

Divine Love and Human Rejection of It.

Horatius Bonar:

"I hearkened and heard, but they spoke not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rushes into the battle. Yes, the stork in the heaven knows her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgments of the Lord." — Jeremiah 8:6,7

"I listen to their conversations, and what do I hear? Is anyone sorry for sin? Does anyone say, 'What a terrible thing I have done'? No! All are running down the path of sin as swiftly as a horse rushing into battle! The stork knows the time of her migration, as do the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane. They all return at the proper time each year. But not my people! They do not know what the Lord requires of them." Jeremiah 8:6-7

The prophet is predicting judgment upon rebellious Israel; he is depicting the woes that were suspended over Jerusalem, like the sword of the destroying angel, sorrow upon sorrow, terror upon terror, death upon death. Through this infinite gloom there shoot rays of light, as once and again God makes mention of his love; and how brightly do these words of love gleam through the terrible darkness! But Israel quenches all these beams; he will have none of them, he loves the darkness rather than the light; he says, 'Darkness, you be my light; evil, you be my good; night, you be my day.' And at last God leaves him to his doom— "The Lord has rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath."

Let us now look at the two sides of the picture— the divine and the human, the heart of God and the heart of man, God's attitude towards man, and man's towards God. For what is written here for Israel is written for us. God's love, and man's rejection of it, are the two points.

I. GOD'S LOVE. "I hearkened and heard, but they spoke not aright." He speaks as one on the watch for good, not for evil; like the prodigal's father, looking eagerly out for his son's return. The scene reminds us of Christ's— "Oh that you had known." It reminds us of "How shall I give you up, O Ephraim"; of "Since I spoke against him I do earnestly remember him still." It tells us of God's eager desire to hear the faintest sigh of the returning sinner, His longing to get one word of remembrance from His alienated sons and daughters. It tells us also of God's disappointment at hearing nothing from us— at man's silence, and distance, and refusal to return.

God is not indifferent to man's position, and danger, and wretchedness. He does not say as we do, "It is his loss, not mine," or, "He has none but himself to blame for it— let him take it." No such hard-hearted speeches ever come from the lips of our loving God. He never loses sight of us, he pities us, yearns over us, longs to hear the inquiring voice, and the sound of the returning footstep. And when He hears it not, it "grieves Him at the heart," His heart is turned within Him— His repentings are kindled together. He is hearkening and listening at our doors, to catch the lowest word or sigh. Each day He listens— He listened this morning when you rose, He listens now! Oh the joy it would give Him to hear from any of you, "I will arise, and go to my Father." Will you not give Him this joy? Will you grieve him by your silence? Shall His patience not melt you?

II. MAN'S REJECTION OF IT. This is very strongly put in our text; and in several ways and forms.

(1.) **THE WRONG WORDS.** He did hear words from them, but not those He wanted; perhaps the words of pride, of self-righteousness, of blasphemy, of worldliness, of lust; not the prodigal's words, "I will arise," which alone are sweet to Him. The self-sufficiency of the Pharisee, "I thank you that I am not as other men," or, "We are lords," or, We are the temple of the Lord; not, God be merciful to me a sinner. "They spoke not aright."

(2.) **The IMPENITENCE.** "No man repented of his wickedness, saying, What have I done." Their hearts were hardened. Goodness and severity had both failed. There was no sense of sin, no shame because of evil, no dread of danger. Israel's was the impenitent heart. And such is the heart of multitudes among us; the heart of our nation, we may say, no, the heart of our world; would to God that we could not say, the heart of the churches. Impenitence! How dreadful the condition of one to whom this description belongs! Do you repent of your way, O man; do you say in bitterness of soul, "Oh what, what have I done!"

(3.) **The RECKLESSNESS.** "All are running down the path of sin as swiftly as a horse rushing into battle!" Man is blind, madly blind, both to danger and to sin. Furiously he plunges on in evil, from sin to sin, from lust to lust, daring every venture, defying God, braving his anger, ridiculing his threats, scoffing at his judgments, rushing against his sword, mocking at his hell. How much is there of recklessness among us! Recklessness in sin, crime, self-indulgence, pleasure, lust. Utter defiance of God— bold, unblushing audacity, which nothing will daunt; which mocks at judgments, sorrows, trials, sermons, ministers, and plunges on in evil, treasuring up

wrath against the day of wrath.

(4.) STUPIDITY. "The stork knows the time of her migration, as do the turtledove, the swallow, and the crane. They all return at the proper time each year. But not my people! They do not know what the Lord requires of them." We were going to say brutish stupidity, but God means to tell us that it is something worse than that. Beast and bird obey the ordained laws and keep to their appointed seasons; they return when the season calls them. But man discerns nothing, heeds nothing; times, laws, seasons, instincts, are all disregarded by him. He is void of understanding, he has closed the eye and ear, his whole intellect has lost its power of perception, not only of duty but of danger.

"My people know not the judgment of the Lord." Their heart has become calloused. They go down lower than the beasts which perish. Yet God leaves us not. He does not say, Let him alone, in the sense of leave him to perish. He stretches out His hands to us, He bends over us, He is patient, not willing that any should perish; He listens and listens. As He does at the door of the saint (Malachi 3:16), so of the sinner. What shall He hear? Ephraim bemoaning himself? Or the words of unbelief, and impenitence, and sin?