

language of the Psalmist, "The fear of the Lord is clean;" and again, "By what means shall a young man learn to purify his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word." To this he frequently adds *afflictive providences*. "By this therefore shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged." There is much dross and chaff remaining about the best in the world, and it is by these means that the Lord purges it away. These have nothing of a penal nature in them, but are only fatherly chastisements for their profit and advantage, Heb. xii. 8.

2. It is the grand design of Christ's coming into his church, to purify and purge her. Accordingly, when John here announces his coming, he shows that his fan is in his hand. Let no man be in any doubt about the intention of his coming, for he has his fan in his hand, which plainly indicates that there is a trying work to commence. It was his design to purge the Israelites when he came down to deliver them from their bondage; when he came to reside in their tabernacle and temple, he came to purify them; and when he came in human nature it was his design to purge and purify a peculiar people unto himself, zealous of good works. This is his design in giving them the Holy Spirit and all his gifts and graces.—It is the design of all his providences, both prosperous and adverse. How then do you view the glorious Redeemer? Have you ever seen him with his fan in his hand, and have you ever experienced his cleansing influence? Have you ever been afraid of his trying dispensations, and have you been ready to cry out with the church of old, "who may abide the day of his coming?"

3. All the means of purging the church and people of God can only be effectual when applied by himself. The word of itself can produce no saving effects, unless accompanied by the Holy Spirit. It is then it becomes the power of God unto salvation, Rom. i. 16; Heb. iv. 12. Unless the waters are troubled by the angel of the covenant none can be healed. The success of the word depends neither upon those who administer it, nor upon those who hear it. "Paul may plant and Appollas water, but God alone gives the increase." Even the saints themselves find not the same comfort in the word at all times. It is indeed at all times the firm and sure foundation of faith, but it does not on every occasion produce the same comfort and consolation. Hence the necessity of the frequent supplies of the spirit of grace. Afflictions cannot produce holiness without his special agency and blessing. Hence a wicked man may for a long time suffer heavy affliction and distress and yet not be purged from his iniquity. The afflictions of the ungodly are of a penal nature, and may be looked upon rather as punishments for his sins, as some drops from the storm of wrath which awaits him in the future state unless he repent. Smiling providences are of themselves equally destitute of energy. If not blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ, instead of proving the means of purging his church, they will prove the occasion of their sin. Thus Jeshurun, when he was grown fat, kicked. Here, however, is ground of comfort to the saint of God—the fan is in the hand of Christ.—Examine, brethren, what effect the word has upon you. What use do you make of your knowledge? What benefit do you receive from the providence of God? Does his goodness make you proud and haughty? And do you receive his reproofs with meekness, humility and resignation? &c.