

Sermon to the saints of God which are at Topeka – Sunday, October 12, 2014

Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? - Eccles. 7:13.

A just view of afflicting incidents is necessary to Christian behavior and exercise under them; and that view is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense. When we do not properly look at the crooks in our lots, as to what they are, why they are there, and what we should therefore do, we get into worlds of trouble. And a mixture of right thinking and fleshly analysis will simply trick us. What follows is a summary of Thomas Boston's writing – "The Crook in the Lot," that we may be edified and seek the Lord for brighter light on the subject.

The proof text contains in it both:

1. The remedy itself;

2. The suitableness of it.

1. The remedy itself is in wisely seeing the hand of God in all we find to bear hard on us: "Consider the work of God," namely, in the crooked, rough, and disagreeable parts of our lot, the crosses we find in it. We see very well the cross itself. We turn it over and over in our mind and view it on all sides. We look to this and the other second cause of it, and so we foam and fret. But, would we be quieted and satisfied in the matter, we must lift up our eyes towards heaven, see the doing of God in it, the operation of His hand. Consider it well; eye the first cause of the crook in your lot; behold how it is the work of God, His doing.

2. Such a view of the crook in our lot is proper to quell improper risings of heart, which are bound to happen otherwise, and quiet us under them: "For who can make that straight which God has made crooked?" As to the crook in your lot, God has made it; and it must continue while He will have it so. Should you ply your utmost force to even it, or make it straight, your attempt will be vain: it will not change no matter what we do – and we will do this and that, and convince ourselves that the crook has been evened and it was at God's hand – even when it has not. Only He who made it can mend it, or make it straight. This view of the matter, is a proper means at once to silence and to satisfy men, and so bring them to a proper submission to their Maker, under the crooks in their lot.

3 Propositions we will look into:

I. Whatever crook there is in our lot, it is of God's making.

II. What God sees fit to mar, no one will be able to mend in his lot.

III. The considering of the crook in the lot as the work of God, or of His making, is a proper means to bring us to a Christian thanksgiving and quietude under it.

We will look into the first of these today. Lord willing, we will take up the second and third next Sunday.

I. Whatever crook there is in our lot, it is of God's making. Here, two things are to be considered, namely, the crook itself, and God's making of it. As to the crook itself, the crook in the lot, for the better understanding of it, a few considerations:

1. There is a certain train of providential events that falls to each of us in this world. . And that is our lot, being allotted to us by the sovereign God, our Creator and Governor, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. This train of events is widely different to different persons, according to the will and pleasure of God, who orders men's condition in the world in a great variety.

2. In that train of events, some fall out, cross to us, and against the grain; and these make the crook in our lot. While we are here, there will be cross events, as well as agreeable ones, in our lot and condition. Sometimes things are agreeably gliding on; but, by and by, there is some incident which alters that course, grates us, and pains us, as, when we have made a wrong step we begin to limp. Some men's crooks have not been made aware to them yet. Some men's crooks, by volume or by intensity, are greater than other men's – this is providence. But the crook, or crooks, in a man's life cannot, to our minds, measure the volume or grievousness of any man's sin. This is folly. Think Lazarus or John the Baptist.

3. Everybody's lot in this world has some crook in it. Complainers will make religious 'grass is greener' comparisons. They look around, and take a distant view of the condition of others, seeing nothing in it but what is straight, and just to one's wish; so they pronounce their neighbor's lot wholly straight. But that is a false verdict; there is no perfection here; no lot out of heaven without a crook. Who would have thought but that Haman's lot was very straight, while his family was in a flourishing condition, and he prospering in riches and honor, being prime minister of state in the Persian court, and standing high in the king's favor? Yet there was, at the precise time of God's appointing, a crook in his lot, which so galled him, that *"all this availed me nothing (Es. 5:13)."* Everyone feels for himself, when he is pinched, though others do not perceive it. Also, nobody's lot, in this world, is wholly crooked; there are always some straight and even parts in it. Indeed, when men's passions in their crooks have cast a mist over their minds, they are ready to say, all is wrong with them, nothing right. While in hell that tale is and ever will be true, yet it is never true in this world. For there, indeed, there is not a drop of comfort allowed (Luke 16:24-25); but here it always holds good, that *"it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed (Lam. 3:22)."*

4. The crook in the lot came into the world by sin: it is owing to the fall, *"wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned(Rom. 5:12)."* Sin has so bowed the hearts and minds of men, that they became crooked in respect of the holy law; and God justly so bowed their lot, that it became crooked too. And this crook in our lot inseparably follows our sinful condition, till dropping this body of sin and death, we get within heaven's gates.

These considerations being accepted, a crook in the lot speaks, in general, two things, 1. Adversity, and 2. Continuance.

The crook in the lot, is, first, some or other piece of adversity. The prosperous part of one's lot, which goes forward according to one's wish, is the straight and even part of it; the adverse part, going a contrary way to one's desires, is the crooked part of it. God has intermixed these two in men's condition in this world; there is some prosperity in it, making the straight line, and there is adversity, making the crooked. This mixture has place, not only in the lot of saints, who are told, that *"in the world ye shall have tribulation (Jn. 16:33),"* but even in the lot of all.

Secondly, it is adversity of some continuance. We do not look at a thing as crooked, though forcibly bent and bowed together, that quickly recovers its former straightness. But under the crook, one having time to find his discomfort, is in some concern to get the crook made straight. So the crook in the lot is adversity, continued for a shorter or longer time.

Now there is a threefold crook in the lot that happen to the children of men.

1. One made by a cross event, which, however brief, yet has lasting effects. A single slip of the foot may make a man go limping ever after. *"For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them. (Eccl. 9:12)"* A thing may fall out in a moment under which the party shall go halting to the grave.

2. There is a crook made by a succession of cross events, following hard on one another, and leaving lasting effects behind them. Thus in the case of Job, while one messenger of evil tidings was yet speaking, another came (Job 1:16-18). Cross events coming one on the neck of another, deep calling to deep, make a sore crook. In that case, the part is like one who recovering his sliding foot from one unfirm piece of ground, sets it on another equally unfirm, which immediately gives way under him too; Solomon observes, *"that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked. (Eccl. 8:14) "*

3. There is a crook made by one cross event, with lasting effects of it coming in the room of another removed. One crook straightened, there is another made in its place: and so there is still a crook. This world is a wilderness, in which we may indeed get our station changed; but the move will be out of one wilderness to another. For many, when one part of the lot is made even, shortly thereafter some other part of that lot will become crooked.

More particularly, the crook has at least four characteristics of its nature:

1. Disagreeableness. A crooked thing is wayward; and, being laid to a straight edge, varies from it. But there is not, in anybody's lot, any such thing as a crook, in respect of the will and purposes of God. That which is crooked on earth is straight in heaven – in strict accordance with providence. Take the most harsh and dismal event in one's lot and lay it to the eternal decree, made in the depth of infinite wisdom before the world began, and it will answer it exactly, without the least deviation, *"according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11)."* Lay it to the providential will of God, in the government of the world, and there is a perfect harmony. But in every

person's lot there is a crook in respect of their mind and natural inclination – their flesh. The adverse event or circumstance lies cross to that rule, and will by no means answer it, nor harmonize with it. When Divine Providence lays the one to the other, there is a manifest disagreeableness—the man's will goes one way, and the providential event and it's purposes another way—the will bends upwards, and cross events press down: so they are contrary. And there, and only there, lies the crook. It is this disagreeableness which makes the crook in the lot fit matter of trial and exercise to us in this our earthly state of probation: if we would approve yourself to God, walking by faith, not by sight, we must quiet ourselves in the will and purpose of God, and not insist that it should be according to our mind (Job 34:33).

2. Unsightliness. Crooked things are unpleasant to the eye; and no crook in the lot seems to be joyous, but grievous, making an unsightly appearance (Heb. 12:11). Therefore men need to beware of giving way to their thoughts to dwell on the crook in their lot, and of keeping it too much in view. David shows a hurtful experience of his, in that kind. *"While I was musing the fire burned (Ps. 39:3)."* Jacob acted more wisely, calling his youngest son Benjamin, the son of the right hand, whom the dying mother had named Benoni, the son of my sorrow. By this means he arranged that the crook in his lot should not be set afresh in his view on every occasion of mentioning his son's name. Indeed, a Christian may safely take a steady and leisurely view of the crook in his lot in the light of the holy Word, so faith will discover a hidden sightliness in it, under a very unsightly outward appearance; seeing the suitability of it to the infinite goodness, love, and wisdom of God, and to the real and most valuable interests of the soul; and so one comes to take a most refined pleasure in distress (2Cor. 12:10). But whatever the crook in the lot is to the eye of faith, it is not all pleasant to the eye of sense – the flesh hates it, so we must strive against viewing it in the dim sparks of the flesh. It does real damage.

3. Unfitness for motion. A high spirit and a low adverse lot make great difficulty in the Christian walk. There is nothing that gives temptation more easy access than the crook in the lot; nothing more apt to occasion out-of-the-way steps. Therefore, says the apostle, *"And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed (Heb. 12:13)."* They who are laboring under it are to be pitied, then, and not to be rigidly censured; though rare is the person who learns this important lesson, till taught by their own experience.

4. Aptness to catch hold and entangle, like hooks – fish hooks (Amos 4:2). The crook in the lot makes an impression, to be ruffling and fretting one's spirit, irritating corruption, that Satan never fails to make diligent use of it for these dangerous purposes; which point once gained by the tempter, the tempted, before he is aware, finds himself entangled as in a thicket, out of which he does not know how to become disentangled. In that temptation it often proves like a crooked stick troubling a standing pool, which not only raises up the mud all over, but brings up from the bottom some very ugly things. Thus it brought up a spice of blasphemy and atheism in Asaph's case; *"Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency (Ps. 73:13)."* How is he turned so quite

unlike himself in that time! But the crook in the lot is a handle by which the tempter makes surprising discoveries of latent corruption even in the best of men.

This being the nature of the crook in the lot; let us now observe what part of the lot it falls in. Three conclusions may be established here:

First, it may fall in any part of the lot; for, sin being found in every part, the crook may take place in any part. *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isa. 64:6)."* The main stream of sin, which the crook follows, runs in very different channels in the case of different persons. And in regard of the various dispositions of the minds of men, it will prove a sinking weight to one, which another would go very lightly under.

Second, it may at once fall into many parts of the lot, the Lord calling, as in a solemn day, one's terrors round about (Lam. 2:22). Sometimes God makes one notable crook in a man's lot; but its name may be Gad, being but the forerunner of a troop which comes. Then the crooks are multiplied, so that the party is made to halt on each side.

Third, it often falls in the tender part – or that part of the lot in which one is least able to bear it, or at least thinks he is so. *"For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance (Ps. 55:12-13)."* If there is any one part of the lot which of all others one is disposed to nestle in, the thorn will be laid there, especially if he belongs to God; in that thing in which he is least of all able to be touched, he will be sure to be pressed. There the trial will be taken of him; for there is the grand competition with Christ. *"I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their minds (Eze. 24:25)."* Since the crook in the lot is the special trial appointed for everyone, it is becoming the wisdom of God, that it fall on that which most rivals him. But more particularly, the crook may be observed to fall in these four parts of the lot.

First, in the natural part. The parents of mankind, Adam and Eve, were formed together sound and entire, without the least blemish, whether in soul or body; but in the formation of their posterity, there often appears a notable variation from the original. Bodily defects, superfluities, deformities, infirmities, natural or accidental, make the crook in the lot of some. Rachel's beauty was balanced with barrenness, one notable crook in her lot (Gen. 30:1). And there is a yet far more considerable crook in the lot of the lame, the blind, the deaf, the diseased.

Second, in the honorary part. There is an honor due to all men, the small as well as the great (1Pet. 2:17), yet some are neglected and slighted; their credit is still kept low; they go through the world under a cloud, being put into an ill name, their reputation sunk. This sometimes is the natural consequence of their foolish and sinful conduct; as in the case of Dinah (Gen. 34). But where the Lord intends a crook of this kind in one's lot, innocence will not be able to ward it off in an ill-natured

world; neither will true merit be able to make head against it, to make one's lot stand straight in that part. Thus David represents his case. *"They that did see me without fled from me. I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind. I am like a broken vessel. For I have heard the slander of many (Ps. 31:11-13)."*

Third, in the vocational part. Whatever is a man's calling or station, the crook in their lot may take its place in it. *"Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not (Lam. 3:37)?"* People ply their business with skill and industry, but the wind turns in their face. Providence crosses their enterprises, renders their endeavors unsuccessful, and so puts and keeps them still in straitened circumstances. *"The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise (Eccl. 9:11)."* So the swift lose the race, and the strong the battle, and the wise miss of bread; while in some other providential incident, supplying the defect of human wisdom, conduct, and ability, the slow gain the race and carry the prize; the weak win the battle and enrich themselves with the spoil; and bread falls into the lap of the fool.

Fourth, in the relational part - one's smartest pain being often felt in these joints. They are in their nature the springs of man's comfort; yet, they often turn the greatest bitterness to him. Sometimes this crook is occasioned by the loss of relation. Thus a crook was made in the lot of Jacob, by means of the death of Rachel, his beloved wife, and the loss of Joseph, his son and darling, which had like to have made him go halting to the grave. Ephraim felt the smart of family afflictions, when he called his son's name Beriah, because it went evil with his house (1Chr. 7:23). And, finally, the crook is sometimes made here by relations proving uncomfortable through the disagreeableness of their disposition. There was a crook in Job's lot, by means of an undutiful, ill-natured wife (Job 19:17). In Abigail's by means of a surly, ill-tempered husband (1Sam. 25:25). In Eli's through the perverseness and obstinacy of his children (1Sam. 2:25) So do men oftentimes find their greatest cross where they expected their greatest comfort. Sin has unhinged the whole creation, and made every relation susceptible of the crook.

Having seen the crook itself, we now consider God's making of it. And here is to be shown, 1. That it is of God's making. 2. How it is of his making. 3. Why he makes it.

1. The crook in the lot, whatever it is, it is of God's making – that there is no other crook - appears from these three considerations.

First, It cannot be questioned but that the crook in the lot is a penal evil (or penalty for sin); whether its immediate cause is sinful or not, it is certainly a punishment of affliction. *"Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it (Amos 3:6)?"* Therefore, since there can be no penal evil but of God's making, and the crook in the lot is such an evil, it is necessarily concluded to be of God's making.

Second, God brings about every man's lot, and all the parts of it. He sits at the helm of human affairs, and turns them about in whatever way he desires. *"Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. (Ps. 135:6)."* The same providence that brought us out of the womb, brings us to, and fixes us in the condition and place allotted for us, by him who

"and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation (Acts 17:26)." It overrules the smallest and most casual things about us, such as hairs of our head being all numbered (Matt. 10:29-30); "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps (Jer. 10:23)." Steps causing the crook can be deliberate and sinful, as Joseph's brothers selling him into Egypt; they can be undesigned in the hearts of men, such as manslaughter, as when one hewing wood kills his neighbor with "the head (of the axe that) slippeth from the helve (handle) (Deut. 19:5)."

Third, God has, by an eternal decree, appointed the whole of every one's lot, the crooked part of it, as well as the straight, in exact conformity to the plan in his decree, *"who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will (Eph. 1:11)." So that there is never a crook in one's lot but of God. Of this Job states in his own case: "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him (Job. 23:13-14)."*

2. That we may see how the crook in the lot is of God's making, we must distinguish between pure sinless crooks and impure sinful ones.

First, there are pure and sinless crooks; which are mere afflictions, cleanly crossed, grievous indeed, but not defiling. Such was Lazarus's poverty, Rachel's barrenness, the blindness of the man who had been so from his birth (John 9:1). Crooks of this kind are of God's making.

Second, there are impure, sinful crooks, which, in their own nature, are sins as well as afflictions, defiling as well as grievous. Such was the crook made in David's lot, through his family disorders, the defiling of Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the rebellion of Absalom, all of them unnatural.

**There is a section in Boston's writing that I will make but brief detour to comment on, should you decide to revisit this text on your own. Many great expositors seem to want to stop short on the causation versus the 'permission' of sin, deftly tip-toeing or clumsily tripping around the subject – but there seems no way out of standing firm on the notion that there is only room, causally, operationally, and every other wise, for one will in the doctrine of a sovereign God, and that is his. We are taught by Christ himself to pray that our merciful God lead us not into temptation, and the word states at Amos that there is no evil in a city but that the Lord performed it. There is no derailment, for the dirty bathwater which I throw out of these expositors' insistence on softly halting at that notion still leaves behind the cleansed baby that God keeps in our hearts – the doctrine of God's sovereignty and the absolute predestination that is defined by his will.*

Thus, God powerfully binds sinners who deliver the causes of some crooks in our lots. He says to the sinful instrument, as He said to the sea, *"And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed (Job 38:11)?" "And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand (Job. 1:12)." Now, Satan went the full length of the bound, leaving nothing within the compass of it untouched, which he saw could make*

for his purpose. But he could by no means move one step beyond it to carry his point, which he could not gain within it.

Third, He wisely overrules them to some good purpose, becoming the Divine perfections. While the sinful instrument has an ill design in the crook caused by him, God directs it to a holy and good end. In the disorders of David's family Amnon's design was to gratify a brutish lust; Absalom's to glut himself with revenge, and to satisfy his pride and ambition; but God meant by that means to punish David for his sin in the matter of Uriah. Satan's design was to cause Job to blaspheme, but God had another design in this way becoming Himself, namely, to manifest Job's sincerity and uprightness. And the crook made in Joseph's lot, by his own brothers selling him into Egypt, though it was on their part most sinful, and of a most mischievous design; yet, as it was of God's making: *"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive (Gen. 50:20)."*

3. It remains to inquire why God makes a crook in one's lot? And this is to be cleared by discovering the design of that dispensation: a matter which it concerns everyone to know, and carefully to notice, in order to a Christian improvement of the crook in their lot. The design of it seems to be chiefly sevenfold.

First, the trial of one's state, whether one is in the state of grace or not? Whether a sincere Christian, or a hypocrite? It was plainly on this foundation that the trial of Job's state was put. The question was, whether Job was an upright and sincere servant of God, as God himself testified of him: or but a mercenary one, a hypocrite, as Satan alleged against him. And the trial of this was put on the crook to be made in his lot. Accordingly, that which all his friends, save Elihu, the last speaker, did, in their reasonings with him under his trial, aim at, was to prove him a hypocrite; Satan thus making use of these good men for gaining his point. As God made trial of Israel in the wilderness, for the land of Canaan, by a trial of afflicting dispensations, which Caleb and Joshua bearing strenuously, were declared suitable to enter the promised land, as having followed the Lord fully; while others being tried out with them, their carcasses fell in the wilderness; so He makes trial of men for heaven, by the crook in their lot.

Second, excitation to duty, or weaning a man from this world, and prompting him to look after the happiness of the other world. Men owe to the crook in their lot becoming settled and turning serious. Going for a time like a wild ass used to the wilderness, scorning to be turned, their foot has slid in due time. Thus was the prodigal brought to himself, and obliged to entertain thoughts of returning to his father (Luke 15:17). The crook in their lot convinces them at length that their rest is not here. Wherefore, whatever use we make of the crook in our lot, the voice of it is, *"Arise ye and depart; for this is not your rest (Mic. 2:10)"* It is this means of mortification, of the afflictive kind, that most deadens a real Christian to this life and world.

Third, conviction of sin. As when one walking heedlessly is suddenly made lame: his limping the rest of his way convinces him that he made a wrong step; and every new painful step brings it afresh to his

mind. So God makes a crook in one's lot, to convince him of some false step he has made. What the sinner would otherwise be apt to overlook, forget, or think light of, is by this means recalled to mind, set before him as an evil and bitter thing, and kept in remembrance, that his heart may every now and then bleed for it afresh. The crook serves as a providential memorial of it, bringing the sin, though perhaps old, to remembrance, and for a badge of the sinner's folly, in word or deed, to keep it ever before him. When Jacob found Leah, through Laban's unfair bait and switch on him for Rachel, how could he miss the stinging remembrance of the cheat he had, seven years at least before, put on his own father, pretending himself to be Esau (Gen. 27:19)? *"As I have done, so God hath requited me (Judges 1:7)."* In like manner, Rachel, dying in childbirth, could hardly avoid a melancholy reflection on her rash and passionate expression, *"Give me children, or else I die (Gen. 30:1)"* Even holy Job read, in the crook in his lot, some false steps he had made in his youth, many years before: *"For thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth (Job 13:26)."*

Fourth, correction, or punishment, for sin. *"Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee (Jer. 2:19)."* God may, for a time, wink at one's sin which afterward he will set a brand of his indignation upon, in crooking the sinner's lot. Though the sin was a passing action, the mark of the Divine displeasure for it, set on the sinner in the crook of his lot, may pain him long and sore, that by repeated experience he may know what an evil and bitter thing it was. David's killing Uriah by the sword of the Ammonites was soon over; but for that cause *"the sword shall never departed from thine house (2Sam. 12:10)."* And one may confess and have sincerely repented of that sin, but he may still limp to the grave, though that sin cannot carry him to hell.

Fifth, preventing of sin. The defiling objects in the world specially take and prove ensnaring, but by means of the crook in the lot, the paint and varnish is worn off the defiling object, by which it loses its former alluring appearance. The edge of corrupt affections is blunted, temptation weakened, and much sin prevented. Thus the Lord crooks one's lot that *"That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword (Job 33:17)."*

Everyone knows what is most pleasant to him; but only God knows what is most profitable. As all men are liars, so all men are fools too. He is the only wise God (Jude 25). Many are obliged to the crook in their lot, so that they do not go to those excesses which their vain minds and corrupt affections would with full sail carry them to; and they would from their hearts bless God for making it, if they calmly considered this great blessing.

Sixth, discovery of latent corruption, whether in saints or sinners. There are some corruptions in every man's heart, which lie so near the surface, that they are always ready to rise up; but there are others which lie so deep, that they are scarcely observed at all. But as the fire under the pot makes the scum rise up, appear on top, and run over; so the crook in the lot raises up from the bottom, and brings out such corruption as otherwise one could hardly imagine to be within. Who would have suspected such strength of passion in the meek Moses as he discovered at the waters at strife, and for which he was

kept out of Canaan (Ps. 106:32-33; Num. 20:13)? Or so much bitterness of spirit in the patient Job, as to charge God with becoming cruel to Him (Job. 30:21)? So much ill-nature in the good Jeremiah, as to curse not only the day of his birth, but even the man who brought tidings of it to his father (Jer. 20:14-15)? But the crook in the lot, bringing out these things, showed them to have been within, no matter how long they had lurked unobserved in a man's heart. So the discovery itself is necessary for the due humiliation of sinners, and to stain the pride of all glory, that men may know themselves.

Seventh, the exercise of grace in the children of God. Believers are liable to fits of spiritual laziness and inactivity, in which their graces lie dormant. Besides, there are some graces which of their own nature are but occasional in their exercise, as being exercised only upon occasion of certain things which they have a necessary relation to, such as patience and long-suffering. Now, the crook in the lot serves to rouse up a Christian to the exercise of the graces, overpowered by corruption, and to call forth to action the occasional graces, ministering proper occasions for them. The truth is, the crook in the lot is the great engine of Providence for making men appear in their true colors, discovering both their ill and their good. And if the grace of God is in them, it will bring it out, and cause it to display itself. It so puts the Christian to his shifts, that however it makes him stagger for awhile, yet it will at length evidence both the reality and the strength of grace in him. The crook in the lot is a great teacher. *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1Pet. 1:6-7)."* The crook in the lot gives rise to many acts of faith, hope, love, self-denial, resignation, and other graces; to many heavenly groanings, which otherwise would not be brought forth. These acts are more precious in the sight of God than even believers themselves are aware of, being acts of immediate internal worship. *"He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy (Ps. 147: 10-11)."*

Now, the use of this doctrine is threefold. (1.) For reproof. (2.) For consolation. And (3.) for exhortation.

Use 1. For reproof. And it meets with three sorts of persons that are reprovably.

First, the carnal and earthly, who do not with awe and reverence regard the crook in their lot as of God's making. *"Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up (Ps. 28:5)."* And in that they are deeply guilty, who, pouring on second causes, and looking no further than the unhappy instruments of the crook in their lot, overlook the first cause; as a dog snarls at the stone, but does not look to the hand that casts it. Why should men terminate their view on the instruments of the crook in their lot, and so magnify their scourges? Witness Shimei's cursing David as a bloody man, meaning the blood of the house of Saul, which he was not guilty of, while God meant it of the blood of Uriah, which he could not deny. They are guilty who impute the crook in their lot to fortune, or their ill-luck, which indeed is nothing but a

creature of imagination, framed for a blind to keep man from acknowledging the hand of God. *"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord (Heb. 12:5)."*

Second, the unsubmissive, whose hearts, like the troubled sea, swell and boil, fret and murmur, and cannot be at rest under the crook in their lot. This is a sinful and dangerous course. The apostle Jude, characterizing some, "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (Jude 13), *"says of them, "these are murmurers, complainers (Jude 16),"* namely, still complaining of their lot. For, since the crook in their lot, which their unsubdued spirits can by no means submit to, is of God's making, they fight against God. And their complaining and murmuring are indeed against Him, whatever face they put on them. May not He who fashioned us without our advice, be allowed to make our lot too, without asking our mind, but we must rise up against Him on account of the crook made in it? What does this speak, but that the proud creature cannot endure God's work, nor bear what He has done? And how black and dangerous is that temper of spirit!

Third, the careless and unfruitful, who do not set themselves dutifully to comply with the design of the crook in their lot. God does nothing in vain. Since he makes the crook, there is, doubtless, a becoming design in it, which we are obliged in duty to fall in with, according to that, *"Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it (Mic. 6:9)."* But the careless sinner, sunk in spiritual sloth, is in no concern to discover the design of Providence in the crook; so he cannot fall in with it, but remains unfruitful. They look not, they turn not to God.

Use 2. For consolation. It speaks comfort to the afflicted children of God. Whatever is the crook in your lot, it is of God's making; and therefore you may look upon it kindly. Since it is your Father who has made it for you, question not but there is a favourable design in it towards you. A discreet child welcomes his father's rod, knowing that, being a father, he seeks the child's benefit in this way; and shall not God's children welcome the crook in their lot, as designed by their Father, who cannot mistake His measures, to work for their good, according to the promise? The truth is, the crook in the lot of a believer, how painful it proves, is a part of the discipline of the covenant, the nurture secured to Christ's children by the promise of the Father. Furthermore, all who are God's children may take comfort in this under their crook - that there is no crook in their lot but they may be made straight; for God made it, surely then He can mend it. He himself can make straight what He has made crooked, though none other can. There is nothing too hard for Him to do. Do not say that your crook has been of so long continuance, that it will never mend. Put it in the hand of God, who made it, that He may mend it, and wait on Him. And if it is for your good that it should be mended, it shall be mended.

Use 3. For exhortation. Since the crook in the lot is of God's making, then, eyeing the hand of God in yours, be reconciled to it, and submit under it whatever it is; for otherwise your submission under the crook in your lot cannot be a Christian submission, acceptable to God, having no reference to Him as your party in the matter. It is merely a stoic, stiff-upper-lip bearing.

And to move you to this consider,

1. It is a duty you owe to God, as your sovereign Lord and Benefactor. His sovereignty challenges our submission, and it can in no case be meanness of spirit to submit to the crook which His hand has made in our lot, and to go quietly under the yoke that He has laid on. And His beneficence to us, ill-deserving creatures, may well stop our mouth from complaining of His making a crook in our lot, who would have done us no wrong had He made the whole of it crooked. *"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil (Job 2:10)?"*

2. It is an unalterable statute that nobody shall want a crook in their lot; for *"yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward (Job 5:7)."* And those who are designed for heaven are in a special manner assured of a crook in theirs, *"in the world ye shall have tribulation (Jn. 16:33);"* for by means of it the Lord makes them suitable for heaven. And since God makes the crooks in men's lot according to what he has decreed is for their greatest and best good, you may be sure that yours is necessary for you.

3. A crook in the lot, which one can by no means submit to, makes a condition like in hell. For there a yoke, which the wretched sufferers can neither bear nor shake off, is wreathed about their necks; there the almighty arm draws against them, and they against it; there they are ever suffering and ever sinning; still in the furnace, but their dross not consumed, nor they purified. Even such is the case of those who now cannot submit to the crook in their lot.

4. Great is the loss by not submitting to it. The crook in the lot, rightly improved, has turned to the best account, and made the best time to some that ever they had all their life long, as the Psalmist from his own experience testifies: *"Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word (Ps. 119:67)."* There are many now in heaven who are blessing God for the crook they had in their lot here. But if the crook in your lot does you no good, be sure it will not miss doing you great damage. It will greatly increase your guilt and aggravate your condemnation, while it shall forever cut you to the heart, to think of the pains taken by means of the crook in the lot to wean you from the world and bring you to God, but all in vain. Take heed, therefore, how you manage it, lest you mourn at the last and say, 'How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof!'

I love you all. Amen.