

A TRIBUTE

To the Memory of

MRS. ABIGAIL E. BOIES.

8817

**The purpose of God in afflicting Ministers :**

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A

**SERMON,**

**PREACHED AT SOUTH HADLEY,**

**APRIL 30, 1826,**

**THE SABBATH IMMEDIATELY SUCCEEDING**

**THE DEATH OF**

**MRS. ABIGAIL E. BOIES,**

**WIFE OF THE**

**REVEREND ARTEMAS BOIES.**

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**BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE,** *R*  
**PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WEST SPRINGFIELD.**

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TO THE  
BEREAVED HUSBAND, PARENTS,  
AND OTHER NEAR RELATIVES OF THE DECEASED,  
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,  
PRINTED AT THEIR REQUEST,  
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,  
WITH THE DEEPEST SYMPATHY IN THEIR AFFLICTION,  
BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,  
W. B. S.

## SERMON.



### II. CORINTHIANS I. 6.

AND WHETHER WE BE AFFLICTED, IT IS FOR YOUR CONSOLATION AND SALVATION.

ONE of the most striking features in the character of Paul—the very ruling passion of his renewed nature, was a burning zeal for the salvation of souls. His life was not only a scene of unwearied activity in the service of his master, but often of severe suffering; and he seems to have felt that the great purpose of his afflictions was answered, only as they enabled him more effectually to administer to the consolation and salvation of others. In the very commencement of the epistle from which our text is taken, and in immediate connexion with the text, we find this holy man, in the midst of tribulation, breaking out in a strain of thanksgiving to God, in view of the happy result, which he anticipated from *his* afflictions, to the church to which he was writing. “*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all com-*

*fort ; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ*”—i. e. the sufferings which we endure in the cause of Christ, and in conformity to his example—“*abound in us, so our consolation aboundeth by Christ :*”—i. e. the comforts which arise from God in him, do so much more abound, as to render our distress comparatively light. The Apostle then adds, as one ground of consolation in his trials, that they were to have an important bearing on the spiritual improvement of his christian brethren :—“*And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*”

The afflictions which the holy Apostle endured, have never had an exact parallel in the history of any minister of Christ. His were the trials of a man, who was sent forth by the Spirit of God, in the infancy of christianity, to make the first daring onset upon the empire of paganism ; and for every accession which he gained to the dominion of Christ, he had to encounter the most formidable opposition. But though no other minister has ever been called to exactly the same trials with those of the Apostle, there is none, who has not, at some period, been called to suffering ; and every good minister has, at such a moment, had some sympathy with the benevolent spirit of the Apostle, exhibited

in our text. It has been a softening ingredient in his cup, to look round upon his beloved people, and to reflect, that out of the scenes of *his* distress, the spirit of grace and consolation might go forth to *them* ; that thus his affliction might be instrumental, not only in purifying his affections, but in adding gems to his immortal crown.

The sentiment obviously contained in the text is, that **THE AFFLICTIONS OF A MINISTER ARE DESIGNED FOR THE BENEFIT OF HIS PEOPLE.** It is my purpose, this morning, to illustrate this thought, in reference to your circumstances, as a congregation, and with a view to the consolation of my deeply afflicted brother.

I ought to premise that it is here taken for granted, that ministers make a proper *personal* improvement of their trials ; for it is only as their own hearts are suitably affected, that they can reasonably hope that any purifying or comforting influence will reach the hearts of their people. A minister may despise the chastening of the Lord, or faint under his rebukes, as truly as any other person ; and in this case, surely, he has no reason to expect that it will be good for his people that he is afflicted. If he would have *them* realize the benefit of *his* trials, he must first feel the benefit of them himself ; and this object he must gain by substantially the same means, which are necessary to every private christian. When he finds the flame of piety in his own

soul burning brighter, through the influence of adversity, and prompting him to the more faithful discharge of duty, then he may expect to be the instrument of communicating a better impulse to the souls of his people.

I. I observe, then, in the first place, that the afflictions of a minister are rendered subservient to the spiritual interests of his people, *as they tend to increase his general spirituality of character.*

The usefulness of any professed christian is in proportion to the consistency and purity of his life. If he is deficient in many of the graces of the gospel, and has, at best, but a dubious claim to the christian character, he will be far more likely to be a stumbling block to others, than to help forward their salvation. But if, on the other hand, he always lives under a commanding sense of religious obligation, he will scarcely ever move, without being the instrument of good to those around him : and to say nothing of the direct efforts of benevolence, with which his life will be filled up, the spirituality of his general deportment, his watchfulness, and humility, and self-denial, and devotion—all that which goes to constitute his piety, will make an appeal, not easily resisted, in favor of his Master's cause. And what is true of the influence of a private christian, is eminently true of the influence of a christian minister. Let him be a man, who, like Paul, has drank deep into

the spirit of that gospel which he preaches ; let his conversation and deportment evince that he sits daily at the feet of Jesus, and that the objects of sense diminish, while the objects of faith rise in his estimation ; and it is hardly possible but that the example of such a minister should exert a benign and extensive influence.

It is manifest, then, that whatever has a tendency to refine and exalt the private religious character of a minister, is fitted to produce a happy effect upon his people, inasmuch as it brings them in immediate contact with a higher degree of christian excellence ; and that, too, in one who is placed over them in the Lord, and whom they are bound to esteem highly for his work's sake. Now, that this is the tendency of affliction, does not admit of reasonable doubt. If a minister be, in any degree, wanting in religious zeal ; if, from original constitution, or any other cause, he be addicted to indolence, or levity ; if he have inadequate views of the shortness of life, or the worth of the soul ; or if there be any other glaring defect in his religious character, there is good reason to hope that affliction will operate as an effectual remedy. And be his character ever so free from blemishes, or ever so richly adorned with graces, it may reasonably be calculated that it will acquire a still greater elevation in the school of adversity. This additional degree of spirituality, then, is just so much gain to his people. They have a holier example

exhibited before them; an example which speaks a louder rebuke to the sinner, and furnishes higher encouragement and aid to the christian. And this is one way, in which the afflictions of a minister work for his people the peaceable fruits of righteousness.

II. A minister's afflictions subserve the spiritual interests of those committed to his charge, *as they have a tendency to increase his ministerial activity.*

Suppose the rod of God has been laid upon him in some agonizing bereavement;—be it that the wife of his youth has sunk down under the palsy hand of disease, and God hath changed her countenance, and sent her away—and his house is left desolate, and his children motherless—what reflexions must such a visitation suggest to a pious minister? Must it not forcibly remind him that, in a little while, the period of his activity will close; that his people are dropping, one by one, into eternity, and will soon be where the voice of alarm or persuasion cannot reach them. Must not his views of the value of the soul be greatly enlarged, by accompanying one, whose interests and hopes were so nearly identified with his own, to the very margin of eternity, and by watching, with a bursting heart, that decisive change, which tells that the soul is entering on its everlasting retributions. Must not the contrast between the things which are seen and are temporal, and the things which are not seen and are eternal;

between the joys of the saved, and the woes of the lost, strike the mind, at such a moment, with an increased and overwhelming energy? Now, I ask, are not these precisely the reflections, which are fitted to impress a minister most deeply with the responsibility of his work; to waken all his powers into vigorous action for the salvation of his people.

Observe, for a moment, the influence which these reflections must exert on a minister's various duties. Does he go into his closet to bear the interests of his people before the throne of mercy? With how much more fervor will he make supplication on their behalf, from having been taught by the rod of God, to feel more deeply the value of the souls for whom he intercedes, and the shortness of the period in which his intercessions can be availing. Does he sit down to make preparation for the sanctuary? How much more likely will he be to frame his instructions in a manner which shall reach the heart and the conscience, rather than gratify the taste, or amuse the fancy, from having had impressed upon his own soul, in the rough school of adversity, the infinite value of eternal things. Does he ascend the sacred desk, to lead his fellow-worshippers to the throne of the heavenly grace, and to warn sinners of their danger, and beseech them to be reconciled to God? What an unction may be expected to pervade his manner, what fervor to breathe through his devotions, in view of the high practical estimate which

he has formed, under the influence of affliction, of the importance of his work. Does he address himself to the more private duties of a pastor? How much more easily will he introduce serious topics; how much more earnestly will he speak of death and eternity, from the vivid impression which he has gained of these realities, by means of his afflictions. 'If the soul be so precious,' he will say, 'as I have seen it to be at the dying bed of my dearest friend; if life and its enjoyments be so short and uncertain, as the disruption of the tenderest ties of nature teach me that they are; then I have no time to lose from the great work, in which I am engaged. I will go forth to my various duties, with this for my commanding object—to present every one of my people perfect before Christ. I will pray, and labor, and if need be, suffer, that no one of all the souls committed to my care, may finally perish.' Who does not see that a minister, who should habitually act under the influence of reflections like these, could not fail to be eminently useful? And if it be the tendency of affliction to awaken such reflections, and give them an influence over his life, we see again the connexion between a minister's trials, and the spiritual improvement of his people.

III. The afflictions of a minister are made subservient to the spiritual interests of his charge, *as they furnish an occasion for his exhibiting the sustaining influence of the gospel which he preaches.*

There is a principle in our nature, which leads us to be more strongly affected, by witnessing the practical effect of any thing, than by hearing that effect described; and in nothing is the operation of this principle discovered more clearly, than in the comparative influence which the truths of the gospel exert, when they are exhibited in the language of the lips, and when they are set forth in the more impressive language of the life. Let a minister, for instance, describe the power of christian faith to sustain the heart in adversity; let him tell his people that there is that in the truths of the gospel, which, when firmly believed, and deeply felt, will pour light and joy over the darkest scenes; and there will probably be many among them, who, though they may not openly gainsay, will secretly doubt. But let that same minister himself be the subject of Heaven's chastisements; let him be called to one of those scenes in which, reason, philosophy, and even friendship, all confess their impotence to administer consolation; and there let him press the gospel to his heart; and imbibe its living comforts; and go forth among his people with a calm and holy resignation to God's will; and, rely on it, the eloquence of such an example will carry conviction to many a heart, which the most glowing description could never reach. No, the infidel will not be able to hold out against it: though he could laugh at the truths of the gospel, when he heard them

from the pulpit, he is disarmed—whether he acknowledges it or not—now that he meets them in the form of a living reality. And to every careless sinner, here will be a powerful argument in favor of religion ;—a practical comment upon the power and excellence of the gospel, which, if any thing, will be fitted to break up the delusions of impenitence. Nor is this example, by any means, lost upon the christian. It is fitted to give him a higher value for his religion ; to make him more diligent in securing its consolations ; and to bring him to co-operate more zealously with his minister and his fellow-christians, in extending its pure and healing influences.

But while the *immediate* effect of such an example as I have here spoken of, is, in a high degree, desirable, there is a favorable, though more *remote* influence exerted, in preparing a people for a more profitable improvement of the future labors of their minister. After having walked before them in the consolations of the gospel, through a scene of deep affliction, with how much more effect may he hope to deliver his message, He has exhibited before them the highest evidence, not merely of the sincerity of his faith, but of its power : in the dignified submission and serenity with which he has met his trials, they have had a living testimony that, in the gospel which he preaches, there is “a sovereign balm for every wound.” Must not a minister, in the

circumstances which I have supposed, address his people under peculiar advantages? Is there not special reason to hope that the gospel coming from *his* lips, will be the power of God ?

IV. A minister's afflictions are rendered useful to his people, *as they qualify him to sympathize with them more deeply, and administer consolation to them more effectually, in their trials.*

This is the precise effect, to which the Apostle alludes, in the verses preceding our text. In view of his own trials, he renders thanks to the God of all comfort, "*who comforteth us;*" says he, "*in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*" In the discharge of his duties, as a minister of Jesus, he must needs encounter affliction ; and he rejoiced in the thought, that his own trials were preparing him, in a still greater degree, to be " a son of consolation."

It is true, indeed, that a minister, who has felt the *sanctifying* influences of the gospel upon his own heart, must be, in a good degree, prepared to impart its *comforting* influences to the hearts of others. But it is also true, that that knowledge is the most perfect, and those impressions the most deep and vivid, which are gained by experience : a minister, therefore, has a more correct knowledge of the anguish of bereavement,

from having himself been bereaved ; and he knows better how to apply the consolations of the gospel to the hearts of others, from having had occasion to apply them in his own experience. Let a minister who has been disciplined in the school of affliction, and has rightly improved his trials, go into that chamber where the conflict with the last enemy has but just ceased, and tears are streaming from every eye, and sobs are bursting from every heart ; and see whether that afflicted family will not greet him as an angel of mercy. Not only does he approach them as a minister of Jesus, whose benevolent office it is to bind up the broken hearted, but he brings with him a deep experimental impression of the sufferings which he comes to relieve. When he explains the benevolent purposes of God in afflicting his children ; when he addresses to them the affectionate counsels which the word of God suggests ; when he reminds them of the rich consolations which mingle in their cup of sorrow ; when he leads them to a throne of mercy, and commends them to a Saviour's compassionate regards, every word will seem to them to come, and will actually come from a heart, which has itself been broken by a Father's chastisement, and healed by a Father's compassion. Many a person in affliction, has had occasion to give thanks, that his minister could impart to him that comfort wherewith he himself had been comforted of God ; and many a

minister has found reason to bless God, that the severity of his discipline has enabled him more effectually to comfort those who are in trouble.

V. I observe, once more, that the afflictions of a minister may subserve the spiritual interests of his people, *by his availing himself of their sympathies, to inculcate upon them the truths and obligations of religion.*

Far be it from me to intimate that there is any thing in the principle of sympathy, which partakes of the nature of evangelical holiness : and I am well aware, that it has often been perverted in aid of an evil habit, and for the extinction of the moral sensibility. Still, it admits of no question, that this principle may be, and often is, brought to act, in various ways, as a powerful auxiliary to religion. Let a congregation see their minister bending under a burden of affliction ; let them accompany him to the grave of a beloved friend, and there watch the heavings of his heart ; let them trace the lines of sorrow in his countenance, from day to day, and thus let their compassion be stirred into exercise ; and rely on it, much has been done towards preparing them for a profitable improvement of his labors. The principle of sympathy will be quickened in its operations, by the affection which they already bear for him ; and their affection will, in turn, be increased by the exercise of sympathy ; and this will give him no small advantage, both in his public and private addresses.

Let a minister, then, avail himself of such a season, to pour into the minds of his hearers the truths of God's word ; and while their hearts are bleeding for *his sorrows*, let him endeavor to impress them with a sense of *their sins*, and the provision which is made for them in the gospel ; and let him follow up his public ministrations by the private appeals of an affectionate pastor ; and he has peculiar reason to hope that his labors will not be in vain in the Lord. It may reasonably be calculated that some souls, who had always turned a deaf ear to his message, before, will listen now ; and thus the sympathetic emotions which were excited on his behalf, he may hope to turn into a religious channel, and through the influence of God's Spirit, render them subservient to their final salvation.

It only remains that we apply the subject, in few words, to the present occasion, after having laid before you some brief notices of the life and character of the individual, whose death has this day brought your minister to the sanctuary, as a mourner, and has opened in your hearts fountains of sorrow, as well for *your* loss, as for *his* affliction.

Mrs. ABIGAIL BOIES was born at Long-Meadow, December 20, 1794.\* From her earliest years, she discovered an unusual gentleness of disposition, which

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\* She was the second daughter of Ethan Ely, Esquire, and Mrs. Hannah Ely.

constituted an important element of her subsequent character. She appears also, from an early period, to have been less attached to the vanities of the world, and more inclined to serious reflection, than most persons in the morning of life ; but it was not until she was about nineteen years of age, that she indulged the hope of having felt the power of religion. At that time, she became deeply impressed with a sense of her sinfulness, and subsequently, as she hoped, found joy and peace in believing. Her religious exercises, during the period of her conviction, were marked by peculiarly abasing views of her own character, and by a deep sense of the justice of God, in the condemning sentence of the law ; and when she first indulged the hope that her transgression was forgiven, and her sin covered, her mind seems to have reposed, with a most delightful confidence, in the perfections and government of God. Here was evidently laid the foundation of her religious character ; and from this period to her death, she apparently maintained an unusually close and humble walk with God, and exhibited to the world the christian character in its loveliest attractions.

In October 1821, she was married to the Reverend Mr. BOIES, and removed to Charleston, South Carolina, where her husband was then settled in the ministry. This event she seems to have contemplated in connexion with a deep sense of her christian obliga-

tions, and with a full determination to make the new relations to which it introduced her a means of more extended usefulness. During her residence in Charleston, she was actively devoted to the cause of religion, and greatly endeared herself to the congregation with which she was connected. There also she drew around her a new circle of friends, with many of whom she had the most delightful intercourse, of whom she has often been heard to speak in terms of the warmest affection, and who will no doubt embalm her memory, and mourn that they are to see her face no more.

Mrs. BOIES was long enough a resident here, to discover to you that she possessed rare qualifications for the station which Providence had assigned to her. With a well balanced and well cultivated mind, with deep and fervent piety, she united engaging and dignified manners, and an unusual share of prudence and condescension. Her heart was always set upon doing good ; and her hands were always active in carrying into effect her benevolent purposes. You never met her, but the law of kindness was upon her lips, and the smile of cheerfulness upon her countenance. In your religious prosperity, as a congregation, she felt the deepest interest ; and when it pleased God lately to visit you with the refreshing tokens of his grace, her heart seemed to overflow with gratitude and joy. I doubt not that she has offered many prayers on your

behold, which now stand registered in the book of God's remembrance : May they avail to bring down blessings upon you, while the heart which dictated them, and the lips which uttered them, are cold in the grave.

It can hardly be necessary to speak particularly of Mrs. BOIES, in the different relations which she sustained. That she was a devoted wife, an affectionate mother, a dutiful child, a confiding and valuable friend, none need be told, who know the qualities of which her character was composed. Her winning mildness and unaffected piety, adorned every relation ; and even the enemies of virtue could scarcely withhold from it their homage, as it shone forth in her character.

In her last sickness, and in the dying hour, she exhibited, in an unusual degree, the sustaining influence of Christian faith. Even amidst the severest sufferings, not a whisper of complaint was heard from her ; but her lips were often opened in gratitude and praise. When she saw that the conflict with the last enemy had commenced—though the event was, till that time, unexpected—no terror, no apprehension seemed to agitate her mind ; but with her accustomed benignity, in all the overflowings of conjugal and parental affection, she commended her husband and children to the protection and grace of a covenant keeping God ; and then her spirit took its flight, as we confidently trust, to the regions of immortality.

The subject upon which we have been meditating, administers both *instruction* and *consolation* to you, my brother, in whose domestic prospects there has been so sudden and so distressing a change. It *teaches* you, first of all, that the season through which you are passing, is a season of peculiar responsibility. Your afflictions are designed, not merely for your own spiritual improvement, but for the consolation and salvation of those to whom you minister ; and whether or not this most desirable result is to be realized, must depend, under God, in a great measure, upon yourself. Recollect that this is a season peculiarly favorable to making religious impressions on the minds of your people ; and that the success of your future labors may be connected, in no small degree, with the temper which you exhibit in your adversity. And with such views of your responsibility, as an afflicted minister, you will feel the importance of being yourself a bright example of those graces, which affliction is especially designed to bring into exercise ;—of making it manifest that, while smarting under the rod of God, you have renewed your strength for the discharge of duty, and your zeal for the salvation of your people.

But the subject administers not only instruction, but *consolation* ; for it is the privilege of an afflicted minister to look over the immortal souls for whom he is appointed to watch, and reflect that to some of them, his affliction

may be the means of everlasting salvation. And must not this thought extract from his cup of sorrow more than half its bitterness? It may be, my brother, may I not say, it not improbably will be—that some of this beloved people will stand up amidst the scenes of the judgment, and point to this very dispensation as that, which made *them* the heirs of glory, by making *you* a more devoted minister. Should it be so, would it not heighten the ecstasies of heaven, and make your affliction appear lighter than vanity?

And now, my brother, I commend you, and your motherless children, the afflicted parents, and other near relatives, to the God of all grace and comfort. To all of you may the consolations of the gospel be extended; and may this affliction result in preparing you for an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

To this congregation also, the subject of our discourse is one of high practical interest. You behold your minister, at an unexpected moment, borne down with a burden of sorrow. You do well to mingle your tears with his, and to endeavor to alleviate his sorrows by every expression of kindness. For all this he is thankful, and will no doubt bear a tender recollection of it to the grave; but he will rejoice, most of all, to see his afflictions working for you the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Let *him* have the benefit of *your* prayers, that he may appear among you with the dignity

of christian faith and submission; and *you*, in turn, may expect the benefit of *his* increasing fidelity in the service of his master. May the events of the last week, which have caused so many hearts to bleed, while they serve to strengthen the tie, which binds you and your minister together, serve also to prepare you and him, after all the sorrows of life are over, for a more joyous meeting in eternity.

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