

mankind give God's reproofs; but this answer will not pass when God comes to reprove.

4. There are men's answers at the last day: Matt. vii. 52, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works?" God comes and reproves them, and they plead their duties, their works. It will not do. "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

There are the common answers men in their souls, and consciences, and spirits, give to God when he reproves them.—Either they excuse themselves, with Adam, or justify themselves, with Jonah, or promise better things, with false flattering Israel, or plead what good things they have done. All these things will fail us; which leads me to the last observation.

There is but one answer that will hold, but one good answer that is to be made unto God when we are to be reprov'd by him, and that is this,—free justification in the blood of Jesus Christ. What shall I answer when I am reprov'd? Truly this, "He whose heart is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by faith." And the apostle, in three or four several places, doth prove that this resolution of the prophet intends faith that is the means of our free justification in the blood of Jesus Christ. This is the great and only answer poor sinful souls can make unto God when reprov'd.

I will a little open it unto you by showing you how God reproves us, and whence it is that this is our only answer.

God reproves us four ways:—1. In general, by the curse of the law: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This is God's great reproof of all sinners. Under this reproof we all lie. Truly, he that cannot answer this reproof of God will be cast out as a speechless, self-condemned person. 2. God reproves us by particular applications of the word of the law, finding out our special sins; as when the prophet came to David, and told him "thou art the man." When in the preaching of the word there is application made unto the souls of men, that they are the persons that are guilty, that is a peculiar reproof of God. The

general reproof is by the curse of the law, the sanction of the law; the particular reproof is by the application of the word to the conscience. 3. God reproves us in general judgments: "O Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, the inhabitants of the earth should learn righteousness." All the dispensations of God that are dreadful and terrible in the world, we ought every one to take them as reproofs for sin, and not put the evil day far from us, nor think there are not any calls of God in them towards us. 4. God reproves us by particular afflictions, trials, chastisements, in our persons, in our relations, in things that befall us in this world; the end of them is to reprove us. The first language wherewith affliction upon a person or in a family opens its mouth in conscience is, "Thou art a sinner;" as the woman, when her child died, said unto the prophet, "O thou man of God, art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?"—1 Kings xvii. 18. The brethren of Joseph, as soon as they fell into trouble, say, "God hath called our sin to remembrance." One great end of affliction is to reprove for sin.

Now, I say there is no other answer, when God thus reproves in conscience, to be given, but only the plea of pardon of sin and free justification of our souls by the blood of Jesus Christ. The apostle tells us so, Rom. iii. 19, "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." God gives reproofs by the law; what is the issue? Every mouth is stopped; all the world becomes guilty before God. Must they lie always so? Is there no answer to be given before God? no relief? No, saith he; but we are "justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ," verse 24. Here the mouth of the sinner is opened again, here is something for him to plead. But take him by himself under God's reproofs by the law, and every mouth is stopped, and that to eternity, and that with a sense of guilt; all the world becomes guilty before God.

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