

God Our Refuge and Strength Part 3

By George Gipps (n.d.)

Psalm 46:1

I. The Text Opened

A. Psalm 46:1

1. I remind you of our text, when we string all the words of our text together, it reads “we shall find God our refuge, strength and very present help in trouble.”

II. The Doctrine from the Text

A. DOCTRINE: that it is the comfort of God’s church and children who trust in him that they shall find God a very present, strong, and abundant help in all their troubles no matter what they are.

1. God is our hope, refuge, and shelter; our hope makes us fly to him for shelter.
2. Objection: Experience tells us that the godly are overrun with troubles, and they sink and perish under them.
 - a) I shall give you a sevenfold answer to this objection.
3. Answer 1. The troubles that befall us in this life are common to both godly and wicked men, nevertheless God helps the godly through and out of them all.
4. Answer 2. In order to uphold the harmony of these two truths and to contain each of them within its bounds, we must remind ourselves of the distinction between temporal troubles that have to do with our natural life and spiritual troubles that relate to our supernatural life.
 - a) We should consider the difference between both the matter and the manner of these differing kinds of troubles.
 - b) The matter is the kind of troubles we suffer, such as sickness, hunger, thirst, nakedness, death, Satan’s temptations, etc.
 - c) The manner is God’s regard for the man who is troubled, and man’s respect back again to God.
 - d) No matter how temporal troubles are for both the godly and the wicked, in their manner they are sanctified to the godly and not to the wicked.
 - (1) *The godly have a personal relationship with the sovereign God who is the author of all circumstances, so they can rectify their troubles with the providence of God.*
 - (2) *With God as their Father, they are suited to bear troubles as correction or chastisement from the Father.*
 - (3) *Being children of God, they hate sin and desire to mortify sin which is the primary cause of all trouble by laboring for holiness and looking for a better life in eternity with God.*
 - (4) *And all this makes them hope all the more in the God whom they fly to for help, and learn with David to say, “Before I was afflicted, I went astray: but now have I kept thy Word. I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me,” (Psa. 119:67, 75).*
 - e) The spiritual trouble of sin, however it may look alike in both the godly and the wicked in substance, yet for its manner it is quite different.
 - (1) *The godly sin due to infirmity, not because of presumption.*

- (2) *Their sins are more immediate violations, not contrived beforehand.*
- (3) *They are regretted, not boasted in afterward.*
- (4) *They do not willingly serve them.*
 - (a) *Sin does not reign in the heart of the godly and therefore is not sin, "unto death."*
- (5) *All this is quite the opposite with the wicked.*
 - (a) *Because they are all flesh, sin finds no opposition in them.*
- (6) *But the godly are both flesh and Spirit.*
 - (a) *"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would," (Gal. 5:17).*
- (7) *They are, therefore, continually at war with the sin that they experience.*
 - (a) *In this way the godly cannot totally, or finally sink under sin, because the Spirit cannot be subdued and conquered by the flesh.*
- (8) *"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, then he that is in the world," (1 John 4:4).*

f) Though God allows his children to be buffeted by Satan as a trial or for chastisement, yet despair cannot totally or finally prevail over them, for they shall recover, and God's grace shall be sufficient for them.

g) And however difficult it may be with the godly in this life, yet the end of the righteous outshines it all, as Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have fought a good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith. Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, and not to me only, but to those also that love his appearing."

- (1) *And, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Rom. 8:35).*
- (2) *The final condition of the wicked, to the contrary, is that they will sink without help under all these troubles throughout all eternity.*

5. But here may some object, as noted in John 11:37, "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" Couldn't God have spared mankind of this misery?

- a) Let us hear Paul's answer. "O man, who art thou that disputes with God?"
 - (1) *Most assuredly, an all-powerful God could have done it, if in his infinite wisdom he had seen it best to do so.*
 - (2) *These are depths we cannot fathom to its bottom, yet we can dive into the deep end of the following five truths.*
- b) God is of absolute infinite perfection from all eternity, needing no creation nor creature to add anything to him, and though the whole creation may seem merely arbitrary, yet it is all working in sync with some end suitable to his excellency and worthy of his undertakings.
 - (1) *God's end can be none other than the manifestation of his glory in all his communicative attributes of power, wisdom, providence, and the rest, and that to the highest perfection that the most noble creatures, men, and angels can reach in order to honor and praise him in all his excellencies.*
 - (2) *His hidden paths are infinitely beyond all his creatures finding out until he is pleased to manifest them, because ease and commonness strips things of admiration, exposing them to neglect and contempt.*
 - (3) *God employs such contrary and unlikely means to produce his ends that however much we think the work he does is impossible beforehand, so much more do we admire and esteem it afterward.*

- (a) *Even if we slighted it before, we adore it afterward.*
- (4) *Are not God's ordinary works of nature as admirable?*
- c) So, it is true, God could have, if he had so desired, prevented man's fall, Christ's death, and his children's sin and suffering.
- (1) *But then we would have failed to see the weakness of even the choicest of creatures, men, and angels, when not supported by God.*
- (2) *We would not have experienced God's rich love in Christ as he was given a ransom for us, nor God's severe indignation against sin, his exacting of justice against reprobates, and his unfathomed free grace towards his elect.*
- (3) *We would have missed his unblemished holiness that did not spare sin but found a way to punish it – in his children by way of chastisement and in his Son by way of satisfaction.*
- (4) *We would not have experienced the power of the grace of God in his saints that is stronger than death, the very grace that works all things together for our good and with the best advantage for God's glory.*
- (5) *We would have missed the opportunity to look with admiration into these paths of God, that we may say with Paul, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen!" (Rom. 11:33-36).*
- (6) *Men cannot trace his paths or predict his ways because the end of all things is God's glory.*
- (a) *He brings good out of evil, which could not be had if he did not first permit evil to exist.*
- (7) *Nothing so confounds Satan with all his assassins and foils him at his own weapon than allowing him to have his most malicious will, which in turn fully accomplishes God's own most holy will.*
- (8) *A perfect example is that of Joseph when his brothers sold him as a slave.*
- (a) *As Joseph relayed to them many, many years later, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."*
- (9) *Another example is that mighty man Samson, who was bound by the Philistines to deprive him of his strength, and in turn he exercised and evidenced his strength to their ruin.*
- (10) *Yet another example is how David killed Goliath with his sling and several smooth stones from the brook, and so cut off Goliath's head with his own sword.*
- (11) *In all Satan's attempts to bring Christ to death, the end result was to open the door to man's salvation and his own kingdom's desolation – the things Satan so feared and worked so hard to prevent.*
- (a) *"Surely the wrath of man (and devils) shall praise thee, the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain," (Psa. 76:10).*
- (b) *That is, when God has allowed all the malice he intends to allow for his glory, he will dam up the residue.*
- (c) *He will instantaneously put an end to it all when he is ready and his time is right, when God rises to judgement to save all the meek of the earth.*

III. The Text Applied

A. Uses from the Doctrine

1. USE 1: The first application of this doctrine is to understand the several ways God has for delivering the godly from all their troubles.

a) 1. God often strikes the hearts of the enemies of his church and children with sudden fears of dangers to themselves, even when there is no cause, so that they run even when no one pursues them.

(1) *This happened with the hosts of the Assyrians in 2 Kings 7:6-7 whom the Lord caused to hear a noise of chariots and horses, and of a great host, and so were utterly diverted.*

(2) *There are narratives of the enemy mistaking cattle for armies, rattling winds that strike horror, and another notable example of the Midianite's dream as told in Judges 7:13.*

b) 2. God often smites the enemies' hearts with relenting pity, making them prove to be friends to his church and children.

(1) *Similarly, he turned Judah's and Reuben's hearts towards Joseph to spare his life (Gen. 37:19).*

(2) *He turned the heart of King Ahasuerus towards Esther, reversing the sentence that would have destroyed the whole nation of the Jews (Esther 7).*

(3) *Similarly, Nebuchadnezzar's heart was set beforehand to free Daniel, and in the interim to be troubled for him (Daniel 6).*

(4) *These are examples of God's "preventing" ways of help.*

c) 3. God often allows his churches and children's enemies to prosper in their malicious efforts and then, in turn, he confounds them and turns their designs to his own glory, the welfare of his church and children, and by it, to their enemies' shame and confusion.

(1) *A prime example is found in the instances of Joseph's brethren who sold him into Egypt, the Philistines binding of Samson, and the betraying of the Christ to death.*

(2) *Another instance is when Saul gave Michal to David to be his wife in order to snare him with the dowry of a hundred of the Philistines' foreskins, that so David might fall under their hands.*

(a) *And yet this resulted in David's rise to greater honor (1 Sam. 18:22, etc.).*

(3) *Still another example is found in the accusers of the three Hebrew children (Daniel 3) and of Daniel himself, (Daniel 6), both which tended to the rise of them and the consequent ruin of their adversaries.*

d) 4. God often leaves the principals alone, and only deals with the instruments of their cruelty, disabling them for service against his church and children.

(1) *Such was the case with the fiery furnace and the lions in the two forenamed examples.*

(2) *Also, the chariot wheels of Pharaoh's host fell off in pursuit of Israel through the Red Sea, (Exod. 14:25).*

(3) *So, with the band of soldiers that came to arrest Jesus, as soon as he said, "I am he," they all went backward and fell to the ground (John 18:5-6).*

(4) *And the Apostle John, having been boiled in a cauldron of oil, came out without any injury.*

e) 5. God often allows the devil and all his instruments to do their worst, and then he does his best, his host against theirs, under whose command are all creatures.

(1) *Some were so potent, in fact, that one angel in one night killed 185,000 enemies of his church (2 Kings 19:35).*

(2) *The stars in their courses fought against Sisera (Judges 5:20).*

(3) *The sun and moon stood still to give light to his people to be avenged of their enemies (Joshua 10:12-13).*

(4) And God sent hosts of lice, flies, fleas, frogs, hail, death, and what not to punish kings for his people's sakes.

f) 6. God often allows the wicked to prevail even to martyrdom against his church and his saints.

(1) But it is to free them from evils to come, to give them a more honorable crown of glory, and to raise up seed to his church from their blood.

(2) All these things are written for our instruction, for though we don't expect miraculous deliverances, as most of these were, yet through patience and comfort of the Scriptures we have hope that the Lord will find a way for us also to escape, based on his wise providence designed for his own glory and his children's good.

(3) For in the end he delivers them from eternal death and gives them life everlasting.

2. USE 2: God's children are men of observation, and as such we observe diligently God's gracious dealings both on behalf of his church, and to yourself in particular, to learn to praise him, to pray to him, and to trust in him.

a) A great example is David, a man after God's own heart, who invoked songs of God's providence in all his wondrous works of grace to his church, historically from the beginning of the world down to his own times, and prophetically from his own time to the world's end.

(1) Therefore, the book of Psalms remains music for the church to the world's end.

3. USE 3: A third exhortation for the saints is that we be most deeply and chiefly troubled for our sins until we are pardoned of them on the merits of Christ and gain victory over them by the power of God's Spirit.

a) This will alleviate all other troubles; they all will be easily overcome once our sin is rightly and thoroughly vanquished.

b) That is when we experience joy in the Holy Spirit, not based on some false sense of eternal security and a veneer of forgiveness of sin, but because God is at home in our conscience.

c) How sad is that man's condition who has no safety abroad nor quiet at home because of the sin that continually plagues his conscience.

d) We carry this house, where conscience abides, wherever we go.

e) For this reason, we should take heed how we deal with our sins.

f) If we keep close tabs on our conscience to discover our sins early, then we may kill them.

g) However, if they are allowed to remain and take root inside our heart, they put us at great risk, if God chooses not to show us mercy.

h) Let our sins, therefore, be our greatest trouble.

(1) *As Augustine says, "The carpenter hews timber which is rotten on the outside. But if he finds it sound within, he squares it and fits it for building, regardless of the outward unsound chips, which will be burned in the fire. It will profit us nothing to have sound bodies and hollow hearts with corrupted consciences, for these are the troubles which seize on us, that we sink under them. Get a good heart and a sound conscience, and in whatever troubles, you may retire and appeal to God with comfort, who will meet you there, speaking peace, no matter what troubles dog and pursue you from place to place. Otherwise, your sin will become your own accuser and tormentor, perpetually haunting you in every place and at every turn, and that much more fiercely for those secret, inner sins. And yet, even in these extremities, God, yes, God alone is our refuge," Augustine says, "He is our present help. Therefore, let us find out our sins, and with the help of our God, route them out, that they do not destroy us utterly."*

(2) *And let us make sure to have our God at peace within us.*

(3) *For though we are all born in our sins, yet take heed how we live in our sins, for then we shall die in our sins.*

(4) *The sin nature is with the godly until death, yet they are not in their sins, but in Christ Jesus.*

(5) *They are new creatures, continually mortifying all their sinful lusts.*

(6) *O let it be so with me, and with you also, whoever you are, as we nurture the eternal salvation of our souls.*

4. USE 4: In this fourth exhortation, we rest upon God alone for delivery in all our troubles.

a) Isaiah 26:3-4 speaks fully to this purpose. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength."

(1) *Let no carnal reasonings draw us away from our repose in God.*

(2) *We can secure ourselves and take refuge and comfort in God's all-powerful, wise, and good providence, for we know that God disposes of kings and kingdoms, bringing down one and setting up another.*

(3) *He does whatever he pleases, both in heaven and on earth.*

b) Secondly, we should know that God is not fickle, but sparing and forbearing until our sins so provoke him that the honor of all his glorious attributes like justice, truth, and holiness are so deeply engaged that he must avenge his anger and render justice.

(1) *He spared the Canaanites until their sins were ripe for judgment.*

(a) *Judah's sins grew to the measure for which there was no remedy (2 Chron. 36:16).*

(2) *"Fill ye up the measure of your fathers," (Matt. 23:32).*

(3) *"A fruitful land he turns into barrenness, for the iniquity of them that dwell therein," (Psa. 107:34).*

c) Thirdly, we should know further that in all these catastrophes God still preserves his church (the city of God and the kingdom of Christ) safe and sound, though he may move his candlestick from one nation to another.

(1) *Though all Judea and Palestine were laid waste, the church settled in Greece.*

(2) *And when it was overrun, it moved into these western and northern territories, and happily it took its flight into America.*

(3) *And certainly, it will not be extinct until the world's end, and not even then, because it will be perfected in heaven.*

d) Lastly, we should know that in all these relocations God took special care of his chosen ones (those who are his true church).

(1) Therefore, even temporal governments (much less Christ's church), do not depend on fate, human strength, or policy, but on God's most wise and just providence and grace.

(2) Therefore, let no such vain conceit deflect us from making God our God, our hope, refuge, and shelter, in whom we shall find a very present, great, and abundant help in our ever so present, great, and abundant troubles.

(3) Labor to make God your God, by giving him all you possibly can.

(4) Break off all associations with sin, because until this is done, there is no coming to God; he does not listen to those who continue in their sin.

(a) "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination," (Prov. 28:9).

e) Secondly, do not seek other helpers but rely on him only, fully trusting him in the ways and means which he prescribes and allows; God is jealous.

(1) He will have no rival for our heart. He who works all in all must be to you all in all.

(2) "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to him be all praise for ever," (Rom. 11:36).

f) Thirdly, to this end celebrate all his former great deliverances for his church and chosen.

(1) And be like David who tuned his heart to sing praises to God for past victories!

g) Fourthly, let faith infer from what God has done to what he both can and will do in the future.

(1) He who is the same without change, if his wisdom sees cause, his goodness will do it.

(2) Therefore, strengthen your faith, comfort your spirit, take courage to endeavor.

(3) As David argued, "God delivered me from the lion, and the bear," (1 Sam. 17:34-35, cf. 2 Cor. 1:10), "Therefore will he also deliver me from this uncircumcised Philistine."

(4) And as Paul declares, "God has delivered us, and does deliver us, in whom we trust that he will deliver us."

h) Fifthly, be fervent, and frequent God by prayer in all your troubles.

(1) Season your prayers with salty tears of repentance for your sins, which provoke him to trouble us.

i) Sixthly, (1 Kings 21:29) by faith, prayer, praise, repentance, and obedience, make God your hope, refuge, and shelter, not only in times of trouble but also in times of peace.

(1) Seek him in the height of prosperity, as you look for his help in the depth of adversity.

(2) In this way, God will not seem strange, nor look strange on you when you come to him, but you may rather have gained his care and favor and free recourse in your time of need.

(3) Likewise, in this way you may prevent rather than remove troubles, which is the easier task.

(4) God does not need to prescribe a remedy if you have no illness.

(5) One or other greater distemper may be recovered by speedy repentance, in such case God will not need to prescribe any bitter medicine or apply any painful discipline.

j) Finally, I say, discharge the duty, which our text prescribes, and you may confidently infer that you need not fear, though the earth be removed.

(1) May God Almighty's blessings be yours.