou shalt plunge me in the ditch*” (the pit of destruction, so some, or rather the filthy kennel, or sewer), “which will make me so offensive in the nostrils of all about me that *my own clothes shall abhor me* and I shall even loathe to touch myself.” He saw his afflictions coming from God. Those were the things that blackened him in the eye of his friends; and, upon that score, he complained of them, and of the continuance of them, as the ruin, not only of his comfort, but of his reputation. Yet these words are capable of a good construction. If we be ever so industrious to justify ourselves before men, and to preserve our credit with them, — if we keep our hands ever so clean from the pollutions of gross sin, which fall under the eye of the world, — yet God, who knows our hearts, can charge us with so much secret sin as will for ever take off all our pretensions to purity and innocency, and make us see ourselves odious in the sight of the holy God. Paul, while a Pharisee, made his hands very clean; but when the commandment came and discovered to him his heart-sins, made him know lust, that *plunged him in the ditch*.

(2.) As if he despaired to have a fair hearing with God, and that were hard indeed.

[1.] He complains that he was not upon even terms with God (v. 32): “*He is not a man, as I am*. I could venture to dispute with a man like myself (the potsherds may strive with the potsherds of the earth), but he is infinitely above me, and therefore I dare not enter the lists with him; I shall certainly be cast if I contend with him.” Note, *First*, God is not a man as we are. Of the greatest princes we may say, “They are men as we are,” but not of the great God. His thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, and we must not measure him by ourselves. Man is foolish and weak, frail and fickle, but God is not. We are depending dying creatures; he is the independent an immortal Creator. *Secondly*, The consideration of this should keep us very humble and very silent before God. Let us not make ourselves equal with God, but always eye him as infinitely above us.

[2.] That there was no arbitrator or umpire to adjust the differences between him and God and to determine the controversy (v. 33): *Neither is there any days-man between us*. This complaint that there was not is in effect a wish that there were, and so the Septuagint reads it: *O that there were a mediator between us!* Job would gladly refer the matter, but no

creature was capable of being a referee, and therefore he must even refer it still to God himself and resolve to acquiesce in his judgment. Our Lord Jesus is the blessed days-man, who has mediated between heaven and earth, has laid his hand upon us both; to him the Father has committed all judgment, and we must. But this matter was not then brought to so clear a light as it is now by the gospel, which leaves no room for such a complaint as this.

[3.] That the terrors of God, which set themselves in array against him, put him into such confusion that he knew not how to address God with the confidence with which he was formerly wont to approach him, v. 34, 35. “Besides the distance which I am kept at by his infinite transcendency, his present dealings with me are very discouraging: *Let him take his rod away from me.*” He means not so much his outward afflictions as the load which lay upon his spirit from the apprehensions of God’s wrath; that was *his fear* which *terrified him*. “Let that be removed; let me recover the sight of his mercy, and not be amazed with the sight of nothing but his terrors, and *then I would speak* and order my cause before him. *But it is not so with me*; the cloud is not at all dissipated; the wrath of God still fastens upon me, and preys on my spirits, as much as ever; and what to do I know not.”

2. From all this let us take occasion,

(1.) To stand in awe of God, and to fear the power of his wrath. If good men have been put into such consternation by it, *where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?*

(2.) To pity those that are wounded in spirit, and pray earnestly for them, because in that condition they know not how to pray for themselves.

(3.) Carefully to keep up good thoughts of God in our minds, for hard thoughts of him are the inlets of much mischief.

(4.) To bless God that we are not in such a disconsolate condition as poor Job was here in, but that we walk in the light of the Lord; let us rejoice therein, but *rejoice with trembling*.