

Revivals And Church History :: John Flavel's Letter To the widowed Ursula Upton

John Flavel's Letter To the widowed Ursula Upton - posted by Yeshuasboy (), on: 2016/4/4 2:23

"Madam,

If I find it an hard task to write on such a doleful subject, it cannot be imagined but your part must be abundantly harder, who feel over and over what is here written. Could I tell how to administer counsels and comforts to you, without exasperating your sorrows, I would certainly take that way; but seeing the one (in this case) cannot be done without the other, it is our duty to submit to the method Providence hath prescribed to us."

"The design of the ensuing discourse, is to evince the truth of what seems a very great paradox to most men, namely, that the afflictions of the saints can do them no hurt, and that the wisdom of men and angels cannot lay one circumstance of their condition (how uneasy soever it seems to be) better, or more to their advantage than God hath laid it. I attempt not by a flourish of rhetoric to persuade you against the demonstrations you can fetch from sense and feeling to the contrary, but to overthrow the false reasonings of flesh and sense, by the allowed rules of Scripture, and sure principles of religion."

"And methinks you, and every Christian, should gladly entertain that comfortable conclusion, when you shall find the foundations of it as strong, as the influences thereof are sweet and comfortable."

"Certainly, Madam, the intent of the Redeemer's undertaking was not to purchase for his people riches, ease, and pleasures on earth; but to mortify their lusts, heal their natures, and spiritualize their affections; and thereby to fit them for eternal fruition of God. Upon this supposition the truth of this conclusion (how strange soever it seems) is firmly built."

"It was not without divine direction, that the subject of the ensuing discourse was as pertinently, as seasonably, recommended to me by your beloved husband, in the day of your sorrows for your only son. He took, I hope, his portion of comfort out of it before he died, and it is now a spring of comfort to you, who then mourned with him, and now for him."

"Heavy pressures call for strong support, and fainting seasons for rich cordials. Your burden is indeed heavy: yet I must say it is much our own fault our burdens are so heavy as we feel them to be; for according to our measure of delight in, and expectation from the creature, is our sorrow and disappointment when we part from it. The highest tides are always followed with the lowest ebbs. We find temperance and patience knit together in the same precept, and intemperance and impatience as inseparably connected in our own experience. It may be we did not suspect ourselves of any sinful excess in the time of their enjoyment; but it now appears the creature was gotten deeper into our hearts than we imagined, by the pain we feel at parting: Did we not lean too hard upon it, there would not be such shakings as we feel when it is split from us."

"But, Madam, it is high time to recal your thoughts, and bound your sorrows, which the following considerations would greatly assist you in."

1. "What is the very ground and reason of our excessive sorrows for the loss of earthly comforts? Is it not this, That they are perishing and transitory? That is, that you find them to be as God made them. And can we expect that God should alter the laws of nature to please and humour us? It is as natural to our relations to die, as it is for flowers to wither, or the moon to wane."

2. "That there is no such necessary connection betwixt these things and our comfort, that whenever God removes the one, he must needs remove the other with it. Christ and comfort are indeed so united, but nothing beside him is or can be so. I hope you will shortly experience the truth of this conclusion, by the comfort God will give you in the absence of those comforts you have lost. Can you not now have free access to God as before? Yea, do not these very afflictions send you oftener into his presence? And if God meet you in those duties, (as in days of distress he uses to meet his people), then it will be evident to you that your joy and comfort lives, though your husband and children be laid in their graves."

3. "That the removing of your earthly comforts hinders not but that you may still pursue the great end and business of your life, and carry on all your designs for heaven as successfully as ever. Indeed, Madam, had we been sent into this world to raise estates, contract relations, and then sit down in the midst of them as our portion, then our design had been utterly frustrated."

erly dashed and disappointed: but you know this is not the main end, or great business upon earth, but to honour God by an holy fruitful life here, and make ready for the full enjoyment of him hereafter. And what hinders but you may as prosperously manage and carry on this your design as ever? You do not think the traveller is disabled for his journey, because he hath fewer clogs and hinderances than before. I think few Christians find much furtherance heavenward by their multiplicity of engagements or enjoyments in this world. Your cares and fears about these things, will now lie in a narrower compass than they did before, and thereby you may have your thoughts more about you, to attend the great concerns of God's glory, and your own salvation."

4. "But above all, you will certainly find your relief and consolation to lie in the everlasting covenant of God. Thence it was, that David fetched his support under a much heavier burden and smarter rod than yours: For your relations were such as gave you comfort in their lives, and left you many grounds of hope in their deaths; but his were taken away in their sins. But though the grounds of his sorrow (blessed be God) are not yours, yet I hope the grounds of his comfort in the text are fully yours."

"I confess, I have prepared these things in too much haste and distraction of thoughts, which in this juncture was unavoidable; nor have I bestowed much of art or language upon them: And if I had, they would have been never the more effectual to your relief for that. But such as they are, I humbly present them to you with my hearty prayers, that God would make them a sovereign balm, by the blessing of his Spirit on them, to your wounded spirit, and to all other godly families groaning under the like strokes of God with you, and remain, Madam,

Your most Faithful Sympathizing Friend and Servant,  
JOHN FLAVEL" (1628 - 1691)

- Excerpt within, "The Works of John Flavel, Volume 6"; Reprinted by Banner Of Truth Trust, this edition 1997; pages 83-85)