

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

PROBLEMS SOLVED.

A Sermon

BY MR. JAMES WELLS,

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“Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?”—JOB xiii. 24.

NONE but those who are born of God know what it is to be so tried as to sink into something like self and black despair, and to tremble at the thought of God being against them; and when brought under that conviction, into the dark and into bondage, when his wrath to all appearance lieth hard upon them, they cannot help themselves. And each, when so tried, thinks his case to be the worst; he thinks, No Christian can be tried as I am, for I am such a poor creature, and everything seems to go against me. I would not mind if I could pray earnestly, if I could feel submissive and reconciled. And so it is that the Lord has a variety of ways of bringing our weaknesses to light. All the time the Lord was pleased to shine upon the soul of Job, that brought out of Job what there was in him after the Spirit; and then he could say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord; and shall we not receive evil as well as good at the hands of the Lord?” “In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly;” or, as the margin reads it, “attributed folly to God.” Job, when in that happy state of confidence in his covenant God, did not attribute folly to God; he knew that, mysterious as were these dealings of the Most High, they were in infinite wisdom. Job did not attribute folly to God; he believed that what God had done he had done wisely. And we in a great many instances cannot see his wisdom; it looks to us as though it would have been better to have been the other way, for none of us like affliction, but it is a privilege to believe there is a needs be. But when the Lord hides his face from Job, then Job brings out what he is after the flesh; so that we

get a clear representation of Job,—first, what he is after the Spirit, when he could acquiesce in these solemn dealings of the Most High with him ; then what he was after the flesh,—cursing the day of his birth, and wishing he had never existed. Here you get a clear representation of what the apostle calls the mind and the flesh ;—“ With my mind,” the new man, “ I serve the law of God,”—the law of faith and truth ; “ but with my flesh the law of sin.” Now, according to modern notions, it is very wrong that it should have been put upon record what the Old Testament saints were after the flesh. Hence they fall upon poor Job, and say he ought not to have cursed the day of his birth, and he ought not to have called his friends forgers of lies, and physicians of no value ; and that he ought not to have been so cowardly as to say, “ Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy ? ” So that, according to the moderns it almost makes one say, What a pity it is that these moderns were not there to teach the Holy Spirit better, and to be his counsellors ; to teach him what to put upon record, and what not ! But then it so happens that the Lord foresaw that his people would be to the end of time the subjects of these same rebellions, weaknesses, doubts, and fears ; so that when brought into them they may find in the Holy Scriptures that some of the most honoured and favoured servants of God have been the subjects of the same, have travelled in the same path. And faith very often makes a very holy and advantageous use of these infirmities and faults so put upon record ; because faith saith, Why, then, these men got to heaven, why should not I ? The Lord turned their captivity, who can tell but he will turn mine ? The Lord then revealed himself to them ; who can tell but there are, after all, yet happy days in store for me ? It is a great mercy to be concerned about eternal things at all, and especially when you come to the house of God. As I said in prayer, the Lord is taking one and another from our midst, and it reminds us that every service may be our last. And I pray this morning that every one of you that does not profit by hearing the word may go away sorry for it, grieved that you have not been profited, unhappy about it ; that you may say, I went to see the King, and I have not seen him ; I went to hear the voice of the great Shepherd, and I have not heard it ; I went with a hope I should be profited, but I am not profited. I hope and pray that it may be a trouble to you ; and if it be a trouble to you, if you carry nothing else with you, you can carry our text with you,—“ Wherefore hidest thou thy face,” when thou knowest I should so like to enjoy thy presence, “ and holdest me for thine enemy,” when thou knowest I should be so delighted to be assured thou dost reckon me one of thy friends, and that thou art my friend ?

First, *the hidings of the Lord's face*; secondly, *a judgment according to outward appearance*; for according to outward appearance it looked to Job as if God held him as his enemy.

First, then, *the hidings of the Lord's face*. This is a subject one can hardly condense into one sermon, because I must range over all those things that will make the subject somewhat clear. I shall therefore notice three different circumstances under which the Lord hides his face. In the first circumstance I shall note he hides his face penally, so also in the second; in the third circumstance, that contained in our text, he does not hide his face penally, but hides it sovereignly. First, then, he hides his face penally, or punitively, in the first Adam, in the fall of man. The fall took place, and there the Lord hides his face, and he has never shown his face there in a way of approbation, for that is what it means, of course,—approbation; he has never shown his approbation of man there, in the first Adam, from that day to this. There we fell under the displeasure of the Most High, and there he has hid his face from us. “We are consumed, for thou hast hid thy face from us because of our iniquities.” I want to show as I go along what the remedy is in each case; and this is one of the advantages we should take of such a scripture as this,—to set forth the dear Saviour; let him stand over against that that stands against us; and then if in that light we can see that God is on our side, we can then safely arrive at the conclusion that great as that is which is against us, yet greater is he that is for us than any and all that can be against us. Just a word upon the fall of man. It is wonderful how instructive the word of God is. You will see first there is the doctrine in the fall of man, suggested by the enemy, of universality;—that is instructive; and you will find that every man in his state by nature is blind to the sovereignty of God. The very sound of eternal election is abhorrent to the natural man; his heart heaves at it. Universality is the language of every natural man. That is a lie received into our nature when the fall took place. “Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” What, are you a hyper-Calvinist before the fall takes place? Is there anything in the shape of divine sovereignty here? Well, God has said we may eat of every tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil;—and you all know why it was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; because partaking of it would give them such a knowledge of the good they had lost which they never had before, and would give them a knowledge of the evil that was entailed by partaking of this tree. “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Then after

Satan had got in the doctrine of universality, the next step he takes is to make God a liar. Now has not this been the practice of the world—blindly, I grant? It was not done blindly by Satan; he knew what he was about. To make God a liar Satan said, "Ye shall not surely die." Then you mean to say God is a liar. Perhaps he would not say so openly, but he would give a nod, as much as to say, Yes, I do. And Eve received that doctrine—that God was a liar. Then, next, the serpent would make God to be unjust in leaving them in the dark. Mark the language, it is very solemn;—the next is, "God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened;" you are poor blind things now, you do not know the difference between good and evil; but "in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods;" you shall not be the poor, dependent, humble, cringing creatures you are now; you will walk in all the sovereignty of your free will; you will no longer admit the doctrine of divine sovereignty, that you shall not eat of all the trees. First, then, here is universality in opposition to divine sovereignty; secondly, here is making God a liar, in opposition to his truth; thirdly, here is God unjust, in not allowing them to know all things, to be as gods, to choose for themselves. Such is the way in which the fall took place. You will see, therefore, that in the fall there is a complete substituting of Satan in his gospel of universality, of creature power, creature exaltation,—here is a complete substituting of the gospel, if I may so call it, as the apostle saith, of Satan, for the truth of the blessed God. Now what is the consequence? The Lord came and said, Now, instead of the ground bringing forth as it has done, instead of things being as they have been, "thorns and thistles shall it bring forth unto thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Thus everything was darkened. And this is just where the world has been from that day to this—contending for a universality that does not exist, in opposition to God's sovereignty; making God a liar, and exalting the creature, as it were, into the place of the Creator. Hence some people say to me sometimes, Don't you think such and such a revivalist will do a great deal of good? He preaches to multitudes. But what does he preach? Why, he preaches just what the people think; he just confirms them in their delusion. They think salvation is conditional, and he tells them so; they think they can be saved or lost, which they like, and he tells them so, and confirms them in their delusion. Thus it is that Satan is transformed into an angel of light, and his ministers as ministers of righteousness.

But we will notice the remedy as we go along. Now there was a twofold remedy here for this evil, and that evil still exists and the remedy still exists, and will do, bless the Lord, as long as the world stands. The remedy was twofold;—first the promise, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head.” That promise means two things: first, it shall overturn the counsel of Satan; and secondly, it shall destroy his power,—“destroying him that had the power of death;” it shall overturn the counsel of Satan. Now in the case of hundreds of you this has been done; the Lord has in relation to hundreds of you thus bruised the serpent’s head; that is, overturned his counsel and destroyed his power. What is the counsel of Satan? The whole counsel of Satan can be better expressed nowhere than in those few words of the apostle,—“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not.” Therefore the counsel of Satan is to keep from you the light that would show you your need of Christ, the light that would show you the yea and amen promise in Christ. And while Satan’s counsel prevailed with you, he had power over you; but when the Lord called you by his grace, then the counsel of Satan was completely overturned. Now you are led to see that eternal life is given by the promise that is in Christ; and so it is by faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed. And now all the powers of persecution that might rise against you would not be able to keep you away from Christ, from the promise, from that order of things by which you are saved. This is the way the Lord reveals himself to every poor seeking sinner under the fall. And then the other part of the remedy was, the Lord made coats of skins, and clothed Adam and Eve. We are led here irresistibly to infer, and I think the inference is perfectly safe, that the Lord had taught Adam to offer sacrifice, as we see Abel after this offered sacrifice. Take the two together;—here is a promise that Satan shall be overcome; that we shall come out from that counsel of Satan that would keep us away from God, and from that power of Satan that would keep us away from God; and then in comes the sacrifice;—oh sweet atoning sacrifice! what a heavenly theme!—all our sins laid upon that, and all the fire, all the curse, the sting of death, descends upon that, it all meets there, and the sacrifice of Christ makes an eternal sweep of the whole. He rises as a morning without clouds; and here the Lord shows his face; here he shines, and shines for ever; as it saith in Ezekiel xxxix., “I will no more hide my face from them,” that is, not penally, “for I have poured out my Spirit upon the house of Israel;” and God’s Spirit is a spirit of interposition and mediation; and if you are a Christian your spirit will be a spirit of mediation; you will be a believer in

mediation, you will love mediation, you will rest upon mediation, you will range in mediation, you will be happy in this divine mediation. Here the Lord looks upon us with infinite pleasure, approbation, and delight; here it is he saith, "I will no more hide my face from Israel." So in the light of the revelation thus made they shall see his face, and shall serve him, and shall reign for ever and ever. Here, then, is one doctrine, of the Lord hiding his face from us in the fall, and you see what the remedy is. In Isaiah viii. there is a beautiful scripture upon the Lord hiding his face from us in the fall, and the remedy is introduced in a form that makes our souls go out, when we read the words attentively, with love to God. It is evident the dear Saviour is the speaker there. "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob." The Lord hideth his face from us in the first Adam, as well as from others, for we all by nature were children of wrath even as others; but God who is rich in mercy hath by Jesus Christ brought us out of this state. "I will wait upon the Lord;" so he did, in his life, death, and resurrection; so he does on his throne, so he will at the last day, and so he will throughout eternity, although it refers especially to his humiliation work. "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." And now mark, the Saviour says, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion." He doesn't call for the children to be beheld until his work is finished. After he had waited upon the Lord, now he says, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me." Look at them now, see what I have made them by my sacrifice, my righteousness, my truth, my spirit; and they are "for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion." They shall all be brought to trace up the hope they have in God to God's own sovereign and eternal mercy. That, then, is one respect in which the Lord hides his face, and there we see the remedy.

Secondly, he hides his face penally in a broken covenant. You that know the truth pretty clearly, I need not be so emphatic with; but some of you that are just seeking the Lord, you have not perhaps a very distinct idea of the difference between the two covenants. Now in the one the Lord hides his face penally from the people; in the other he never hides his face penally from the people, as I hope clearly to prove from the Scriptures before I close my discourse. He hides his face from the people in a broken covenant, and we shall see how Jesus Christ is the remedy there. Take the first part of Isaiah lix., and then take the latter part of the chapter, the first part is all darkness, and the latter part is all light; the first part is all

wrath, the latter part is all love ; the first part is all despair and condemnation, the latter part is all glory and eternal salvation ; because Christ is not in the one, but he is in the other. I will just read what is here said, and then point out to you what the characters were from whom he penally hid his face in a broken covenant. The people had got an idea,—We must do something towards our welfare. Very well, as we must do something, one says, You must do a little ; then another says, You must do a little more ; and then another says, You must do a little more ; and so they brought in their *do little mores* till they left at last nothing for the Lord to do ; the creature was to do it all,—you can't expect the Lord to do it all. And so the Lord, in opposition to their creature pretensions, saith, " Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save ; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear ;" he is able to save unto the uttermost. " But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." It is the general fashion to apply this to the people of God. Why, this is the voice of the law, the voice of the broken covenant. Tell me that mine iniquities, as a believer in Christ, can separate between me and my God? Where is the blood, and righteousness, and grace of Christ then? The apostle Paul was not of this mind ; he saith, " Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Well, but God's elect are as sinful as other people, children of wrath by nature even as others ; but their iniquities, before called or after called, cannot separate them from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Here, in the old covenant, it separated the Jews from God ; they stood conditionally, and that covenant was nothing else but law ; they ceased to perform those conditions, and consequently were separated from God, everything became destroyed, and he hid his face from them, would not hear them. Why would he not hear them? Why, they prayed for the putting down of his truth:—"The Lord enable us to crucify this Jesus Christ ; the Lord enable us to get rid of this horrid Jeremiah, this horrid Ezekiel ; the Lord enable us to get rid of these horrid apostles,—awful characters, the scum of the earth." They prayed to God against God's own truth, against God's own Christ, and against God's own salvation, and expected to be heard. They fell into a state of enmity against God ; and thus, " Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Thus he was their God in the old covenant, in a national sense ; " and your sins have hid his face from you." Will my sins hide God's face from me? My sins may hinder me from getting to God, but they can never hinder God from coming to me. They can hinder me from getting any comfort such as I could wish for, but they can never hinder God from coming to me. When the devil and sin have gained the

ascendency over his people, thrown them down, like the man among thieves, and made them miserable, the Lord comes in, pours in the oil and wine, raises the man up, and gives him the victory, and he is astonished at the freeness, fulness, and excellency of the grace of God, and the efficacy of Immanuel's blood. Can *true* Christians fatally apostatise, become wilful enemies to God, and so be separated from him? Here were the people under that covenant, unregenerate, that never loved God; and the more the truth was sounded in their ears, the more they hated it, until their apostasy, for that is what their sins mainly consisted in, separated them and their God. They set up golden calves, and when they got tired of them, or they got too expensive, and they could not get money enough, then they set up human tradition, just as men do now. "Your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." But what was their character? Why, they were not believers. "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood;" that is their character. Let us make haste, and crucify this Jesus to-day if we can get a chance; but they could not get a chance, because his time was not come. And when they did get hold of him, what a hurry they were in! the devil is always in a hurry to get his work done, knowing he hath but 'a short time. The Lord goes to work deliberately, but the devil goes to work in a hurry. They hurried the Saviour off to the cross, crucified him;—let us have it all over as quickly as we possibly can. "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood." So that these persons from whom the Lord penally hid his face were apostates, enemies to him; and Christendom is full of apostates now; for if you join an apostate church, and your spirit be a spirit of antipathy to that which alone can save the soul, you will be reckoned as much an apostate as though you had once professed the truth and gone from it, because you sanction the evil deed of them that set aside God's truth. There, then, in that broken covenant, God hid his face from the people. "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." Modern divines tell us that must mean Christians. Then the Christian is swift to shed innocent blood if it is so;—if it does mean the Christian, then the Christian is an enemy to Christ, and would crucify him if he could get at him; it means that the Christian would set aside God's truth. Never bring a dark cloud into the clondless skies of the new, the better, the everlasting covenant. Now just go on to the end of that 59th of Isaiah, and see what a difference there is. The dear Saviour appeared, "and saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor;" that is, he wondered as man; "therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him." Now you can under-

stand this, that in bringing salvation to him it brought salvation to us; his righteousness sustaining him will sustain us. But I must be clear upon this. Is there any one saying, I can't see that? Well, then, let me make it clear. Now suppose you have a surety for a very heavy amount, and he signs his name, and is bound by law to pay the uttermost farthing of your debt; that man is straitened until he has accomplished this; and by bringing himself into freedom—that is, paying your debt, that brings you into freedom,—and by his thus doing right, he is sustained, can lift up his head and look any one in the face, so that his freedom is your freedom. If your surety fail, your debt returns, you are in bondage; but in bringing liberty to himself he brings liberty to you. Therefore it is said, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." We cannot be free unless by a Surety we are made free; we cannot be free unless by a Substitute we are made free. Here, then, it is very different from the old covenant; here the Surety takes away all sin. I want to know how the sin of those that Christ died for can separate between them and their God. Bless the Lord, no; "it is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." I must not notice all these verses, but I feel anxious here to point out this contrast; first, that here is a violated covenant; God hides his face from the people, and scatters them to the four winds, as at this day, and everything they had is gone. But that was but a temporal covenant; these persons were apostates. Then you get here, in the new covenant, Christ Jesus, whose own arm brought salvation unto him, and his righteousness sustained him; and then all who are brought to know this come into reconciliation with God; and reconciliation to God by the knowledge of Christ, reconciliation to God by the faith of Christ, is called turning from transgression. "And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord." Now in the preceding part of the chapter you have the transgression; what was that transgression? Murderous enmity against Christ and against his servants, setting aside God's truth. But those that turn from this, that are convinced of what they are, like Saul of Tarsus, they come out of their enmity into love, they are brought down to the Saviour's feet, and brought into reconciliation to God; and the Redeemer shall come to such. Just so sure as you are turned away from the enmity, if you have not yet realized the mercy in your own soul, yet the Redeemer will come to you, because he sees you are waiting for him.

I have dwelt three or four times lately upon the last verse of this 59th of Isaiah, because I feel anxious you should understand it;—

this last verse referring to the people who are thus reconciled to God, and for whom Christ died, and from whom the Lord never did and never will hide his face penalty. The Lord makes a covenant with them. For years and years did I read those words in 2 Samuel xxiii.,—"He hath made with me an everlasting covenant," and so of the rest; I never could understand it. I thought to myself, How did the Lord do this? I wonder whether he hath made that covenant with me? and I could not see that he had. Oh, I thought, if I could be sure that the Lord had made that covenant with me, how happy I should be! For years was I off and on, more or less concerned about that;—oh, if I could but get where David was! And would you think it, that I could be so silly, I did not give it a thought to search the Scriptures and see if I could find a key, but went on imagining and dreaming, and asking this divine and the other, and this learned man and the other; but, like the wise men, they could get no definite information until the star reappeared, and then they soon found their way to where the young child was, and so found their way to where God was. "As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord; my Spirit that is upon thee." What was the Spirit of Christ? Not to go into the different qualities of that Spirit, I will mention one. Christ's Spirit was the spirit of the testamentary will of God; Christ took up the testamentary will of God, called the good, the acceptable, the perfect will of God;—that was Christ's Spirit; he was at home in that. And I thought to myself, Have I this Spirit? God is my witness, night and day, at home or abroad, I can always say that his testamentary will, his immutable covenant, finds a solemn, deep, sincere response in my soul. Then that is the covenant with them,—"My Spirit," the spirit of this testamentary will. Everything that pertains to our eternal welfare is found in the covenant, and there is nothing out of the covenant but death, bitterness, lamentation, and woe, and nothing in this covenant but that which is life and pleasantness. "My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed," the apostles, "nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever." Can you say, then, that you have received the testimony of Christ's substitution, the testimony of God's immutable covenant, the testimony of that eternal life that is by Jesus Christ; and that you do feel that you cannot part with those blessed truths, that you see their infinite and eternal value; that he has brought you into a bond; you feel you are in a bond that you can neither break nor desire to break,—you are bound to acknowledge that it is all of grace from first to last. If this be the case, if you have this faith in the testamentary will of God, you

will in your better judgment say, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver;" because God will do for us by these blessed truths what silver and gold could never do. See the difference, then; in the one case the people are separated by their sins, in the other case the Lord takes all their sins away; in the one case the people apostatise and turn enemies, in the other case they remain friends. Christ Jesus brings in a better sacrifice, a better covenant, established upon better promises, and by a better work makes a better people, for the people are better, because, being born of an incorruptible seed, thus reconciled to God, they never can become his enemies. What true prophet ever apostatised, and became his enemy? and what apostle (except Judas, who was no apostle at all) apostatised, and became God's enemy? What saint has ever apostatised, and become God's enemy? God's declaration is, "He that hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

The Lord never did and never will hide his face from his new covenant people on the ground of anything bad in them, any more than he will reveal himself to them on the ground of anything meritorious. Now before I go into the doctrine of that, let me ask you a question. Did not the Lord Jesus Christ sojourn with his disciples three years and a half? Yes. Did he ever say to them, Well, now, you were so naughty yesterday that you may go; I won't grant you my company to-day; I will leave you now until you are better; and if you are not better, I will go away altogether? Not an instance of the kind. And even when Peter, to the deep wounding of his own soul, denied that he knew Jesus, Jesus never denied Peter, but looked upon him, penetrated his very soul with a fresh manifestation of his love. The words were hardly off Peter's lips before forgiving love rolled into Peter's soul; for if it had not, he would not have gone out and wept bitterly.

"Law and terrors do but harden,
All the while they work alone;
But a sense of blood-bought pardon
Soon dissolves a heart of stone."

Ah, but then here is Job. Well, did the Lord hide his face from Job on account of something bad? Job is declared three times at the beginning of the book to be a "perfect man;" that is, he was perfect in Christ; Job received the Redeemer, in whom he was perfect; "and upright;" that is, upright to that perfection; perfect in Christ, and then upright to that perfection, sincere to that perfection. "I know that my Redeemer liveth;"—"One that feareth God;" that is, the true God, in contrast to false gods; "and eschewing evil;" he got rid of evil. And how did he get rid of evil? Why, by bringing in Jesus Christ, by faith in Christ. "This is our

victory over the world, even our faith." "Wherefore hidest thou thy face?" I may just say here that the Lord hides his face from his own people sovereignly; he sees a needs be. Are you getting a little character proud, or joy proud, or doctrinal proud—some way or another? What will the Lord do? He will just hide his face from you, in order to do you good. But I had better bring a scripture to throw a light upon this (2 Chron. xxxii. 31):—"God left Hezekiah, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." Hezekiah had obtained a wonderful victory; and Mr. Hart says,—

"The heart uplifts with God's own gifts,
And makes e'en grace a snare."

God therefore watches over us, and takes care lest, through his abundant goodness, we get consequential; he will hide his face from us to keep us in our right place, and to do us good. Jeremiah xxiv. :—"Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good." And so he hides his face sovereignly; not wrathfully, not penally, but sovereignly, for our good, for our discipline; as he left Hezekiah, that he might know all that was in his heart. And these are very profitable experiences. The darkness of soul, and the bubblings up of the infidelities within, teach us wonderful things; they humble us wonderfully. I ought not to say it, perhaps, but I assure you, friends, that I am so tried with my atheistical and infidel nature sometimes that before I come to the house of God I seem to stagger, and something seems to say, "What in the world is the good of your going to preach the gospel? You have got nothing in you but the devil, and sin, and wretchedness; you are as black as the devil, you are as foul as hell;—a poor wretch like you! And I am obliged to say with the apostle—and thank God there is such a scripture upon record,—“O wretched man that I am!” But what a mysterious thing it is that I have had some of the sweetest seasons when I have been thus tried! The Lord comes in, as though he should say, “I never came to you for your goodness, and I will not stop away from you for your badness. I see you are in a wretched plight, and now is the time for me to come in and magnify my grace.” So if the Lord hide his face from Paul, and give him a thorn in the flesh, it is only lest the apostle should be exalted above measure. Who will say that he did it in wrath? Will you say that thorn in the flesh was sent in wrath? No, but in love. And therefore if he hides his face from us, it is because there is a needs be. “For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath”—that is, no real wrath, but only apparent wrath; just the same as the father may frown upon his son, or the mother upon her child, not from any real wrath, but for the good of the child.