

# DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*"What? Shall we receive  
good at the hand of God,  
and shall we not receive  
evil?" (Job 2:10)*



ARTHUR W. PINK

**DIVINE  
CHASTISEMENT**



ARTHUR W. PINK  
(1886-1952)

# DIVINE CHASTISEMENT



BY

ARTHUR W. PINK



**he Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc.**

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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth.

—*Psalm 60:4*

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*lux lucet in tenebris*  
“The Light Shineth in the Darkness”

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# DIVINE CHASTISEMENT



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## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

*“Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”* (Hebrews 12:5-8).

**C**HRISTIANS HAVE TRIALS and afflictions. This should not be a strange concept. It is an obvious fact of life. But, the idea that Christians are chastened and corrected by their heavenly Father is a concept that is not only foreign but completely contrary to what many present-day Christians are taught and the way they think every day. However, the Bible text given above from the book of Hebrews makes such a concept clearly undeniable, the Lord “*chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth*” (Hebrews 12:6).

The Bible plainly states that, “*Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward*” (Job 5:7). According to this verse, all men by nature have trouble as surely as all sparks by nature fly upward. Men can no more prevent or avoid trouble, than they can prevent sparks from flying upward into the sky. All men will, sooner or



later, face adversity and endure suffering of some kind in this world. Hence, the Bible says, “*Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble*” (Job 14:1). In commenting on this verse, John Gill wrote,

“Man is born to trouble, being born in sin; trouble and sin go together, where there is sin there is trouble; sin entered into the world, and death by it, with the numerous train of afflictions and miseries which issue from it: *all men* have their troubles, some of one sort, and some of another; *wicked men* are not indeed troubled as other men, as good men are; they have not the same sort of trouble, yet they are not exempt from all; they are full of commotion, disquietude and uneasiness, as the word signifies; they are restless, and ever in motion; they are like the troubled sea, that cannot rest . . . and *good men* have their troubles besides those in common with others, they have inward troubles arising from the vanity of their minds and thoughts, the impurity of their hearts, and the power of indwelling sin in them, and especially from the breaking forth of it in words and deeds, from the weakness of their graces, from the hidings of God’s face, and from the temptations of Satan; in short, Job’s meaning is, that men in the ordinary course of things meet with . . . much trouble.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in view of what the Bible says about trouble and suffering, we can say that no man lives a trouble-free life in this world. All men will, sooner or later, face adversity and endure suffering of some kind. The Bible also reveals that wickedness does not exempt unsaved men from their natural troubles and salvation

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1. John Gill. *An Exposition of the Old & New Testaments*. Volume 3. (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810). Page 306.

does not exempt saved men from their troubles. But it should be noted that Christian men suffer from *two kinds* of trouble. They must endure both natural troubles and spiritual troubles. This is why John Gill wrote, “wicked men are not indeed troubled as other men, as good men are; they have not the *same sort* of trouble.” Lost men are not disturbed by the “spiritual” troubles of a Christian. So, for emphasis I say again, no man lives a trouble-free life, not even Christians. Such an idea is an unrealistic fantasy and the figment of an imagination completely uninformed by what the Bible teaches about human life in this sin-cursed world. One wonders if those who espouse such ideas have ever read the Book of Job (1:21; 2:10; 27:2; etc.) or the words of Christ in John 16:33 or what Paul said in Acts 14:22? According to what the Bible teaches, all men will, sooner or later, face adversity and endure suffering of some kind. This is especially true for Christians. They will have both natural and spiritual troubles. It was an oft-repeated saying among the old Puritans that, “God had only one Son without sin, but He never had any sons without sorrow.” If Christ was – “*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*” – how can any Christian follow Him, walk in His steps and not have any trouble? How can the “head” of the body suffer, and the “members” of the body not feel it? For the Christian, some afflictions are brief, some persist for years and some may even continue throughout his entire lifetime. Often troubles come upon us one after another in quick succession. At other times we have a reprieve and enjoy an interval of peace between troubles. Occasionally we must endure physical troubles like crippling affliction or a lingering sickness, or sometimes we suffer spiritual trouble and sorrows of the soul, sometimes our families are rent asunder by death or divorce, sometimes severe financial loss or outright poverty trouble us, or sometimes we may have to endure the political turmoil that flows from war or the

oppression of a tyrannical government. But, whatever the nature of the anxiety – every Christian has trouble. The question is not, can you avoid and prevent having any trouble. The question is, do you understand: (1) the origin, nature and purpose of your troubles and (2) how you should respond to them.

Dear reader, have you ever seriously compared yourself with the people of God in the Bible? If so, have you not often observed that there is a great difference between these people and yourself? Beyond the miraculous, are there not some glaring contrasts between today's professing Christians and the saints of the past? In no aspect of the Christian life is that contrast and difference more apparent than in the way Bible Christians understood and responded to their trials and troubles and the way we understand and respond to ours today.

As we approach this subject, we should be careful to remember that the people of God in the Bible – even those who served the Lord in miraculous ways – were still, “*subject to like passions as we are*” (James 5:17). They too fell into sin and often failed to serve God aright. The same doubt and fear, the same self-will and inclination to seek personal ease and comfort that often plagues us, plagued their hearts as well. They too, even after the new birth, had to battle the same residual indwelling sin (Romans 7:18–24; Galatians 5:17). Hence, it should not be forgotten that the people of God in the Bible were not perfect – they were only saved sinners like ourselves. And yet the Lord obviously led them, taught them and brought them to understand their trials and troubles in manner many of us today find hard to comprehend. For example, after she lost her husband and her sons, Naomi, mother-in-law to Ruth, said, “*I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty... the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me*” (Ruth 1:21). After losing most of his possessions, all

his children, and his health, Job said, “*the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord*” (Job 1:21). When Job’s wife urged him to curse God for his losses, the Bible records Job’s response, “*What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*” Then the Bible vindicates Job’s words, “*In all this did not Job sin with his lips*” (Job 2:10). Again, in recognizing the hand of the Lord in his trials, Job said, “*the Almighty hath vexed my soul*” (Job 27:2). When David spoke of his troubles, he said, “*I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me*” (Psalms 119:75). How different from today’s way of thinking! Should we then just write-off our trials, troubles and afflictions as originating from blind fate, random luck, or haphazard chance? No, not if we believe the Bible. It plainly teaches us that the God of the Bible sits as “*governor among the nations*” (Psalm 22:28) and “*rules over all the kingdoms of the heathen*” (2 Chronicles 20:6) and “*doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth*” (Daniel 4:35) and His kingdom “*ruleth over all*” (Psalm 103:19; 115:3). Hence, the God of the Bible “*worketh all things after the counsel of His own will*” (Ephesians 1:11) and “*chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth*” (Hebrews 12:6). This is exactly what Jesus himself said, “*As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten*” (Revelation 3:19). Consequently, we are repeatedly exhorted to “*despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him*” (Hebrews 12:5–6; Job 5:17; Proverbs 3:11).

But how many of us are guilty of despising the chastening of the Lord? How many of us are guilty of thinking lightly or very little of the Lord’s involvement in our trials and troubles? How many of us see the Lord as the original source and first cause of our afflictions? How many of today’s professing Christians “*bless*” God for the things they’ve suffered? How many of us feel that our

afflictions are right? Don't we usually consider them unfair? Have you ever understood that God was "faithful" when He sent trouble into your life? Again, David said, "*Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me*" (Psalms 23:4) and David spoke of his, "*comfort in affliction*" (Psalms 119:50). Have you ever felt any "comfort" from the afflicting rod? Do we understand "how" one finds comfort in tribulation and affliction? Dear reader, as we said before, the question is not, can you avoid and prevent having any trouble. The question is, do you understand: (1) the origin, nature and purpose of your troubles and (2) how you should respond to them.

I would ask the reader, even as you examine this book, are you not dealing with some type of adversity, are you not troubled in some way or another by something? Would you like to learn more about a Christian man's troubles and how to respond to them? There are many publications currently available that address these issues. Among the more notable we would recommend the following: (1) Thomas Boston – *The Crook in the Lot: God's Sovereignty and Wisdom Displayed in our Afflictions*; (2) Thomas Brooks – *The Mute Christian Under the Smarting Rod*; (3) Jeremy Burroughs – *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*; (4) John Flavel – *The Mystery of Divine Providence*; (5) Richard Sibbes – *The Bruised Reed*; and (6) Thomas Watson – *All Things For Good*. Nevertheless, we believe the following book by Arthur W. Pink is one of the very best on the particular subject of Christian affliction as set forth in the Book of Hebrews Chapter 12. It especially deals with the specific issue of God "chastening" His children. In this book the author's primary objective is to consider what the Bible says about the nature of Christian afflictions and the manner in which Christians ought to respond to their heavenly Father's correction.

The content of this book was extracted from A. W. Pink's book – *An Exposition of Hebrews* and, from our research, we understand that this is the first time this particular material has ever been

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

published by itself in separate book form. We pray the Lord will be pleased to make this book a blessing to all those into whose hands He providentially sends it. Through printing and distributing this book, the publisher hopes to, "*comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves have been comforted of God*" (2 Corinthians 1:4).





## THE PATH OF TRIBULATION

*Hebrews 10:32–34*

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**G**OD HAS NOT promised His people a smooth path through this world; instead, He has ordained that “we must through much tribulation” enter His kingdom (Acts 14:22). Why should it be otherwise, seeing we are now in a territory which is under His curse. And what has brought down that curse, but *sin*. Seeing then that there still is a world of sin both without and within each one of us, why should it be thought strange if we are made to taste the bitterness of its products! Suppose it were otherwise, what would be the effect? Suppose this present life were free from sorrows, sufferings, separations; ah, would we not be content with our present portion? Wisely then God has ordered it that we should be constantly reminded of the fact “*this is not your rest, because it is polluted*” (Micah 2:10). Trials and tribulations are needful if there is to be wrought in us “a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” (Philippians 1:23).

The word “tribulation” is derived from the Latin “tribulum,” which was a flail used by the Romans to separate the wheat from the chaff. How much “chaff” remains even in the one who has been genuinely converted! How much of the “flesh” mingles with and



mars his spiritual exercises! How much which is merely “natural” is mixed with his youthful zeal and energetic activities! How much of carnal wisdom and leaning unto our own understanding there is, till God is pleased to deepen His work of grace in the soul! And one of the principal instruments which He employs in that blessed work is the “tribulum” or flail. By means of sore disappointments, thwarted plans, inward fightings, painful afflictions, does He “take forth the precious from the vile” (Jeremiah 15:19), and remove the dross from the pure gold. It is by weaning us from the things of earth that He fits us for setting our affections on things above. It is by drying up creature-streams of satisfaction that He makes His children thirst for the Fountain of living water.

“Tribulation worketh patience” (Romans 5:3). Patience is a grace which has both a passive and an active side. Passively, it is a meekly bowing to the sovereign pleasure of God, a saying, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it”? (John 18:11). Actively, it is a steady perseverance in the path of duty. This is one of the great ends which God has in view in the afflicting of His children: to effect in them “a meek and quiet spirit.” “Tribulation worketh patience and patience, experience.” It is one thing to obtain a theoretical knowledge of the truth by means of reading, it is quite another to have a real and inward acquaintance with the same. As the tried and tempest-tossed soul bows meekly to the providential dealings of God, he experimentally learns what is “that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). “And experience, hope,” which is a firm expectation of a continuance of sustaining grace and final glory. Since then our sufferings are one of the means which God has appointed for the Christian’s sanctification, preparing us for usefulness here, and for Heaven hereafter, let us glory in them.

But let us lift our thoughts still higher. “Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be

wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3). Ah, it is unto *His* image which the saint is predestined to be conformed (Romans 8:29), first in suffering, and then in glory. Let each troubled and groaning child of God call to remembrance the afflictions through which the Man of sorrows passed! Is it not fitting that the servant should drink of the cup which his master drank? O my brethren, the highest honor God confers upon any of us in this life, is when He permits us to suffer a little for Christ’s sake. O for grace to say with the beloved apostle, “most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye” (1 Peter 4:14).

“No man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1 Thessalonians 3:3). Yet afflictions do not come upon all Saints in the same form, nor to the same degree. God is sovereign in this, as in everything else. He knows what will best promote the spiritual good of His people. All is ordered by Him in infinite wisdom and infinite love. As has been well said, “God had one Son without Sin, but none without sorrow.” Yet the sorrow is not unmixed: God tempers His winds unto the lamb’s. With every temptation or trial He provides a way to escape. In the midst of sorest trouble His all-suffering grace is available. The promise is sure, “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee” (Psalm 55:22), and where faith is enabled to rest in the Lord, His sustaining power is realized in the soul.

Afflictions are not all that the Lord sends His people: He daily loadeth them with His benefits (Psalm 68:19). The smilings of His face greatly outnumber the frowns of His providence. There are far more sunny days than cloudy ones. But our memories are fickle: when we enter the Wilderness, we so quickly forget our exodus from Egypt, and deliverance at the Red Sea. When water gives out (Exodus 17), we fail to call to remembrance the mirac-

ulous supply of manna (Exodus 16). It was thus with the apostles. When they had forgotten to take bread, the Lord Jesus tenderly remonstrated with them, saying, “O ye of little faith . . . Do ye not understand, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many baskets ye took up?” (Matthew 16:5–10). O how much peace and joy we lose in the present through our sinful failure in not calling to remembrance the Lord’s past deliverances and mercies.

“Thou shalt remember *all* the way which the Lord thy God led thee” (Deuteronomy 8:2). Sit down and *review* God’s previous dealings with thee: bring before your hearts His tender patience, His unchanging faithfulness, His powerful interpositions, His gracious gifts. There have been times in the past when your own folly brought you into deep waters of trouble, but God did not cast you off. You fretted and murmured, but God did not abandon you. You were full of fears and unbelief, yet God suffered you not to starve. He neither dealt with you after your sins, nor rewarded you according to your iniquities. Instead, He proved Himself to be *unto you* the “God of *all* grace” (1 Peter 5:10). There were times in the past when every door of hope seemed fast closed, when every man’s hand and heart appeared to be against you, when the Enemy came in like a flood, and it looked very much as though you would be drowned. But help *was* at hand. In the *fourth* watch of the night the Lord Jesus appeared on the waters, and you were delivered. Then *remember* this, and let the realization of past deliverances comfort and stay your heart in the midst of the present emergency.

Many are the appeals made unto us in the Word of God to do this very thing. Varied and numerous are the motives employed by the Holy Spirit in the Scripture of Truth to stir up God’s children unto constancy of heart and the performance of duty when “circumstances” seem to be all against them. Every attribute of God is

made a distinct ground for urging us to run with perseverance the race that is set before us. The promises of God are given to cheer, and His warnings stir up our hearts unto a fuller compliance with His revealed will. Rewards are promised to those who overcome the flesh, the world, and the devil, while eternal woes are threatened unto those failing to do so. Faith is to be stimulated by the record given of God's grace which sustained fellow-pilgrims in bygone days; hope is to be stirred into action by the glorious Goal which the Word holds up to view. And, as we have said, fresh courage for the present is to be drawn by us from calling to mind God's goodness in the past. It is *this* particular motive which the apostle pressed on the Hebrews in the passage which is now before us.

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions” (Hebrews 10:32). In verses 16–21 the apostle had given a brief summary of the inestimable privileges which are the present portion of the regenerated people of God. In verses 22–24 he had exhorted them to make a suitable response to such blessings. In verses 25–31 he had fortified their minds against temptations to apostasy, or to willful and presumptuous sins. He now bids them to recall the earlier days of their profession, and to consider what they had already ventured, suffered and renounced for Christ, and how they had been supernaturally sustained under their trials: the force of this was, disgrace not your former conduct by now casting away your confidence which has great recompense of reward.

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated.” The beginnings of God's work of grace in their souls is here spoken of as being “illuminated.” The Holy Spirit had revealed to them their depravity and impotency, their lost and miserable state by nature. He had brought before them the unchanging demands of God's righteous law, and their utter failure to meet those claims. He had pointed them to the Lord Jesus,

who, as the Sponsor and Surety of His people, had assumed all their liabilities, kept the law in their stead, and died for their sins. For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, had “shined into their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Thus He had granted unto them an experimental acquaintance with the Gospel, so that they had felt in their own consciences and hearts the power of its truth. How unspeakably solemn is it to note that this too had been the experience of the apostates in Hebrews 6:4–6, for the very word here rendered “illuminated” is there translated, “enlightened.”

Right after their illumination by God, they were called upon to feel something of the rage of His enemies. At the beginning of this dispensation those who made profession of Christianity were hotly persecuted, and the believing Hebrews had not escaped. This, the apostle would remind them of: “after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” As soon as God had quickened their hearts and shone upon their understandings so that they embraced His incarnate Son as their Lord and Savior, earth and hell combined against them. By nature we are in the dark, and while in it we meet with no opposition from Satan or the world; but when, by grace we determined to follow the example which Christ has left us, we were soon brought into the fellowship of His sufferings. By such experiences we are reminded that God has called us to the combat, that as good soldiers of Jesus Christ we are to “endure hardness” (2 Timothy 2:3), and need to take unto ourselves the armor which God has provided (Ephesians 6:10–18) – not to speculate about, but to *use* it.

The attitude toward and the conduct of the Hebrew Christians under this “great fight of afflictions” during the days of their “first love,” is here summed up, first, in the one word “endured.” They had not fainted or given way to despondency, nor had they

renounced their profession. They failed in no part of the conflict, but came off conquerors. This they had been enabled unto by the efficacious grace of God. They had been wondrously and blessedly supported under their sufferings. From Acts 8 we learn that when the church at Jerusalem was sorely persecuted, its members so far from abandoning Christianity, were scattered abroad, and “went everywhere preaching the Word” (verse 4). How greatly was the Captain of their salvation honored by this valor of His soldiers. It is a noticeable fact of history that *babes* in Christ have often been the bravest of all in facing suffering and death: perhaps because the great and glorious change involved in the passing from death unto life is *fresh* in their minds than in that of older Christians. Now it was to the recollection of these things unto which the apostle here called the flagging and tempted Hebrews.

“But call to remembrance.” “It is not the bare remembrance He intends, for it is impossible men should absolutely forget such a season. Men are apt enough to remember the times of their sufferings, especially such as are here mentioned, accompanied with all sorts of injurious treatments from men. But the apostle would have them so call to mind, as to consider withal, what support they had under their sufferings, what satisfaction in them, what deliverance from them, that they might not despond upon the approach of the like trials and evils on the same account. If we remember our sufferings only as unto what is evil and afflictive in them, what we lose, what we endure, and undergo; such a remembrance will weaken and dispirit us, as unto our future trials. Hereon many cast about to deliver themselves for the future, by undue means and sinful compliances, in a desertion of their profession; the thing the apostle was jealous of concerning these Hebrews. But if, withal, we call to mind what was the Cause for which we suffered; the honor that is in such sufferings, out-balancing all the contempt and reproaches of the world; the presence of God enjoyed in them; and

the reward proposed unto us; the calling these things to mind, will greatly strengthen us against future trials; provided we retain the same love unto, and valuation of the things for which we suffered, as we had in those former days” (John Owen).

“The remembrance then of past warfare, if it had been carried on faithfully and diligently under the banner of Christ, is at length useful to us, not as a pretext for sloth, as though we had already served our time, but to render us more active in finishing the remaining part of our course. For Christ has not enlisted us on this condition, that we should after a few years ask for a discharge, like soldiers who have served their time, but that we should pursue our warfare even unto the end” (John Calvin). It therefore becomes a solemn and searching question for each of us to face: to what extent am I *now* being antagonized by the world? Something must be seriously wrong with me if I have the goodwill of everybody. Gods Word emphatically declares, “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

“Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock, both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used” (Hebrews 10:33). In this verse the apostle mentions one or two features of what their “great fight of affliction” had consisted. Some of them were made a public spectacle to their neighbors, by the malicious accusations brought against them, and by the derision and punishment laid upon them; while others were the “partners” of those who were also cruelly treated. The principal reference here is to the loss which they had sustained in their characters and reputations, and unto many people (especially those of a sensitive temperament) this is a sore trial; almost anything is easier to bear than obloquy and disgrace. But sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master: they slandered Him, and said He had a demon.

Reproach and slander are exceedingly trying, and if we are not

upon our guard, if we fail to gird up the loins of our minds (1 Peter 1:13), we are likely to be so cast down by them as to be incapacitated for duty. Despondency and despair are never excusable in the Christian, and must be steadily resisted. We need to make up our minds that if, by grace, we are determined to follow the example which Christ has left us we shall have many enemies – especially in the religious world – who will scruple at no misrepresentations of our motives and actions. We must learn to undervalue our reputations, and be content to be regarded as “the off-scouring of all things”; we must seek grace to emulate Him who “set His face like a flint” (Isaiah 50:7), who “endured the cross, *despising* the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). Unless we cultivate His spirit we shall be at a great disadvantage when sufferings come upon us.

Not only had the Hebrew Christians suffered personally, but they had fellowship also in the sufferings of others. This is a Christian duty, and, we may add, a privilege. As members of the same Family, as fellow-pilgrims toward the better Country, as called to serve together under the same Banner, it is only meet that we should bear “one another’s burdens,” and “weep with them that weep.” Of Moses it is recorded that “He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:24, 25). To be a companion of those who suffer for Christ, is an evidence of our love for His brethren, of courage in suffering, and of readiness to succour those who are persecuted because of the gospel. We do well to frequently ponder Matthew 25:42–45.

“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds” (Hebrews 10:34). The apostle here makes grateful acknowledgment of the sympathy which the Hebrews had shown him in an hour of need. The historical reference may be to the time when he lay bound in chains at Jerusalem (Acts 21:33), when their love for him was shown by



their prayers, and perhaps letters and gifts. It is the bounden duty for Christians to express in a practical way their compassion for any of Christ's suffering servants, doing everything in their power to succour, support and relieve them. Equally so is it the duty of God's ministers to thankfully own the kindness shown them: Christ himself will yet publicly bear witness unto the services of love which have been shown unto His brethren (Matthew 25:34-40).

“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds.” These words supply one of the many proofs that the apostle Paul was the author of this Epistle, for of the other persons whom some have fancied wrote it, such as Luke, Barnabas, Clement etc., there is no hint anywhere in Scripture, nor we believe in ecclesiastical history, of any of them suffering bonds in Judea. But the lying of Paul in bonds and imprisonments, was renowned above all others. Hence he styled himself in particular “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Philemon 1:1), and gloried in this particular honor as “an ambassador in bonds” (Ephesians 6:20), and as such, desired the Saints at Colosse to remember him at the throne of grace (Colossians 4:3). Thus, his “bonds” being above all others so familiar, such a subject of the churches’ prayers, this reference here in Hebrews 10:34 at once identifies the writer.

“And took joyfully the spoiling of your goods” (verse 34). This supplies further information upon the deportment of the Hebrews under their trials: they had not only patiently “endured” the great fight of affliction, but were happy in being counted worthy to suffer for Christ – a blessed triumph that was the mighty grace of God over the weakness of the flesh. God is able to strengthen in the inner man “with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering, with joyfulness” (Colossians 1:11). Ordinarily, few things are more calculated to distress the minds of men than their being cruelly plundered of those things for which they have labored hard, and which they and their families still need:

wailing and lamentations commonly accompany them. Blessed is it when the heart is brought to hold lightly all earthly comforts and conveniences, for it is easier then to part with them should we be called upon to do so.

“Knowing in yourselves that we have in heaven a better and enduring substance” (verse 34). This clause supplies the key to the previous one, showing the ground of their joy. Faith looked away from things seen to those unseen, reckoning that “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18); “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). Where the heart’s affections are truly set upon things above (Colossians 3:2), few tears will be shed over the loss of any earthly baubles. True, it is *natural* to mourn when rudely deprived of material possessions, but it is *supernatural* to rise above such grieving.

The true riches of the Christian are not accessible to human or satanic plunderers. Men may strip us of all our worldly possessions, but they cannot take from us the love of God, the salvation of Christ, the comforts of the Holy Spirit, the hope of eternal glory. Said one who was waylaid by a bandit, who demanded his money or his life: “Money, I have none on me; my *life* is hid with Christ in God.” The poor worldling may give way to despair when business is bad, bonds deteriorate, and banks smash, but no child of God ought ever to do so: he has been begotten unto an inheritance which is “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven” (1 Peter 1:4). Yet it is only as faith is in exercise, as the heart is really occupied with our heavenly portion, that we enjoy them, and regard all else as but “vanity and vexation of spirit.”

“What was it that enabled them thus to bear up under their sufferings? They knew in themselves that they had in heaven a better

and a more enduring substance. Observe, First, the happiness of the saints in heaven is ‘substance,’ something of real weight and worth – all things here are but shadows. Secondly, it is a better substance than anything they can have or lose here. Thirdly, it is an enduring substance; it will outlive time, and run parallel with eternity. They can never spend it; their enemies can never take it from them as they did their earthly goods. Fourthly, this will make a rich amends for all they can lose and suffer here. In heaven they shall have a better life, a better estate, better liberty, better society, better hearts, better work, everything better” (Matthew Henry).

“Knowing in yourselves that we have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” Let us now weigh carefully the first three words of this clause: these Hebrew Saints had a firm conviction of heart concerning their heavenly portion. It does not say, “knowing from God’s promises,” but “knowing *in yourselves*.” This presents a side of the Truth, an aspect of Christian assurance, which is rarely dwelt upon these days; instead, it is widely ridiculed and denied, many insisting that the only basis of assurance is the bare letter of Scripture. It is quite true that the foundation of our confidence is the written Word, but that is *not* the *only* ground, any more than a marriage certificate is the sole proof which a woman has that the man who loves, cherishes, and lives with her, is her husband. No, one has only to read impartially through the first Epistle of John in order to discover that he who is walking with God and enjoying the light of His countenance, has many evidences that he is a new creature in Christ Jesus.

“Knowing in yourselves.” The one who is following on to know the Lord (Hosea 6:3), not only has the testimony of God’s Word without, but he has also the witness of the Spirit within him, that he is a child and heir of God (Romans 8:16, 17). In his regeneration and begun experimental sanctification, he has received “the first-fruits of the spirit (Romans 8:23). In consequence, he now has new

desires, new conflicts, new joys, new sorrows. Faith purifies his heart (Acts 15:9). He has received the Spirit of adoption, whereby he cries “Abba Father.” From what he finds in his own heart, he *knows* that he is heaven-born and heaven-bound. Let those who are strangers to a supernatural work of grace in their own hearts mock and scoff all they please, let them sneer at introspection, call it mysticism, or anything else they wish, but one who is scripturally assured of the Spirit’s work within him, refuses to be laughed-out of his surest proof that *he* is a child of God.

Granted that many have been and are deluded: acknowledging that the unregenerate heart is “deceitful above all things”; admitting that the Devil has lulled thousands into hell by means of happy feelings within them; yet none of these things alter or affect to the slightest degree the fact that it is both the duty and privilege of every genuine Christian to know *in himself* that he has passed from death unto life. Provided he be denying self, taking up his cross, and following Christ in the path of obedience, he will have cause for rejoicing in the testimony of a good conscience (2 Corinthians 1:12). But if he yields to lust of the flesh, fellowships with an ungodly world, and gets into a backslidden state, then the joy of his salvation will be lost. Nothing then is of greater practical importance than that the Christian should keep clean and unstained in his inward evidences that he is journeying towards heaven.

“Such, then, are the things which the apostle wishes the Hebrew Christians to ‘call to remembrance.’ It is easy to see how the calling of these things to remembrance was calculated to serve His purpose – to guard them from apostasy and establish them in the faith and profession of the Gospel. It is as if he had said, ‘Why shrink from suffering for Christianity now? Were you not exposed to suffering from the beginning? When you first became Christians, did you not willingly undergo sufferings on account of it? And is not Christianity as worthy of being suffered for as ever? Is not

Jesus the same yesterday, and today, and forever? Did not the faith and hope of Christianity formerly support you under your sufferings, and make you feel that they were but the light afflictions of a moment? And are they not as able to support you now as then? Has the substance in heaven become less real, or less enduring? And have you not as good evidence now as you had then that to the persevering Christian such treasure is laid up? Are you willing to lose all the benefit of the sacrifices you have made, and the sufferings you have sustained? And will they all go for nothing if you endure not unto the end! These are considerations all naturally suggested by the words of the apostle, and all well calculated to induce them 'to hold fast the profession of their faith without wavering.'" (John Brown).



## A CALL TO STEADFASTNESS

*Hebrews 12:3–4*

**A**T FIRST SIGHT it is not easy to trace the thread which unites the passage that was last before us and the verses which are now to engage our attention: there appears to be no direct connection between the opening verses of Hebrews 12 and those which follow. But a closer examination of them shows they are intimately related: in verses 3, 4 the apostle completes the exhortation with which the chapter opens. In verse 1 the apostle borrowed a figure from the Grecian Games, namely, the marathon race, and now in verse 4 he refers to another part of those games – the contest between the gladiators in the arena. Second, he had specified the principal grace required for the Christian race, namely, “Patience” or perseverance; so now in verse 3 he is urging them against faintness of mind or impatience. Third, he had enforced his exhortation in bidding the saints to “look unto Jesus” their great Exemplar; so here he calls on them to “consider Him” and emulate His steadfastness.

Yet, the verses which are now before us are not a mere repetition of those immediately preceding: rather do they present another, though closely related aspect of the Christian life or “race.” In verse 1 the racers are bidden to “lay aside every weight,” and in verse

3 it is the “contradiction of sinners” which has to be endured: the former, are hindrances which precede more from *within*; the latter, are obstacles which are encountered from *without*. In the former case, it is the evil solicitations of the flesh which would have to be resisted; in the other, it is the persecutions of the world which have to be endured. In verse 1, it is “the sin which doth so easily beset” or “encircle us” – inward depravity – which must be “laid aside”; in verse 4 it is martyrdom which must be prepared for, lest we yield to the “sin” of apostasy.

Now the secret of success, the way to victory, is the same in either case. To enable us to “lay aside” all that hinders from within, there has to be a trustful “looking unto Jesus,” and to enable us to “endure” the oppositions encountered from without and to “strive” against inconstancy and wavering in our profession, we must thoughtfully “consider Him” who was hounded and persecuted as none other ever was. As the incentive to self-denial we are to be occupied with our great Leader and remember how much *He* “laid aside” for us – He who was rich for our sakes became poor; He who was “in the form of God” divested Himself of His robes of glory and took upon Him “the form of a servant.” *We* are not called on to do something which He did not. *He* vacated the throne and took up His cross! Likewise, the chief source of comfort and encouragement when we are called upon to suffer for His sake, is to call to mind the infinitely greater sufferings which He endured for our sakes.

The more we endeavor to emulate the example which the Lord Jesus has left us, the more shall we be opposed from without; the more closely we follow Him, the greater will be the enmity of our fellow-men against us. Our lives will condemn theirs, our ways will be a perpetual rebuke to them, and they will do all they can to discourage and hinder, provoke and oppose. And the tendency of such persecution is to dishearten us, to tempt us to compromise,

to ask “What is the use?” Because of this, the blessed Spirit bids us, “Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” Let the experiences through which *Christ* passed be the subject of daily contemplation. The record of His unparalleled temptations and trials, His endurance, and His victory, is to be the grand source of our instruction, comfort and encouragement. If we have grown “faint and weary” in our minds, it is because we have failed to properly and profitably “consider Him.”

Supremely important is the knowledge of the Scriptures concerning the Lord Jesus: there can be no experimental holiness, no growth in grace apart from the same. Vital godliness consists in a practical conformity to the image of God’s Son: it is to follow the example which He has left us, to take His yoke upon us and learn of Him. For this, there must needs be an intimate knowledge of His ways, a prayerful and believing study of the record of His life, a daily reading of and meditating thereon. That is why the four Gospels are placed at the *beginning* of the New Testament – they are of first importance. What we have in the Epistles is principally an interpretation and application of the four Gospels to the details of our walk. O that we may say with ever-deepening purpose of heart, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Philippians 3:8). O that we may “follow on to *know* the Lord” (Hosea 6:3)

“For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:3, 4). The whole of this is a dehortation or caution against an evil, which if yielded to will prevent our discharge of the duty inculcated in verses 1, 2. That which is dehorted against is “be not wearied” – give not up the race, abandon not your Christian profession. The way whereby we may fall into that evil is by becoming “faint” in our



minds. The means to prevent this is the diligent contemplation of our great Exemplar.

In Hebrews 12:1–2, the apostle had exhorted unto a patient or persevering pressing forward in the path of faith and obedience. In verses 3–11 he presents a number of considerations or motives to hearten us in our course, seeking particularly to counteract the enervating influence which difficulties are apt to exert upon the minds of God’s tried people. The tendency of strong and lasting opposition and persecution is to discourage, which if yielded unto leads to despair. To strengthen the hearts of those tried Hebrews, the apostle bade them consider the case of Christ Himself: *He* encountered far worse sufferings than we do, yet He patiently “endured” them (verse 3). Then they were reminded that their case was by no means desperate and extreme – they had not yet been called to suffer a death of martyrdom. Finally, their very difficulties were the loving chastisement of their Father, designed for their profit (verses 5–11). By what a variety of means does the blessed Spirit strengthen, stablish, and comfort tried believers!

Are you, dear reader, disheartened by the hard usage you are receiving from men, yea, from the religious world; are you fearful as you anticipate the persecutions which may yet attend your Christian profession; or, are you too ready to show resentment against those who oppose you? Then “*consider Him* that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.” The connecting “For” has the force of “moreover” in addition to “looking unto Jesus” as your Leader and Perfecter, consider Him in His steadfastness under relentless persecution. Faith has many actings or forms of exercise: it is to reflect, contemplate, call to mind – God’s past ways with us, His dealings with His people of old, and particularly the recorded history of His beloved and incarnate Son. We are greatly the losers if we fail to cultivate the habit of devout consideration and holy meditation. The Greek word for “consider” is not the

same as the one used in Hebrews 3:1 and Hebrews 10:24; in fact it is a term which occurs, in this form, nowhere else in the New Testament.

The Greek word for “consider” in our text is derived from the one rendered “proportion” in Romans 12:6. It is a mathematical term, signifying *to compute* by comparing things together in their due proportions. It means: form a just and accurate estimate. “For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself:” draw an analogy between *His* sufferings and *yours*, and what proportion is there between them! Weigh well *who* He was, the place He took, the infinite perfection of His character and deeds; and then the base ingratitude, the gross injustice, the cruel persecution He met with. Calculate and estimate the constancy of the opposition He encountered, the type of men who maligned Him, the variety and intensity of His sore trials, and the spirit of meekness and patience with which He bore them. And what are *our* trifling trials when compared with *His* agonies, or even to our deserts! O my soul blush with shame because of thy murmurings.

“Consider Him” in the ineffable excellency of His person. He was none other than the Lord of glory, the Beloved of the Father, the second person in the sacred Trinity, the Creator of heaven and earth. Now, since *He* suffered here on earth, why should you, having enlisted under His banner, think it strange that you should be called on to endure a little hardness in His service! Consider His *relationship* to you: He is your Redeemer and Proprietor: is it not sufficient for the disciple to be as his Master, the servant as his Lord? If the Head was spared not trial and shame, shall the members of His body complain if they be called on to have some fellowship with Him in this? When you are tempted to throw down your colors and capitulate to the Enemy or even to murmur at your hard lot, “Consider Him” who when here “had not where to lay His head.”

The particular sufferings of Christ which are here singled out for our consideration are, the “contradiction of sinners” which He encountered. He was opposed constantly, by word and action; He was opposed by His own people according to the flesh; He was opposed by the very ones to whom He ministered in infinite grace and loving-kindness. That opposition began at His birth, when there was no room in the inn – *He* was not wanted. It was seen again in His infancy, when Herod sought to slay Him, and His parents were forced to flee with Him into Egypt. Little else is told us in the New Testament, about His early years, but there is a Messianic prophecy in Psalm 88:15 where we hear Him pathetically saying, “I am afflicted and ready to die from My youth up!” As soon as His public ministry commenced, and during the whole of its three years’ course, He endured one unbroken, relentless, “contradiction of sinners against Himself.”

The Lord Jesus was derided as the Prophet, mocked as the King, and treated with the utmost contempt as the Priest and Savior. He was accused of deceiving (John 7:12) and perverting the people (Luke 23:14). His teaching was opposed, and His person was insulted. Because He conversed with and befriended publicans and sinners, He was “murmured” at (Luke 15:2). Because He performed works of mercy on the Sabbath day, He was charged with breaking the law (Mark 3:2). The gracious miracles which He wrought upon the sick and demon-possessed, were attributed to His being in league with the Devil (Matthew 12:24). He was regarded as a low-born fanatic. He was branded as a “glutton and winebibber.” He was accused of speaking against Caesar (John 19:12), whereas He had expressly bidden men to render unto Caesar what rightly belonged to him (Matthew 22:21). Though He was the Holy One of God, there was scarcely anything about Him that was not opposed.

“For consider Him who endured *such* contradiction.” Here is emphasized the greatness of Christ’s sufferings: “*such* contradic-

tion” – so bitter, so severe, so malicious, so protracted; everything which the evil wits of men and Satan could invent. That word “such” is also added to awaken our wonderment and worship. Though the incarnate Son of God, He was spat upon, contemptuously arrayed in a purple robe and His enemies bowed the knee before Him in mockery. They buffeted Him and smote Him on the face. They tore His back with scourgings, as was foretold by the Psalmist (Psalm 129:3). They condemned Him to a criminal’s death, and nailed Him to the Cross, and that, between two thieves, to add to His shame. And this, at the hands of men who, though they made a great show of sanctity, were “sinners.”

Christ *felt keenly* that “contradiction,” for He was the Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. At the end, He exclaimed, “reproach hath broken My heart” (Psalm 69:20). Nevertheless, He turned not aside from the path of duty, still less did He abandon His mission. He fled not from His enemies, and fainted not under their merciless persecution: instead, He “*endured*” it. As we pointed out in our exposition of the previous verse, that word is used of Christ in its highest and noblest sense. He bore patiently every ignominy that was heaped upon Him. He never retaliated or reviled His traducers. He remained steadfast unto the end, and finished the work which had been given Him to do. When the supreme crisis arrived, He faltered not, but “set His face as a flint to go up to Jerusalem” (Isaiah 50:7, Luke 9:51).

Do you, tried reader, feel that your cup of opposition is a little fuller than that of some of your fellow Christians? Then look away to the cup of which Christ drank! Here is the Divine antidote against weariness: Christ meekly and triumphantly “*endured*” far, far worse than anything you are called on to suffer for His sake; yet He fainted not. When you are weary in your mind because of trials and injuries from the enemies of God, “consider” Christ, and this will quieten and suppress thy corrupt propensities to murmuring

and impatience. Set *Him* before thy heart as the grand example and encouragement – example in patience, encouragement in the blessed issue: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him” (2 Timothy 2:12). Faith’s consideration of Him will work a conformity unto Him in our souls which will preserve from fainting.

“Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” There is no connecting “and” in the Greek: two distinct thoughts are presented: “lest ye be wearied,” that is, so discouraged as to quit; “faint in your mind,” states the cause thereof. The word for “weary” here is a strong one: it signifies exhausted, being so despondent as to break one’s resolution. In its ultimate meaning, it refers to such a state of despondency through the difficulties, trials, opposition and persecution encountered as to “look back” (Luke 9:62), and either partially or wholly abandon one’s profession of the Gospel. In other words, it is another warning against apostasy. What we are cautioned against here is the opposite of that which the Lord commended in the Ephesian Church, “And for My Names’s sake hast labored, and hast not fainted” (Revelation 2:3) – here there *is* a perseverance in the Christian profession despite all opposition.

At different periods of history God has permitted fierce opposition to break out against His people, to test the reality and strength of their attachment to Christ. This was the case with those to whom our Epistle was first addressed: they were being exposed to great trials and sufferings, temptations and privations; hence the timeliness of this exhortation, and its accompanying warning. Reproaches, losses, imprisonments, scourgings, being threatened with death, have a strong tendency to produce dejection and despair; they present a powerful temptation to give up the fight. And naught but the vigorous activity of faith will fortify the mind under religious persecution. Only as the heart is encouragingly occupied with *Christ’s endurance* of the “contradiction of sinners against Himself,” will our resolution be strong to endure until the

end: “in the world ye shall have tribulations: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

“Faint in your minds.” This it is which, if not resisted and corrected, leads to the “weariness” of utter exhaustion of the previous clause. This faintness of mind is the reverse of vigor and cheerfulness. If, under the strong opposition and fierce persecution, we are to “endure unto the end,” then we must watch diligently against the allowance of such faintness of mind. There is a spiritual vigor required in order to perseverance in the Christian profession during times of persecution. Hence it is that we are exhorted, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, *arm yourselves* likewise with the same mind” (1 Peter 4:1); “for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in the heavenlies. *Wherefore take unto you* the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand” (Ephesians 6:12, 13); “watch ye, stand fast in the faith, *quit you like men*, be strong” (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Any degree of faintness of mind in the Christian results from and consists in a remitting of the cheerful actions of faith in the various duties which God has called us to discharge. Nothing but the regular exercise of *faith* keeps the soul calm and restful, patient and prayerful. If faith ceases to be operative, and our mind be left to cope with difficulties and trials in our own natural strength, then we shall soon grow wary of the *persecuted* Christian profession. Herein lies the beginning of all spiritual declension – a lack of the due exercise of faith, and that in turn, is the result of the heart growing cold toward Christ! If faith be in healthy exercise, we shall say, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18), realizing that “our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal

weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17); ah, but *that* consciousness is only “*while we look not* at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (verse 18).

“Consider *Him*.” there is the remedy against faintness of mind; there is the preservative from such “weariness” of dejection of spirits that we are ready to throw down our weapons and throw up our hands in utter despair. It is the diligent consideration of the person of Christ, the *Object* of faith, the *Food* of faith, that *Supporter* of faith. It is by drawing an analogy between His infinitely sorer sufferings and our present hardships. It is by making application unto ourselves of what is to be found in Him suitable to our own case. Are we called on to suffer a little for Him, then let our eye be turned on Him who went before us in the same path of trial. Make a comparison between what *He* “endured” and what *you* are called to struggle with, and surely you will be ashamed to complain! “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Admire and imitate His meekness – weeping over His enemies, and praying for His murderers!

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:4). The persons here immediately addressed – the “ye” – were the Hebrews themselves. Because of their profession of Christianity, because of their loyalty to Christ, they had suffered severely in various ways. Plain reference to something of what they had already been called on to endure is made in 10:32–34, “but call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.” Thus, the Hebrew Saints had been sorely oppressed by their unbelieving brethren among the Jews; it is that which gave such point to the exhortation and warning in the previous verse.

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” Here is the second consideration which the apostle pressed upon his afflicted brethren: not only to ponder the far greater opposition which their Savior encountered, but also to bear in mind that their own sufferings were not so severe as they might have been, or as possibly they would yet be. It is an argument made by reasoning from the greater to the less, and from comparing their present state with that which might await them: what could be expected to sustain their hearts and deliver from apostasy when under the supreme test of death by violence, if they fainted beneath lesser afflictions? We, too, should honestly face the same alternative: if unkind words and sneers make us waiver now, how would we acquit ourselves if called on to face a martyr’s death!

The present state of the oppressed Hebrews is here expressed negatively: “ye have not yet resisted unto blood.” True, they had already met with various forms of suffering, but not yet had they been called upon to lay down their lives. As Hebrews 10:32–34 clearly intimates, they had well acquitted themselves during the first stages of their trials, but their warfare was not yet ended. They had need to bear in mind that word of Christ, “Men ought always to pray, *and not to faint*” (Luke 18:1); and that exhortation of the Holy Spirit, “let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, *if we faint not*” (Galatians 6:9).

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood.” The apostle here hinted to the Hebrews what might yet have to be endured by them, namely a bloody and violent death – by stoning, or the sword, or fire. *That* is the utmost which fiendish persecutors can afflict. Men may kill the body, but when they have done that, they can do no more. God has set bounds to their rage: none will hound or harm His people in the next world! Those who engage in the Christian profession, who serve under the banner of Christ, have no guarantee that they may not be called unto the utmost suffering of blood on account



of their allegiance to him; for *that* is what His adversaries have always desired. Hence, Christ bids us to “sit down and count the cost” (Luke 14:28), of being His disciples. God has decreed that many, in different ages should be martyred for His own praise, the glory of Christ and the honor of the Gospel.

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” “Sin” is here personified, regarded as a combatant which has to be overcome. The various persecutions, hardships, afflictions, difficulties of the way, in consequence of our attachment to Christ, become so many occasions and means which sin seeks to employ in order to hinder and oppose us. The Christian is called to a contest with sin. The apostle continues his allusion to the Grecian Games, changing from the racer to the combatant. The great contest is in the believer’s heart between grace and sin, the flesh and the spirit (Galatians 5:17). Sin seeks to quench faith and kill obedience: therefore sin is to be “striven against” for our very souls are at stake. There is no place for sloth in this deadly contest; no furloughs are granted!

“Striving against sin.” That which the Hebrews were striving against was apostasy, going to the full-length of sin – abandoning their Christian profession. Persecution was the means which indwelling depravity sought to use, to employ in slaying faith and fidelity to Christ. That terrible wickedness was to be steadfastly resisted, by fighting against weariness in the conflict. O to say with the apostle, “I am ready not to be bound only, but also *to die* at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13): but in order to reach *that* state of soul, there has to be a close walking with Him day by day, and a patient bearing of the minor trials. “If thou hast run with the footmen and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” (Jeremiah 12:5).



## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*Hebrews 12:5*

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### SECTION ONE

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**T**HE GRAND TRUTH of divine chastisement is inexpressibly blessed, and one which we can neglect only to our great loss. It is of deep importance, for when Scripturally apprehended it preserves from some serious errors by which Satan has succeeded (as “an angel of light”) in deceiving and destroying not a few. For example, it sounds the death-knell to that widespread delusion of “sinless perfectionism.” The passage which is to be before us unmistakably exposes the wild fanaticism of those who imagine that, as the result of some “second work of grace,” the carnal nature has been eradicated from their beings, so that, while perhaps not so wise, they are as pure as the angels which never sinned, and lead lives which are blameless in the sight of the thrice holy God. Poor blinded souls: such have not even experienced a *first* “work of Divine grace” in their souls: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

“My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth

He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Hebrews 12:5, 6). How plain and emphatic is that! God *does* find something to “rebuke” in us, and uses the rod upon *every one* of His children. Chastisement for sin is a family mark, a sign of sonship, a proof of God’s love, a token of His Fatherly kindness and care; it is an inestimable mercy, a choice new-covenant blessing. Woe to the man whom God chastens not, whom He suffers to go recklessly on in the boastful and presumptuous security which so many now mistake for faith. There is a reckoning to come of which he little dreams. Were he a *son*, he would be chastened for his sin; he would be brought to repentance and godly sorrow, he would with grief of heart confess his backslidings, and then be blest with pardon and peace.

The truth of Divine chastisement corrects another serious error, which has become quite common in certain quarters, namely, that God views His people so completely in Christ that He sees no sin in them. It is true, blessedly true, that of His elect it is stated, “He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel” (Numbers 23:21) and that Christ declares of His spouse “thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee” (Song of Solomon 4:7). The testimony of Scripture is most express that in regard to the justification or acceptance of the *persons* of the elect, they are “complete in Him” – Christ (Colossians 2:10); “accepted in the Beloved” (Ephesians 1:6) – washed in Christ’s blood, clothed with His righteousness. In *that* sense, God sees no sin in them; none to punish. But we must not use that precious truth to set aside another, revealed with equal clearness, and thus fall into serious error.

God *does* see sin in His children and chastises them for it. Even though the non – imputation of sin to the believer (Romans 4:8) and the chastisement of sin in believers (1 Corinthians 11:30–32) were irreconcilable to the human reason, we are bound to receive *both* on the authority of Holy Writ. Let us beware lest we fall under

the solemn charge of Malachi 2:9, “Ye have not kept My ways, but have been *partial* in the law.” What could be plainer than this, “I will make Him my Firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and My covenants shall stand fast with Him. His seed also will I make to endure forever and His throne as the days of heaven. If His children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments; if they break My statutes, and keep not My commandment; then I will visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving kindness will I not utterly take from Him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail” (Psalm 89:27–33). Five things are clearly revealed there. First, Christ Himself is addressed under the name of “David.” Second, His children *break* God’s statutes. Third, in *them* there is “iniquity” and “transgression.” Fourth, God *will* “visit” their transgression “with the rod!” Fifth, yet will He not cast them off.

What could express more clearly the fact that God *does* see sin in believers, and that He *does* chastise them for it? For, be it noted, the whole of the above passage speaks of believers. It is the language, not of the Law, but of the Gospel. Blessed promises are there made to believers in Christ: the unchanging loving-kindness of God, His covenant-faithfulness toward them, His spiritual blessing of them. But “stripes” and the “rod” are there promised too! Then let us not dare to separate what God has joined together. How do we know anything concerning the acceptance of the elect in Christ? The answer must be, Only on the testimony of Holy Writ. Very well; from *the same* unerring testimony we also know that God chastises His people for their sins. It is at our imminent peril that we reject either of these complementary truths.

The same fact is plainly presented again in Hebrews 12:7–10, “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom that Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all our partakers, then are ye bastards, and

not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily, for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.” The apostle there draws an analogy from the natural relationship of father and child. Why do earthly parents chastise their children? Is it not for their *faults*? Can we justify a parent for chastening a child where there was no fault, nothing in him which called for the rod? In that case, it would be positive tyranny, actual cruelty. If the same be not true *spiritually*, then the comparison must fall to the ground. Hebrews 12 proves conclusively that, if God does not chastise me then I am an unbeliever, and I sign my own condemnation as a bastard.

Yet it is very necessary for us to point out, at this stage, that *all* the sufferings of believers in this world are *not* Divine rebukes for personal transgressions. Here too we need to be on our guard against lopsidedness. After we have apprehended the fact that God *does* take notice of the iniquities of His people and use the rod upon them, it is so easy to jump to the conclusion that when we see an afflicted Christian, God must be visiting His displeasure upon him. That is a sad and serious error. Some of the very choicest of God’s saints have been called on to endure the most painful and protracted sufferings; some of the most faithful and eminent servants of Christ have encountered the most relentless and extreme persecution. Not only is this a fact of observation, but it is plainly revealed in Holy Writ.

As we turn to God’s Word for light on the subject of suffering among the saints, we find it affirmed, “many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all” (Psalm 34:19). Those “afflictions” are sent by God upon different ones for various reasons. Sometimes for the *prevention* of sin: the

experience of the beloved apostle was a case in point, “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Sometimes sore trials are sent for the testing and strengthening of their *graces*: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience” (James 1:2, 3). Sometimes God’s servants and people are called on to endure fierce persecution for a confirmatory testimony to the Truth “and they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

Yet here again we need to be much on our guard, for the flesh is ever ready to *pervert* even the holy things of God, and make an evil use of that which is good. When God is chastening a Christian for his sins, it is so easy for him to suppose such is *not* the case, and falsely comfort himself with the thought that God is only developing his *graces*, or permitting him to have closer fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. Where we are visited with afflictions *personally*, it is always the safest policy to assume that God has a controversy with us; humble ourselves beneath His mighty hand, and say with Job, “show me *wherefore* Thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2); and when He *has* convicted me of my fault, to penitently confess and forsake it. But where others are concerned, it is not for us to judge – though sometimes God reveals the cause to His *servants* (Amos 3:7).

In the passage which is to be before us, the apostle presents a third consideration why heed should be given unto the exhortation at the beginning of Hebrews 12, which calls to patient perseverance in the path of faith and obedience, notwithstanding all the obstacles, difficulties, and dangers which may be encountered therein. He now draws a motive from the nature of those sufferings

considered in the light of *God's end in them*: all the trials and persecutions which He may call on His people to endure are *necessary*, not only as testimonies to the truth, to the reality of His grace in them, but also as chastisements which are required by us, wherein God has a blessed design toward us. This argument is enforced by several considerations to the end of verse 13. How we should admire and adore the consummate wisdom of God which has so marvelously ordered all, that the very things which manifest the *hatred* of men against us, are evidences of *His love* toward us! How the realization of this should strengthen patience!

O how many of God's dear children have found, in every age, that the afflictions which have come upon them from a hostile world, were soul-purging medicines from the Lord. By them they have been bestirred, revived, and mortified to things down here; and made partakers of God's holiness, to their own unspeakable advantage and comfort. Truly wondrous are the ways of our great God. Hereby doth He defeat the councils and expectations of the wicked, having a design to accomplish by their agency something which they know not of. These very reproaches, imprisonments, stripes, with the loss of goods and danger of their lives, with which the world oppose them for their ruin; *God* makes use of for their refining, consolation and joy. Truly He "maketh the wrath of man to praise Him" (Psalm 76:10). O that our hearts and minds may be duly impressed with the wisdom, power and grace of Him who bringeth a clean thing out of an unclean.

"In all these things is the wisdom and goodness of God, in contriving and effecting these things, to the glory of His grace, and the salvation of His Church, to be admired" (John Owen). But herein we may see, once more, the imperative need for *faith* – a God-given, God-sustained, spiritual, supernatural FAITH. Carnal reason can see no more in our persecutions than the malice and rage of evil men. Our senses perceive nothing beyond material

losses and painful physical discomforts. But faith discovers *the Father's* hand directing all things: faith is assured that all proceeds from His boundless *love*: faith realizes that He has in view *the good of our souls*. The more this is apprehended by the exercise of faith, not only the better for our peace of mind, but the readier shall we be to diligently apply ourselves in seeking to learn God's lessons for us in every chastisement He lays upon us.

The opening "And" of verse 5 shows the apostle is continuing to present motives to stir unto a perseverance in the faith, notwithstanding sufferings for the same. The first motive was taken from the example of the Old Testament worthies (verse 1). The second, from the illustrious pattern of Jesus (verses 2–4). This is the third: the Author of these sufferings – our Father – and His loving design in them. There is also a more immediate connection with verse:4 pointed by the "And:" it presents a tacit rebuke for being ready to faint under the lesser trials, wherewith they were exercised. Here He gives a reason how and why it was they were thus making that reason the means of introducing a new argument. The reason why they were ready to faint was their inattention to the direction and encouragement which God has supplied for them – our failure to appropriate God's gracious provisions for us is the rise of all our spiritual miscarriages.

The Hebrew Christians to whom this epistle was first addressed were passing through a great fight of afflictions, and miserably were they acquitting themselves. They were the little remnant out of the Jewish nation who had believed on their Messiah during the days of His public ministry, plus those Jews who had been converted under the preaching of the apostles. It is highly probable that they had expected the Messianic kingdom would at once be set up on earth, and that they would be allotted the chief places of honor in it. But the millennium had not begun, and their own lot became increasingly bitter. They were not only hated by the Gentiles, but



ostracized by their unbelieving brethren, and it became a hard matter for them to make even a bare living. Providence held a frowning face. Many who had made a profession of Christianity had gone back to Judaism and were prospering temporally. As the afflictions of the believing Jews increased they too were solely tempted to turn their back upon the new Faith. Had they been wrong in embracing Christianity? Was high heaven displeased because they had identified themselves with Jesus of Nazareth? Did not their sufferings go to show that God no longer regarded them with favor?

Now it is most blessed and instructive to see how the apostle met the unbelieving reasoning of their hearts. He appealed to *their own scriptures*, reminding them of an exhortation found in Proverbs 3:11, 12: “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastenings of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him” (Hebrews 12:5). As we pointed out so often in our exposition of the earlier chapters of this Epistle, at every critical point in his argument the apostle’s appeal was to the written Word of God – an example which is binding on every servant of Christ to follow. That Word is the final court of appeal for every controversial matter, and the more its authority is respected, the more is its Author honored. Not only so, but the more God’s children are brought to turn to its instruction, the more will they be built up and established in the true faith. Moreover, “whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for *our* learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4): it is to them alone we must turn for solid comfort. Great will be our loss if we fail to do so.

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh *unto you*.” Note well the words we have placed in italics. The exhortation to which the apostle referred was uttered over a thousand years pre-

viously, under the Mosaic dispensation; nevertheless the apostle insists that it was addressed equally unto the *New Testament* saints! How this exposes the cardinal error of modern “dispensationalists,” who seek to rob Christians of the greater part of God’s precious Word. Under the pretense of “rightly dividing” the Word, they would filch from *them* all that God gave to His people prior to the beginning of the present era. Such a devilish device is to be steadfastly resisted by us. All that is found in the book of Proverbs is as much God the Father’s instruction to *us* as are the contents of the Pauline epistles! Throughout that book God addresses us individually as “My son:” see Hebrews 1:2, 3:1, 4:1, 5:1, etc. Surely that is quite sufficient for every spiritual mind – no labored argument is needed.

The appositeness of Proverbs 3:11, 12 to the case of the afflicted Hebrews gave great force to the apostle’s citing of it here. That passage would enable them to perceive that *their* case was by no means unprecedented or peculiar, that it was in fact no otherwise with them than it had been with others of God’s children in former ages and that long before the Lord had graciously laid in provision for their encouragement: “My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction: For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a Father the son in whom He delighteth” (Proverbs 3:11, 12). It has ever been God’s way to correct those in whom He delights, to chastise His children; but so far from that salutary discipline causing us to faint, it should strengthen and comfort our hearts, being assured that such chastening proceeds from His *love*, and that the exhortation to perseverance in the path of duty is issued *by Him*. It is the height of pride and ingratitude not to comply with *His* tender entreaties.

But the apostle had to say to the suffering Hebrews, “Ye have *forgotten* the exhortation.” To forget God’s gracious instruction is at least an infirmity, and with it they are here taxed. To forget the

encouragements which the Father has given us is a serious fault: it is expressly forbidden: “Beware lest thou forget the Lord” (Deuteronomy 6:12). It was taxed upon the Jews of old, “They soon forgot His works. . . . They forgot God their Savior, which had done great things in Egypt” (Psalm 106:13, 21). Forgetfulness is a part of that corruption which has seized man by his fall: all the faculties of his soul have been seriously injured – the memory, which was placed in man to be a treasury, in which to lay up the directions and consolations of God’s Word, has not escaped the universal wreckage. But that by no means excuses us: it is a *fault*, to be striven and prayed against. As ministers see occasion, they are to stir up God’s people to use means for the strengthening of the memory – especially by the formation of the habit of holy *meditation* in Divine things.

Thus it was with the Hebrews, in some measure at least: they had “forgotten” that which should have stood in good stead in the hour of their need. Under their trials and persecution, they ought, in an especial manner, to have called to mind that Divine exhortation of Proverbs 3:11, 12 for their encouragement: had they believingly appropriated it, they had been kept from fainting. Alas, how often we are like them! “The want of a diligent consideration of the provision that God hath made in the Scripture for our encouragement to duty and comfort under difficulties, is a sinful forgetfulness, and is of dangerous consequence to our souls” (John Owen).

“Which speaketh unto you as unto children.” It is very striking indeed to observe the tense of the verb here: the apostle was quoting a sentence of Scripture which had been written a thousand years previously, yet he does not say “which *hath* spoken,” but “which *speaketh* unto you!” The same may be seen again in that sevenfold exhortation of Revelation 2 and 3, “He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit *saith* (not “said”) unto the churches.” The Holy Scriptures are a living Word, in which God speaks to men in every generation. Holy Writ is not a dumb or dead letter:

it has a voice in it, ever speaking of God Himself. “The Holy Spirit is always present in the Word, and speaks it equally and alike to the church in all ages. He doth in it speak as immediately to us, as if we were the first and only persons to whom He spake. And this should teach us, with what *reverence* we ought to attend to the Scriptures, namely, as to the way and means whereby *God Himself* speaks directly to us” (John Owen).

“Which speaketh unto you as unto *children*.” The apostle emphasizes the fact that God addresses an exhortation in Proverbs 3:11 to “My son,” which shows plainly that His relation to the *Old Testament* saints was that of a Father to His children. This at once refutes a glaring error made by some who pose as being ultra-Orthodox, more deeply taught in the Word than others. They have insisted that the Fatherhood of God was never revealed until the Son became incarnate; but every verse in the Proverbs where God says “My son” reveals their mistake. That the Old Testament saints were instructed in this blessed relationship is clear from other passages: “Like as a father pitieth his children, so *the Lord* pitieth them that fear Him” (Psalm 103:13). This relation unto God is by virtue of their (and our) union with Christ: *He* is “the Son,” and being one with Him, members of His body, they were “sons” too.

This precious relationship is the ground of the soul’s confidence in God. “If God speaks to them as to *children*, they have good ground to fly to God as to a Father. And in all time of need to ask and seek of Him all needful blessings (Matthew 7:11), yea, and in faith to depend on Him for the same (Matthew 6:31, 32). What useful things shall they want? What hurtful thing need such to fear? If God deal with us as with *children*, *He will* provide for them every good thing, He will protect them from every hurtful thing, He will hear their prayers, He will accept their services, He will bear with their infirmities, He will support them under all their burdens, and assist them against all their assaults; though through

## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

their own weakness, or the violence of some temptation, they should be drawn from Him, yet will He be ready to meet them in the mid-way, turning to Him – instance the mind of the father of the prodigal towards him” (W. Gouge).



## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*Hebrews 12:5*

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### SECTION TWO

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**I**T IS OF first importance that we learn to draw a sharp distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement – important for maintaining the honor and glory of God, and for the peace of mind of the Christian. The distinction is very simple, yet it is often lost sight of. God’s people can never by any possibility be *punished* for their sins, for God has already punished them at the Cross. The Lord Jesus, our blessed Substitute, suffered the full penalty of all our guilt, hence it is written, “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Neither the justice nor the love of God will permit Him to again exact payment of what Christ discharged to the full. The difference between punishment and chastisement lies not *in the nature* of the sufferings of the afflicted: it is most important to bear this in mind. There is a threefold distinction between the two.

First, *the character* in which God acts. In the former God acts as *Judge*, in the latter as *Father*. Sentence of punishment is the act of the judge, a penal sentence passed on to those who are charged

with guilt. Punishment can never fall upon a child of God in this judicial sense, because his guilt was all transferred to Christ: "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree." But while the believer's sins cannot be punished, while the Christian cannot be condemned (Romans 8:33), yet he may be *chastised*. The Christian occupies an entirely different position from the non-Christian: he is a member of the family of God. The relationship which now exists between him and God is that of Parent and child; and as a son he must be disciplined for wrong-doing. Folly is bound up in the hearts of all God's children, and the rod is necessary to rebuke, to subdue, to humble.

The second distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement lies in *the recipients* of each. The object of the former are His enemies; the subjects of the latter, His children. As the Judge of all the earth God will yet take vengeance on all His foes; as the father of His family God maintains discipline over all His children. The one is judicial, the other parental. A third distinction is seen in *the design* of each: the one is retributive, the other remedial. The one flows from His anger, the other from His love. Divine punishment is never sent for the good of sinners, but for the honoring of God's law and the maintenance of His government. Divine chastisement is sent for the *well-being* of His children: "We have had fathers in our flesh which corrected us and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He *for our profit*, that we might be partakers of His Holiness" (Hebrews 12:9, 10).

The above distinctions should at once rebuke the thoughts which are so generally entertained among Christians. When the believer is smarting under the rod, let him not say, God is now punishing me for my sins. *That* can never be; *that* is most dishonoring to the blood of Christ. God is *correcting* thee in love, not smiting in

wrath. Nor should the Christian regard the chastening of the Lord as a sort of necessary evil to which he must bow as submissively as possible. No, it proceeds from God's goodness and faithfulness and is one of the greatest blessings for which we have to thank Him. Chastisement evidences our Divine sonship; the father of a family does not concern himself with those on the outside: but those within He guides and disciplines to make them conform to His will. Chastisement is designed for our good, to promote our highest interest. Look beyond the rod to the All-wise hand that wields it!

Unhappily there is no word in the English language which is capable of doing justice to the Greek term here. "Paideia" which is rendered "chastening" is only another form of "paidion" which signifies "young children," being the tender word that was employed by the Savior in John 21:5 and Hebrews 2:13. One can see at a glance the direct connection which exists between the words "disciple" and "discipline:" equally close in the Greek is the relation between "children" and "chastening" – *son training* would be better. It has reference to God's education, nurture and discipline of His children. It is the Father's wise and loving correction which is in view.

It is true that much chastisement is the rod in the hand of the Father correcting His erring child, but it is a serious mistake to confine our thoughts to this one aspect of the subject. Chastisement is by no means always God's scourging of his refractory sons. Some of the saintliest of God's people, some of the most obedient of His children, have been and are the greatest sufferers. Oft times God's chastening, instead of being retributive, are corrective. They are sent to empty us of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness; they are given to discover to us hidden transgressions, to teach us the plague of our own hearts. Or again; chastisements are sent to strengthen our faith to raise us to higher levels of experience, to bring us into a condition of greater usefulness. Still again; Divine chastisement is sent as a preventative, to keep under pride, to save



us from being unduly elevated over success in God's service. Let us consider, briefly four entirely different examples.

*DAVID.* In his case the rod was laid upon him for grievous sins, for open wickedness. His fall was occasioned by self-confidence and self-righteousness. If the reader will diligently compare the two songs of David recorded in 2 Samuel 22 and 23, the one written near the beginning of his life, the other near the end, he will be struck by the great difference of spirit manifested by the writer in each. Read 2 Samuel 22:22–25, and you will not be surprised that God suffered him to have a fall. Then turn to Chapter 23, and mark the blessed change. At the beginning of verse:5 there is a heart-broken confession of failure. In verses 10–12, there is a God-glorifying profession, attributing victory unto the Lord. The severe scourging of David was not in vain.

*JOB.* Probably he tasted of every kind of suffering which falls to man's lot: family bereavement, loss of property, grievous bodily afflictions, came fast, one on top of another. But God's end in them all was that Job should benefit therefrom and be a greater partaker of His holiness. There was not a little self-satisfaction and self-righteousness in Job at the beginning; but at the end, when he was brought face to face with the thrice Holy One he "abhorred *himself*" (Job 42:6). In David's case the chastisement was retributive; in Job's, corrective.

*ABRAHAM.* In him we see an illustration of an entirely different aspect of chastening. Most of the trials to which he was subject were neither because of open sins nor for the correction of inward faults. Rather were they sent for the development of spiritual graces. Abraham was sorely tried in various ways, but it was in order that faith might be strengthened, and that patience might have its

perfect work in him. Abraham was weaned from the things of this world, that he might enjoy closer fellowship with Jehovah and become “the friend” of God.

PAUL. “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure” (2 Corinthians 12:7). This “thorn” was sent not because of failure in sin, but as a preventative against pride. Note the “lest” both at the beginning and end of the verse. The result of this “thorn” was that the beloved apostle was made more conscious of his weakness. The chastisement has for one of its main objects the breaking down of self-sufficiency, the bringing us to the end of ourselves.

Now in view of these widely different aspects – chastisements which are retributive, corrective, educative, and preventative – how incompetent are we to *diagnose*, and how great is the folly of pronouncing judgment concerning others! Let us not conclude when we see a fellow-Christians under the rod of God that he is necessarily being taken to task for his sins. Let us now consider *the spirit in which* Divine chastisements are to be received. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him” (Hebrews 12:5).

Not all chastisement is sanctified to the recipient of it. Some are hardened thereby; others are crushed beneath it. Much depends on the spirit in which afflictions are received. There is no virtue in trials and troubles in themselves: it is only as they are blessed by God that the Christian is profited thereby. As Hebrews 12:11 informs us, it is those who are “*exercised*” under God’s rod that bring forth “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” A sensitive conscience and a tender heart are then needed adjuncts.

In our text the Christian is warned against too entirely different dangers: despise not, despair not. These are two extremes against

which it is ever necessary to keep a sharp look-out. Just as every truth of Scripture has its balancing counterpart, so has every evil its opposite. On the one hand there is a haughty spirit which laughs at the Rod, a stubborn will which refuses to be humbled thereby. On the other hand there is a fainting which utterly sinks beneath it and gives way to despondency. Spurgeon said, "The way of righteousness is a difficult pass between two mountains of error, and the great secret of the Christian's life is to wend his way along the narrow valley." Let us then ponder separately the two things which the Christian is here warned against: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou are rebuked of Him."

"The Greek word for 'despise' is nowhere used in the Scripture, but in this place. It signifies to 'set lightly by,' to have little esteem of, not to value any thing according to its worth and use. The Hebrew word means 'to reprobate, to reject, to despise.' We render the apostles word by 'despise,' which yet doth not intend a despising that is so *formally*, but only *interpretatively*. Directly to despise and condemn or reject the chastisements of the Lord is a sin that perhaps none of His sons or children do fall into. But not to esteem of them as we ought, not to improve them unto their proper end, not to comply with the will of God in them, is interpretatively to despise them" (John Owen). As the point now before us is one which is of great practical importance to afflicted Christians, we will describe a number of ways in which God's chastisement may be "despised."

First, *by callousness*. There is a general lack of regard unto God's admonitions and instructions when troubles and sufferings come upon Christians. Too often they view them as the common and inevitable ills which man is heir unto, and perceive not that *their Father* hath any special hand or design in them. Hence they are stoically accepted in a fatalistic attitude. To be stoical under

adversity is the policy of carnal wisdom: make the best of a bad job is the sum of its philosophy. The man of the world knows no better than to grit his teeth and brave things out: having no Divine Comforter, Counselor, or Physician, he has to fall back upon his own poor resources. But it is inexpressibly sad when we find the child of God conducting himself as does a child of the Devil.

This is what is dehorted against in our present text: “despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.” Observe well the personal emphasis – “*thou*:” no matter how thy fellow-creatures act when the clouds of Providence frown upon them, see well to it that *thou* comportest thyself as becometh a son of God. Take to heart the caution here given. Stout-heartedness and stiff-neckedness is to be expected from a rebel, but one who has found grace in the eyes of the Lord should humble himself beneath His mighty hand the moment He gives any intimation of His displeasure. Scorn not the least trials: each has instruction wrapped up in it. Many a child would be spared the rod if he heeded the parent’s *frown!* So it is spiritually. Instead of hardening ourselves to endure stoically, there should be a melting of heart.

Second, *by complaining*. This is what the Hebrews did in the wilderness; and there are still many murmurers in Israel’s camp today. A little sickness, and we become so cross that our friends are afraid to come near us. A few days in bed, and we fret and fume like a bullock unaccustomed to yoke. We peevishly ask, Why this affliction? What have I done to deserve it? We look around with envious eyes, and are discontented because others are carrying a lighter load. Beware, my reader: it goes hard with murmurers. God always chastises twice if we are not humbled by the first. Remind yourself of how much dross there yet is among the gold. View the corruptions of your own heart, and marvel that God has not smitten you far more severely.

This is what is dehorted against here: “despise not thou the

chastening of the Lord.” Instead of complaining, there should be a holy submitting unto the good will of God. There is a dreadful amount of complaining among Christians today, due to failure to nip this evil weed in the bud. Grumbling at the weather, being cross when things are lost or mislaid, murmuring because someone has failed to show us the respect which we consider ourselves entitled unto. *God’s hand* in these things – for nothing happens by chance under His government: everything has a meaning and message if our hearts are open to receive it – is lost sight of. That is to “despise” His rod when it is laid but gently upon us, and that it is which necessitates heavier blows. Form the habit of hearing His *taps*, and you will be less likely to receive His *raps*.

Third, *by criticisms*. How often we question the usefulness of chastisement. As Christians we seem to have little more spiritual good sense than we had natural wisdom as children. As boys we thought that the *rod* was the least necessary thing in the home. It is so with the children of God. When things go as we like them, when some unexpected temporal blessing is bestowed, we have no difficulty in ascribing all to a kind Providence; but when our plans are thwarted, when losses are ours, it is very different. Yet, is it not written, “I form the light *and* create darkness, I make peace, *and* create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Isaiah 45:7).

How often is the thing formed ready to complain “Why hast Thou made me *thus*?” We say, I cannot see how *this* can possibly profit my soul: if I had better health, I could attend the house of prayer more frequently; if I had been spared those losses in business, I would have more money for the Lord’s work! What good can possibly come out of this calamity? Like Jacob we exclaim, “All these things are against me.” What is this but to “despise” the rod? Shall thy ignorance challenge God’s wisdom? Shall thy short-sightedness arraign omniscience? O for grace to be as a “weaned child” (Psalm 131:2).

Fourth, *by carelessness*. So many fail to mend their ways. The exhortation of our text is much needed by all of us. There are many who *have* “despised” the rod, and in consequence they have *not* profited thereby. Many a Christian has been corrected by God, but in vain. Sickness, reverses, bereavement have come, but they have not been sanctified by prayerful self-examination. O brethren and sisters, take heed. If God be chastening “consider your ways” (Haggai 1:5), “ponder the path of thy feet” (Proverbs 4:26). Be assured that there is some reason for the chastening. Many a Christian would not have been chastised half so severely had he diligently inquired as to the cause of it.

“Cause me to understand wherein I have erred” (Job 6:24); “show me wherefore Thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2), expresses the attitude we should take whenever God’s hand is laid upon us. We are bidden “*hear ye the rod*” (Micah 6:9), that is, to pay a due regard to God’s voice in our trials and afflictions, and to correct that in our lives with which He is displeased. In chastisement God is to be viewed not only as a Father but also as a Teacher: valuable lessons are to be learned therefrom if we cultivate a teachable spirit. Not so to do, failure to improve them unto their proper design and to comply with the will of God in them, is to “despise” His loving reproofs. But we must turn now to the second half of our verse.

“Nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him.” This word presupposes that we have not “despised” God’s chastening, but *have heeded it* – inquired as to the cause and reason of it, and have discovered He is evidencing that He is displeased with us. The learned tell us that the word for “rebuked,” both in the Hebrew and in the Greek, signifies “a reproof by rational conviction:” the conscience has been pricked, and God has discovered unto the heart that there is something in our ways – which before we took no notice of – which has convinced us of the needs-be for our present afflictions. He

makes us to understand *what it is* that is wrong in our lives: we are “rebuked” in our conscience. Our response should be to humble ourselves before Him, confess the fault, and seek grace to right it; and in order to this we are cautioned against “fainting” in our minds. Let us mention several forms of this particular evil of “fainting.”

First, *when we give up all exertion*. This is done when we sink down in despondency. The smitten one concludes that it is more than he can possibly endure. His heart fails him; darkness swallows him up; the sun of hope is eclipsed, and the voice of thanksgiving is silent. To “faint” means rendering ourselves unfit for the discharge of our duties. When a person faints, he is rendered motionless. How many Christians are ready to completely give up the fight when adversity enters their lives. How many are rendered quite inert when trouble comes their way. How many by their attitude say, God’s hand is heavy upon me: I can do nothing. Ah, beloved, “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). “Faint not when thou art rebuked of Him:” go to the Lord about it; recognize *His* hand in it. Remember thine afflictions are among the “all things” which work together for good.

Second, *when we question our sonship*. There are not a few Christians who, when the rod descends upon them, conclude that they are not sons of God after all. They forget that it is written “Many are the afflictions of the righteous” (Psalm 34:19), and that we must “through *much* tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). One says, “But if I were His child I should not be in this poverty, misery, shame.” Listen to verse 8. “But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.” Learn, then, to look upon trials as proofs of God’s love – purging, pruning, purifying thee. The father of a family does not concern himself much about those on the outside of his household: it is they who are within whom he guards and guides, nurtures and conforms to his will. So it is with God.

Third, when *we give way to unbelief*. This is occasioned by our failure to seek God's support under trials, and lay hold of His promises – “weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). Sure are we to “faint” if we lose sight of the Lord, and cherish not His words of consolation. David was encouraging himself against unbelief when he took himself to task and said, “Why art thou cast down O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance” (Psalm 42:5): if only *that* attitude be maintained by us, we shall be preserved from sinking when troubles come upon us.

Fourth, *when we despair*. When unbelief dominates the heart, despondency soon becomes our portion. Some indulge the gloomy fancy that they will never again get from under the rod in this life; ah, it is a long lane that has no turning! Perhaps a reader says, “but I have prayed and prayed, and yet the dark clouds have not lifted.” Then comfort yourself with the reflection: it is always the darkest hour which precedes the dawn. Perhaps another says, “I have pleaded His promises, but things are no better with me: I thought God delivered those who called upon Him; I *have* called, but He has not delivered, and I fear He never will.” What! child of God, speak of thy Father thus? You say, He will never leave off smiting because He has smitten so long; rather conclude, He has now smitten so long, I must soon be delivered. Fight hard, my brother, against this attitude of despair, lest your complaining cause others to stumble. Despise not; faint not. May Divine Grace preserve both writer and reader from either of these sinful extremes.

N. B. For several of the leading thoughts in the above article, we are indebted to a sermon by the late C.H. Spurgeon.







## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*Hebrews 12:6*

### SECTION THREE

**T**HE PROBLEM OF suffering is a very real one in this world, and to not a few of our readers a personal and acute one. While some of us are freely supplied with comforts, others are constantly exercised over procuring the bare necessities of life. While some of us have long been favored with good health, others know not what it is to go through a day without sickness and pain. While some homes have not been visited by death for many years, others are called upon again and again to pass through the deep waters of family bereavement. Yes, dear friend; the problem of suffering, the encountering of severe trials, is a very personal thing for not a few of the members of the household of faith. Nor is it the *external* afflictions which occasion the most anguish: it is the questionings they raise, the doubts they stimulate, the dark clouds of unbelief which they so often bring over the heart.

Very often it is in seasons of trial and trouble that Satan is most successful in getting in his evil work. When he perceives the uselessness of attempting to bring believers under the bondage

in which he keeps unbelievers, he bides his time for the shooting at them of other arrows which he has in his quiver. Though he is unable to drag them down to the commission of the grosser outward forms of sin, he waits his opportunity for tempting them to be guilty of inward sins. Though he cannot infect them with the poison of evolutionism and higher criticism, he despairs not of seducing them with questions of God's goodness. It is when adversity comes the Christian's way, when sore trials multiply, when the soul is oppressed and the mind distressed, that the Devil seeks to instill and strengthen doubtings of God's love, and to call into question the faithfulness of His promises.

Moreover, there come seasons in the lives of many saints when to sight and sense it *seems* as though God Himself had ceased to care for His needy and afflicted child. Earnest prayer is made for the mitigation of the sufferings, but relief is not granted. Grace is sought to meekly bear the burden which has been laid upon the suffering one; yet, so far from any sensible answer being received, self-will, impatience, unbelief, are more active than ever. Instead of the peace of God ruling the heart, unrest and enmity occupy its throne. Instead of quietness within, there is turmoil and resentment. Instead of "giving thanks always for all things unto God" (Ephesians 5:20), the soul is filled with unkind thoughts and feelings against Him. This is cause for anguish unto the renewed heart; yet, at times, struggle against the evil as the Christian may, he is overcome by it.

Then it is that the afflicted one cries out, "Why standest Thou *afar off*, O Lord, why *hidest* Thou Thyself in times of trouble?" (Psalm 10:1). To the distressed saint, the Lord seems to *stand* still, as if He coldly looked on from a distance, and did not sympathize with the afflicted one. Nay, worse, the Lord appears to be *afar off*, and no longer "a very present help in trouble," but rather an inaccessible mountain, which it is impossible to reach. The felt

presence of the Lord is the stay, the strength, the consolation of the believer; the lifting up of the light of His countenance upon us, is what sustains and cheers us in this dark world. But when *that* is withheld, when we no longer have the joy of His presence with us, drab indeed is the prospect, sad is the heart. It is the *hiding* of our Father's face which cuts to the quick. When trouble *and desertion* come together, it is unbearable.

Then it is that the word comes to us, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him" (Hebrews 12:5). Ah, it is easy for us to perceive the meetness of such an admonition as this while things are going smoothly and pleasantly for us. While our lot is congenial, or at least bearable, we have little difficulty in discerning what a sin it is for any Christian to either "despise" God's chastenings or to "faint" beneath them. But when tribulation comes upon us, when distress and anguish fill our hearts, it is quite another matter. Not only do we become guilty of one of the very evils here dehorted from, but we are very apt to excuse and extenuate our peevishness or faintness. There is a tendency in all of us to pity ourselves, to take sides with ourselves against God, and even to justify the uprisings of our hearts against Him.

Have we never, in self-vindication, said, "Well, after all we are *human*; it is *natural* that we should chafe against the rod or give way to despondency when we are afflicted. It is all very well to tell us that we *should not*, but how can we help ourselves? we cannot change our natures; we are frail men and women, and not angels." And what has been the issue from the fruit of this self-pity and self-vindication? Review the past, dear friend, and recall how you felt and acted inwardly when God was tearing up your cozy nest, overturning your cherished plans, dashing to pieces your fondest hopes, afflicting you painfully in your affairs, your body, or your family circle. Did it not issue in calling into question the wisdom

of God's ways, the justice of His dealings with you, His kindness towards you? Did it not result in your having still stronger doubts of His very goodness?

In Hebrews 12:5 the Christian is cautioned against either despising the Lord's chastenings or fainting beneath them. Yet, notwithstanding this plain warning, there remains a tendency in all of us not only to disregard the same, but to act contrary thereto. The apostle anticipates this evil, and points out the remedy. The mind of the Christian must be fortified against it. But how? By calling to remembrance *the source* from which all his testings, trials, tribulations and troubles proceed, namely, the blessed, wondrous, unchanging love of God. "My son, despise not thou the chastenings of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. FOR whom the Lord *loveth*, He chasteneth." Here a reason is advanced why we *should not* despise God's chastening nor faint beneath it – all proceeds from His *love*. Yes, even the bitter disappointments, the sore trials, the things which occasion an aching heart, are not only appointed by unerring wisdom, but are sent by infinite Love! It is the apprehension and appropriation of this glorious fact, and that alone, which will preserve us from both the evils forbidden in verse:5.

The way to victory over suffering is to keep sorrow from filling the soul: "Let not your *heart be troubled*" (John 14:1). So long as the waves wash only the deck of the ship, there is no danger of its foundering; but when the tempest breaks through the hatches and submerges the hold, then disaster is nigh. No matter what floods of tribulation break over us, it is our duty and our privilege to have peace within: "keep thy *heart* with all diligence" (Proverbs 4:23): suffer no doubtings of God's wisdom, faithfulness, goodness, to take root there. But how am I to prevent their so doing? "*Keep yourselves in the love of God*" (Jude 21), is the inspired answer, the sure remedy, the way to victory. There, in one word, we have

made known to us the secret of how to overcome all questionings of God’s providential ways, all murmurings against His dealings with us.

“Keep yourselves in the love of God.” It is as though a parent said to his child, “keep yourself in the sunshine:” the sun shines whether he enjoys it or not, but he is responsible not to walk in the shade and thus lose its genial glow. So God’s love for His people abides unchanging, but how few of them keep themselves in the warmth of it. The saint is to be “rooted and grounded in love” (Ephesians 3:17); “rooted” like a tree in rich and fertile soil; “grounded” like a house built upon a rock. Observe that both of these figures speak of *hidden* processes: the root-life of the tree is concealed from human eyes, and the foundations of the house are laid deep in the ground. Thus it should be with each child of God: the heart is to be fixed, nourished by the love of God.

It is one thing to believe intellectually that “God is love” and that He loves His people, but it is quite another to enjoy and live in that love in the soul. To be “rooted and grounded in love” means to have a settled assurance of God’s love for us, such an assurance as nothing can shake. This is the deep need of every Christian, and no pains are to be spared in the obtaining thereof. Those passages in Scripture which speak of the wondrous love of God, should be read frequently and meditated upon daily. There should be a diligent striving to apprehend God’s love more fully and richly. Dwell upon the many unmistakable proofs which God has made of His love to you: the gift of His Word, the gift of His Son, the gift of His Spirit. What greater, what clearer proofs do we require! Steadfastly resist every temptation to question His love: “keep yourselves in the love of God.” Let *that* be the realm in which you live, the atmosphere you breathe, the warmth in which you thrive.

This life is but a schooling. In saying this we are uttering, a platitude, yet it is a truth of which all Christians need to be constantly

reminded. This is the period of our childhood and minority. Now in childhood everything has, or should have, the character of education and discipline. Dear parents and teachers are constantly directing, warning, rebuking; the whole of the child-life is under rule, restraint and guidance. But the only object is the child himself – his good, his character, his future; and the only motive is love. Now as childhood is to the rest of our life, so is the whole of our earthly sojourn to our future and heavenly life. Therefore let us seek to cultivate the spirit of childhood. Let us regard it as natural that we *should be* daily rebuked and corrected. Let us behave with the docility and meekness of children, with their trustful and sweet assurance that *love* is behind all our chastenings, that we are in the tender hands of our Father.

But if this attitude is to be maintained, *faith* must be kept in steady exercise: only thus shall we judge aright of afflictions. Sense is ever ready to slander and belie the Divine perfections. Sense beclouds the understanding and causes us to wrongly interpret God's dispensations with us. Why so? Because sense estimates things from their outside and by their present feeling. "No chastening *for the present* seemeth to be joyous, but grievous" (Hebrews 12:11), and therefore if when under the rod we judge of God's love and care for us by our *sense of His present dealings*, we are likely to conclude that He has but little regard for us. Herein lies the urgent need for the putting forth of faith, for "faith is the evidence of things not seen." *Faith* is the only remedy for this double evil. Faith interprets things not according to the outside or visible, but according to the promise. Faith looks upon providences not as a present disconnected piece, but in its entirety to the end of things.

Sense perceives in our trials naught but expressions of God's disregard or anger, but faith can discern Divine wisdom and love in the sorest troubles. Faith is able to unfold the riddles and solve the mysteries of providence. Faith can extract honey and sweetness out

of gall and wormwood. Faith discerns that God’s heart is filled with love toward us, even when His hand is heavy and smarts upon us. The bucket goes down into the well the deeper, that it may come up the fuller. Faith perceives God’s design in the chastening is our good. It is through faith “that He would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is” (Job 11:6). By the “secrets of wisdom” is meant the *hidden* ways of God’s providence. Divine providence has two faces: the one of rigor, the other of clemency; sense looks upon the former only, faith enjoys the latter.

Faith not only looks beneath the surface of things and sees the sweet orange beneath the bitter rind, but it looks beyond the present and anticipates the blessed sequel. Of the Psalmist it is recorded, “I said *in my haste*, I am cut off from before Thine eyes” (Psalm 31:22). The fumes of passion dim our vision when we look only at what is present. Asaph declared, “my feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped; for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:2, 3); but when he went into the sanctuary of God he said, “Then understood I *their end*” (verse 17), and that quieted him. Faith is occupied not with the scaffolding, but with the completed building; not with the medicine, but with the healthful effects it produces; not with the painful rod, but with the peaceable fruit of righteousness in which it issues.

Suffering, then, is a test of the heart; chastisement is a challenge to faith – our faith in His wisdom, His faithfulness, His love. As we have sought to show above the great need of the Christian is to keep himself in the love of God, for the soul to have an unshaken assurance of His tender care for us: “casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you” (1 Peter 5:7). But the knowledge of that “care” can only be experimentally maintained by the exercise of faith – especially is this the case in times of trouble. A preacher once asked the despondent friend, “Why is that cow looking over



the wall?” And the answer was, “Because she cannot look through it.” The illustration may be crude, yet it gives point to an important truth. Discouraged reader, look over the things which so much distress you, and behold the Father’s smiling face; look above the frowning clouds of His providence, and see the sunshine of His never changing love.

“For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6). There is something very striking and unusual about this verse, for it is found, in slightly varied form, in no less than five different books of the Bible: – “Happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty” (Job 5:17); “Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law” (Psalm 94:12); “whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:12); “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Revelation 3:19). Probably there is a twofold reason for this reiteration. First, it hints at the importance and blessedness of this truth. God repeats it so frequently lest we should forget, and thus lose the comfort and cheer of realizing that Divine chastisement proceeds from *love*. This must be a precious word if God thought it well to say it five times over! Second, such repetition also implies our slowness to believe it; by nature our evil hearts are inclined in the opposite direction. Though our text affirms so emphatically that the Christian’s chastisements proceed from God’s love, we are ever ready to attribute them to His harshness. It is really very humbling that the Holy Spirit should deem it necessary to repeat this statement so often.

“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” Four things are to be noted. First, the best of God’s children *need* chastisement – “every son.” There is no Christian but what has faults and follies which require correcting: “in many things we all offend” (James 3:2). Second, God *will correct*

all whom He adopts into His family. However He may now let the reprobate alone in their sins, He will not ignore the failings of His people – to be suffered to go on unrebuked in wickedness is a sure sign of alienation from God. Third, in this God acts as a *Father*: no wise and good parent will wink at the faults of his own children: his very relation and affection to them oblige him to take notice of the same. Fourth, God’s disciplinary dealings with His sons proceed from and make manifest His *love* to them: it is this fact we would now particularly concentrate upon.

1. The Christian’s chastisements *flow from* God’s love. Not from His anger or hardness, nor from arbitrary dealings, but from God’s heart do our afflictions proceed. It is love which regulates all the ways of God in dealing with His own. It was love which *elect*ed them. The heart is not warmed when our election is traced back merely to God’s sovereign will, but our affections are stirred when we read “in *love* having predestinated us” (Ephesians 1:4, 5). It was love which *redeem*ed us. We do not reach the center of the atonement when we see nothing more in the Cross than a vindication of the law and the satisfaction of justice: “God so *loved* the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). It is love which regenerates or *effectually calls* us: “with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jeremiah 31:3). The new birth is not only a marvel of Divine wisdom and the miracle of Divine power, but it is also and superlatively a product of God’s affection.

In like manner it is *love* which ordained our trials and orders our chastisements. O Christian, never doubt the love of God. A quaint old Quaker, who was a farmer, had a weather-vane on the roof of his barn, from which stood out in clear-cut letters “God is love.” One day a preacher was being driven to the Quakers home; his host called attention to the vane and its text. The preacher turned and said, “I don’t like that at all: it misrepresents the Divine

character – God’s love is not variable like the weather.” Said the Quaker, “Friend, you have misinterpreted its significance; that text on the weather-vane is to remind me that, no matter which way the wind is blowing, no matter from which direction the storm may come, still, “God is love.”

2. The Christian’s chastisements *express* God’s love. Oftentimes we do not think so. As God’s children we think and act very much as we did when children naturally. When we were little and our parents insisted that we should perform a certain duty, we failed to appreciate the love which had respect unto our future well-being. Or, when our parents denied us something on which we had set our hearts, we felt we were very hardly dealt with. Yet was it *love* which said “No” to us. So it is spiritually. The love of God not only gives, but also *withholds*. No doubt this is the explanation for some of our unanswered prayers: God loves us too much to give what would not really be for our profit. The duties insisted upon, the rebukes given, the things withheld, are all *expressions* of His faithful love.

Chastisements manifest God’s care of us. He does not regard us with unconcern and neglect, as men usually do their illegitimate children, but He has a true parent’s solicitation for us: “Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him” (Psalm 103:13). “And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (Deuteronomy 8:3). There are several important sermons wrapped up in that verse, but we have not the space here to even outline them. God brings into the wilderness that we may be drawn near Himself. He dries up cisterns that we may seek and enjoy the Fountain. He destroys our nest down here that our affection may be set upon things above.

3. The Christian's chastisements *magnify* God's love. Our very trials make manifest the fullness and reveal the perfections of God's love. What a word is that in Lamentations 3:33; "He doth not afflict willingly"! If God consulted only His own pleasure, He would not afflict us at all: it is for our profit that He "scourges." Ever remember that the great High Priest Himself is "*touched* with the feeling of our infirmities"; yet, notwithstanding, He employs the rod! God is love, and nothing is so sensitive as love. Concerning the trials and tribulations of Israel of old, it is written, "In all their affliction *He* was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9); yet out of love He chastens. How this manifests and magnifies the unselfishness of God's love!

Here, then is the Christian supplied with an effectual shield to turn aside the fiery darts of the wicked one. As we said at the beginning, Satan ever seeks to take advantage of our trials: like the fiend that he is, he makes his fiercest assaults when we are most cast down. Thus it was that he attacked Job – "Curse God and die." And thus some of us have found it. Did he not, in the hours of suffering and sorrow, seek to remind you that when you had become increasingly diligent in seeking to please and glorify God, the darkest clouds of the adversary followed; and say, How unjust God is; what a miserable reward for your devotion and zeal! Here is your recourse, fellow-Christian: say to the Devil, "It is written, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.'"

Again; if Satan cannot succeed in traducing the character of God and cause us to doubt His goodness and question His love, then he will assail our assurance. The Devil is most persevering: if a frontal attack fails, then he will make one from the rear. He will assault your assurance of sonship: he will whisper "*You* are no child of His: look at your condition, consider your circumstances, contrast those of other Christians. *You* cannot be an object of God's favor; you are deceiving yourself; your profession is an empty one. If you *were* God's child, He would treat you very differently. Such

privations, such losses, such pains, show that you cannot be one of His.” But say to him, “It is written, ‘Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.’”

Let our final thought be upon the last word of our text: “for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He *receiveth*.” The one whom God scourged is not rejected, but “received” – received up into glory, welcomed in His House above. First the cross, then the crown, is God’s unchanging order. This was vividly illustrated in the history of the children of Israel: God “chose them in the furnace of affliction,” and many and bitter were their trials ere they reached the promised land. So it is with us. First the wilderness, then Canaan; first the scourging, and then the “receiving.” May we keep ourselves more and more in the love of God.



## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*Hebrews 12:7–8*

### SECTION FOUR

**T**HE ALL-IMPORTANT MATTER in connection with Divine chastenings, so far as the Christian is concerned, is the spirit in which he *receives* them. Whether or not we “profit” from them, turns entirely on the exercises of our minds and hearts under them. The advantages or disadvantages which outward things bring to us, is to be measured by the effects they produce in us. Material blessings become curses if our souls are not the gainers thereby, while material losses prove benedictions if our spiritual graces are enriched therefrom. The difference between our spiritual impoverishment or our spiritual enrichment from the varied experiences of this life, will very largely be determined by our heart-attitude toward them, the spirit in which they are encountered, and our subsequent conduct under them. It is all summed up in that word “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7).

As the careful reader passes from verse to verse of Hebrews 12:3–11, he will observe how the Holy Spirit has repeatedly stressed

this particular point, namely, *the spirit in which* God's chastisements are to be received. First, the tried and troubled saint is bidden to consider Him who was called upon to pass through a far rougher and deeper sea of suffering than any which His followers encounter, and this contemplation of Him is urged "lest we be wearied and faint in our minds" (verse 3.). Second, we are bidden to "despise not" the chastening of the Lord, "nor faint" when we are rebuked of Him (verse 5). Third, our Christian duty is to "endure" chastening as becometh the sons of God (verse 7). Fourth, it is pointed out that since we gave reverence to our earthly fathers when they corrected us, much more should we "rather be in subjection" unto our heavenly Father (verse 9). Finally, we learn there will only be the "peaceable fruit of righteousness" issuing from our afflictions, if we are duly "exercised thereby" (verse 11).

In the previous articles we have sought to point out some of the principal considerations which should help the believer to receive God's chastisements in a meet and becoming spirit. We have considered the blessed example left us by our Captain: may we who have enlisted under His banner diligently follow the same. We have seen that, however severe may be our trials, they are by no means extreme: we have not yet "resisted unto blood" – martyrdom has not overtaken *us*, as it did many who preceded us: shall we succumb to the showers, when they defied the fiercest storms! We have dwelt upon the needs-be for Divine reproof and correction. We have pointed out the blessed distinction there is between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement. We have contemplated the source from which all proceeds, namely, *the love* of our Father. We have shown the imperative necessity for the exercise of faith, if the heart is to be kept in peace while the rod is upon us.

"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and

not sons” (verses 7, 8). In these verses another consideration is presented for the comfort of those whom God is chastening. That of which we are here reminded is, that, when the Christian comports himself properly under Divine correction, he gives proof of his Divine sonship. If he endures them in a manner becoming to his profession, he supplies evidence of his Divine adoption. Blessed indeed is this, an unanswerable reply to Satan’s evil insinuation: so far from the disciplinary afflictions which the believer encounters showing that God loves him not, they afford a golden opportunity for him to exercise and display *his* unquestioning love of the Father. If we undergo chastisements with patience and perseverance, then do we make manifest, both to ourselves and to others, the genuineness of our profession.

In the verses which are now before us the apostle draws an inference from and makes a particular application of what had been previously affirmed, thereby confirming the exhortation. There are three things therein to be particularly noted. First, the duty which has been enjoined: Divine chastisements are to be “endured” by us: that which is included and involved by that term we shall seek to show in what follows. Second, the great benefit which is gained by a proper endurance of those chastisements: evidences thereby obtained that God is dealing with us as “sons:” not as enemies whom He hates, but as dear children whom He loves. Third, a solemn contrast is then drawn, calculated to unmask the hypocrites and expose empty professors: those who are without Divine chastisement are not sons at all, but “bastards” – claiming the Church for their mother, yet having not God for their Father: what is signified thereby will appear in the sequel.

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.” This statement supplements what was before us in verse 5. Both of them speak of the spirit in which chastisements are to be received by the Christian, only with this difference: verse 5 gives the negative



side, verse 7 the positive. On the one hand, we are not to “despise” or “faint” under them; on the other hand, they are to be “endured.” It has become an English proverb that “what cannot be cured must be endured,” which is but another way of saying that we must grit our teeth and make the best of a bad job. It scarcely needs pointing out that the Holy Spirit has not used the term here in its lowest and carnal sense, but rather in its noblest and spiritual signification.

In order to ascertain the force and scope of any word which is used in Holy Scripture neither its acceptance in ordinary speech nor its dictionary etymology is to be consulted; instead, a concordance must be used, so as to find out how it is actually employed on the sacred page. In the case now before us, we do not have far to seek, for in the immediate context it is found in a connection where it cannot be misunderstood. In verse 2 we read that the Savior “endured the cross,” and in verse 3 that He “endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself.” It was in the highest and noblest sense that Christ “endured” His sufferings: He remained steadfast under the sorest trials, forsaking not the path of duty. He meekly and heroically bore the acutest afflictions without murmuring against or fainting under them. How, then, is the Christian to conduct himself in the fires? We subjoin a sevenfold answer.

First, the Christian is to “endure” chastisement *inquiringly*. While it be true that all chastisement is not the consequence of personal disobedience or sinful conduct, yet much of it is so, and therefore it is always the part of wisdom for us to seek for the why of it. There is a cause for every effect, and the reason for all God’s dealings. The Lord does not act capriciously, nor does He afflict willingly (Lamentations 3:33). Every time the Father’s rod falls upon us it is a call to self-examination, for pondering the path of our feet, for heeding that repeated word in Haggai “Consider your ways.” It is our bounden duty to search ourselves and seek to discover the reason of God’s displeasure. This may not be a pleasant

exercise, and if we are honest with ourselves it is likely to occasion us much concern and sorrow; nevertheless, a broken and contrite heart is never despised by the One with whom we have to do.

Alas, only too often this self-examination and inquiring into the cause of our affliction is quite neglected, *relief* therefrom being the uppermost thought in the sufferer's mind. There is a most solemn warning upon this point in 2 Chronicles 16:12, 13, "And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceedingly great; yet in his disease *he sought not to the Lord*, but the physicians. And Asa slept with his fathers." How many professing Christians do likewise today. As soon as sickness strikes them, their first thought and desire is not that the affliction may be sanctified unto their souls, but how quickly their bodies may be relieved. We do not fully agree with some brethren who affirm that the Christian ought never to call in a doctor, and that the whole medical fraternity is of the Devil – in such case the Holy Spirit had never denominated Luke "the beloved physician," nor had Christ said the sick "need" a physician. On the other hand, it is unmistakably evident that physical healing is not the first need of an ailing saint.

Second, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement *prayerfully*. If our inquiry is to be prosecuted successfully, then we are in urgent need of Divine assistance. Those who rely upon their own judgment are certain to err. As our hearts are exercised as to the *cause* of the chastening, we need to seek earnestly unto God, for it is only in *His* light that we "see light" (Psalm 36:9). It is not sufficient to examine ourselves: we must request the Divine physician to diagnose our case, saying "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23, 24). Nevertheless, let it be pointed out that such a request cannot be presented sincerely unless we have personally endeavored to thoroughly search ourselves and purpose to continue so doing.

Prayer was never designed to be a substitute for the personal discharge of duty: rather is it appointed as a means for procuring help therein. While it remains our duty to honestly scrutinize our hearts and inspect our ways, measuring them by the holy requirements of Scripture, yet only the immediate assistance of the Spirit will enable us to prosecute our quest with any real profit and success. Therefore we need to enter the secret place and inquire of the Lord “show me *wherefore* Thou contendest with me” (Job 10:2). If we sincerely ask Him to make known unto us what it is in our ways He is displeased with, and for which He is now rebuking us, He will not mock us. Request of Him the hearing ear, and He will tell what is wrong. Let there be no reserve, but an honest desire to know what needs correcting, and He will show you.

Third, the Christian is to “endure” chastisement *humbly*. When the Lord has responded to your request and has made known the cause of His chastening, see to it that you quarrel not with Him. If there be any feeling that the scourging is heavier than you deserve, the thought must be promptly rejected. “Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment (or chastisement) of his sins?” (Lamentations 3:39). If we take issue with the Most High, we shall only be made to smart the more for our pains. Rather must we seek grace to heed that word, “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God” (1 Peter 5:6). Ask Him to quicken your conscience, shine into your heart, and bring to light the hidden things of darkness, so that you may perceive your inward sins as well as your outward. And then you will exclaim, “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me” (Psalm 119:75).

Fourth, the Christian is to “endure” chastisement *patiently*. Probably that is the prime thought in our text: steadfastness, a resolute continuance in the path of duty, an abiding service of God with all our hearts, notwithstanding the present trial, is what

we are called unto. But Satan whispers, “What is the use? you *have* endeavored, earnestly, to please the Lord, and how is He rewarding you? You cannot satisfy Him: the more you give, the more He demands; He is a hard tyrannical master.” Such vile suggestions must be put from us as the malicious lies of him who hates God and seeks to encompass our destruction. God has only your good in view when the rod is laid upon you. Just as the grass needs to be mown to preserve its freshness, as the vine has to be pruned to ensure fruitfulness, as friction is necessary to produce electric power, as fire alone will consume the dross, even so the discipline of trial is indispensable for the education of the Christian.

“Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9). Keep before you the example of Christ: He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, yet before His shearers He was “dumb.” He never fretted or murmured, and we are to “follow His steps.” “Let patience have her perfect work” (James 1:4). For this we have to be much in prayer; for this we need the strengthening help of the Holy Spirit. God tells us that chastisement is not “joyous” but “grievous”: if it were not, it would not be “chastening.” But He also assures us that “*afterwards* it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11). Lay hold of that word “*afterward*”: anticipate a happy sequel, and in the comfort thereof continue pressing forward along the path of duty. “Better is *the end* of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Ecclesiastes 7:8).

Fifth, the Christian is to “endure” chastisement *believingly*. This was how Job endured his: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). Ah, he looked behind all secondary causes, and perceived that above the Sabaeans and Chaldeans was Jehovah Himself. But is it not at *this* point we most often fail? Only too frequently we see only the injustice of

men, the malice of the world, the enmity of Satan, in our trials: that is walking by sight. Faith brings God into the scene. "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Psalm 27:13). It is an adage of the world that "Seeing is believing:" but in the spiritual realm, the order is reversed: there we must "believe" in order to "see." And *what is it* which the saint most desires to "see"? Why, "the goodness of the Lord," for unless he sees *that*, he "faints." And how does faith see "the goodness of the Lord" in chastisements? By viewing them as proceeding from God's love, as ordered by His wisdom, and as designed for our profit.

As the bee sucks honey out of the bitter herb, so faith may extract much good from afflictions. Faith can turn water into wine, and make bread out of stones. Unbelief gives up in the hour of trial and sinks into despair; but faith keeps the head above water and hopefully looks for deliverance. Human reason may not be able to understand the mysterious ways of God, but faith knows the sorest disappointments and the heaviest losses are among the "all things" which work together for our good. Carnal friends may tell us that it is useless to strive any longer; but faith says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15). What a wonderful promise is that in Psalm 91:15, "I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him." Ah, but faith alone can feel that Presence, and faith alone can enjoy now the assured deliverance. It was because of the joy set before Him (by the exercise of faith) that Christ "endured the cross," and only as we view God's precious promises will *we* patiently endure *our* cross.

Sixth, the Christian is to "endure" chastisement *hopefully*. Though quite distinct, the line of demarcation between faith and hope is not a very broad one, and in some of the things said above we have rather anticipated what belongs to this particular point. "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for

what a man *seeth*, why doth he yet *hope for*? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Romans 8:24, 25). This passage clearly intimates that “hope” relates to *the future*. “Hope” in Scripture is far more than a warrantless wish: it is a firm conviction and a comforting expectation of a future good. Now inasmuch as chastisement, patiently and believably endured, is certain to issue in blessing, hope is to be exercised. “When He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10): that is the language of confident expectation.

While it be true that faith supports the heart under trial, it is equally a fact – though less recognized – that *hope* buoys it up. When the wings of hope are spread, the soul is able to soar above the present distress, and inhale the invigorating air of future bliss. “For our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: *while* we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen” (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18): that also is the language of joyous anticipation. No matter how dark the clouds which now cover thy horizon, ere long the Son of righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings. Then seek to walk in the steps of our father Abraham, “who against hope, believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations” (Romans 4:18).

Seventh, the Christian is to “endure” chastisement *thankfully*. Be grateful, my despondent brother, that the great God cares so much for a worm of the earth as to be at such pains in your spiritual education. O what a marvel that the Maker of heaven and earth should go to so much trouble in His son-training of us! Fail not, then, to thank Him for His goodness, His faithfulness, His patience, toward thee. “We are chastened of the Lord (now) that we should not be condemned with the world” in the day to come (1 Corinthians 11:32): what cause for praise is this! If the Lord Jesus, on the awful night of His betrayal, “sang a hymn” (Matthew 26:30),

how much more should we, under our infinitely lighter sorrows, sound forth the praises of our God. May Divine grace enable both writer and reader to “endure chastening” in this sevenfold spirit, and then will God be glorified and we advantaged.

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.” This does not mean that upon our discharge of the duty enjoined God will act toward us “as with sons”; for this He does in the chastisements themselves, as the apostle has clearly shown. No, rather, the force of these words is, If ye *endure* chastening, then you have the evidence in yourself that God deals with you as sons. In other words, the more I am enabled to conduct myself under troubles as becometh a child of God, the clearer is my proof of my Divine adoption. The new birth is known by its fruits, and the more my spiritual graces are exercised under testing, the more do I make manifest my regeneration. Furthermore, the clearer the evidence of my regeneration, the clearer do I perceive the dealings of a *Father* toward me in His discipline.

The patient endurance of chastenings is not only of great price in the sight of God, but is of inestimable value unto the souls of them that believe. While it be true that the sevenfold description we have given above depicts not the spirit in which all Christians *do* receive chastening, but rather the spirit in which they *ought to* receive it, and that all coming short thereof is to be mourned and confessed before God; nevertheless, it remains that no truly born-again person continues to either utterly “despise” the rod or completely “faint” beneath it. No, herein lies a fundamental difference between the good-ground hearer and the stony-ground one: of the former it is written, “the righteous also shall hold on his way” (Job 17:9); of the latter, it is recorded, “Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the Word, immediately he is offended” (Matthew 13:21).

A mere suffering of things calamitous is not, in itself, any evidence of our acceptance with God. Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upwards, so that afflictions or chastisements are no pledges of our adoption; but if we “endure” them with any measure of real faith, submission and perseverance, so that we “faint not” under them – abandon not the Faith or entirely cease seeking to serve the Lord – then do we demonstrate our Divine sonship. So too it is the proper frame of our minds and the due exercise of our hearts which lets in a sense of God’s gracious design toward us in His chastenings. The Greek word for “dealeth with us as with sons” is very blessed: literally it signifies “he *offereth Himself* unto us:” he proposeth Himself not as an enemy, but as a Friend; not as toward strangers, but as toward His own beloved children.

“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Hebrews 12:8). These words present the reverse side of the argument established in the preceding verse: since it be true, both in the natural and in the spiritual realm, that disciplinary dealing is inseparable from the relation between fathers and sons, so that an evidence of adoption is to be clearly inferred therefrom, it necessarily follows that those who are “without chastisement” are not children at all. What we have here is a testing and discriminative rule, which it behooves each of us to measure himself by. That we may not err therein, let us attend to its several terms.

When the apostle says, “But if ye be without chastisement, where of all are partakers,” it is obvious that his words are not to be taken in their widest latitude: the word “all” refers not to men, but to the “sons” of whom he is speaking. In like manner, “chastisement” is not here to be taken for everything that is grievous and afflictive, for none entirely escape trouble in this life. But *comparatively* speaking, there are those who are largely exempt: such as the Psalmist referred to when he said, “For there are no bands in *their* death: but



their strength is firm. *They* are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men” (Psalm 73:4, 5). No, it is God’s *disciplinary* dealings which the apostle is speaking of, corrective instruction which promotes holiness. There are many professors who, whatever trials they may experience, are without any Divine *chastisement* for their good.

Those who are “without chastisement” are but “bastards.” It is common knowledge that bastards are despised and neglected – though unjustly so – by those who illegitimately begot them: they are not the objects of that love and care as those begotten in wedlock. This solemn fact has its counterpart in the religious realm. There is a large class who are destitute of Divine chastisements, for they give no evidence that they receive them, endure them, or improve them. There is a yet more solemn meaning in this word: under the law “bastards” *had no right of inheritance*: “A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 23:2): No cross, no crown: to be without God’s disciplinary chastenings now, means that we must be excluded from His presence hereafter. Here, then, is a further reason why the Christian should be contented with his present lot: the Father’s rod upon him now evidences his title unto the Inheritance in the day to come.



## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*Hebrews 12:9*

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### SECTION FIVE

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**T**HE APOSTLE PAUL did not, like so many of our moderns, hurry through a subject and dismiss an unpleasant theme with a brief sentence or two. No, he could say truthfully, “I kept back *nothing* that was profitable unto you.” His chief concern was not to please, but to *help* his hearers and readers. Well did he know the tendency of the heart to turn away quickly from what is searching and humbling, unto that which is more attractive and consoling. But so far from acceding to this spirit, he devoted as much attention unto exhortation as instruction, unto reproving as comforting, unto duties as expounding promises; while the latter was given its due place the former was not neglected. It behooves each servant of God to study the methods of the apostles, and seek wisdom and grace to emulate their practice; only thus will they preserve the balance of Truth, and be delivered from “handling the Word deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:2).

Some years ago, when the editor was preaching a series of sermons on Hebrews 12:3–11, several members of the congregation

intimated they were growing weary of hearing so much upon the subject of Divine chastisement. Alas, the very ones who chafed so much at hearing about God's rod, have since been smitten the most severely by it. Should any of our present readers feel the same way about the writer's treatment of the same passage, he would lovingly warn them that, though these articles may seem gloomy and irksome while prosperity be smiling upon them, nevertheless they will be well advised to "harken and hear *for the time to come*" (Isaiah 42:23). The sun will not always be shining upon you, dear reader, and if you now store these thoughts up in your memory, they may stand you in good stead when your sky becomes overcast.

Sooner or later, this portion of Holy Writ *will apply* very pertinently unto each of their cases. God "scourgeth *every* son whom He receiveth." None of the followers of "The Man of sorrows" are exempted from sorrow. It has been truly said that "God had one Son without sin, but none without suffering." So much depends upon *how* we "endure" suffering: the spirit in which it be received, the graces which are exercised by it, and the improvement which we make of it. Our attitude toward God, and the response which we make unto His disciplinary dealings with us, means that we shall either honor or dishonor Him, and suffer loss or reap gain therefrom. Manifold are our obligations to comport ourselves becomingly when God is pleased to scourge us, and many and varied are the motives and arguments which the Spirit, through the apostle, here presents to us for this end.

In the verse which is now to be before us a further reason is given showing the need of the Christian's duty to meekly bear God's chastening. First, the apostle had reminded the saints of the teaching of Scripture, verse 5: how significant that he began with that! Second, he had comforted them with the assurance that the rod is wielded not by wrath, but in tender solicitude, verse 6. Third, he affirmed that God chastens all His children without exception,

bastards only escaping, verses 7, 8. Now he reminds us that we had natural parents who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Our earthly fathers have the right, because of their relationship, to discipline us, and we acquiesced. If, then, it was right and meet for us to submit to their corrections, how much more ought we to be in subjection unto our heavenly Father when He reproves us.

“Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Hebrews 12:9). The opening “Furthermore” is really humbling and searching. One would think sufficient had been said in the previous verses to make us be submissive under and thankful for the tender discipline of our God. Is it not enough to be told that the Scriptures teach us to expect chastisements, and exhort us not to despise them? Is it not sufficient to be assured that these chastisements proceed from the very heart of our Father, being appointed and regulated by His love? No, a “furthermore” is needed by us! The Holy Spirit deigns to supply further reasons for bringing our unruly hearts into subjection. This should indeed humble us, for the implication is clear that we are *slow* to heed and bow beneath the rod. Yea, is it not sadly true that the older we become, the more need there is for our being chastened?

The writer has been impressed by the fact, both in his study of the Word and his observation of fellow-Christians, that, as a general rule, God uses the rod very little and very lightly upon the babes and younger members of His family, but that He employs it more frequently and severely on mature Christians. We have often heard older saints warning younger brethren and sisters of *their* great danger, yet it is striking to observe that Scripture records not a single instance of a young saint disgracing his profession. Recall the histories of young Joseph, the Hebrew maid in Naaman’s household, David as a stripling engaging Goliath, Daniel’s early

days, and his three youthful companions in the furnace; and it will be found that all of them quitted themselves nobly. On the other hand, there are numerous examples where men in middle life and of gray hairs grievously dishonored their Lord.

It is true that young Christians *are* feeblest, and with rare exceptions, they *know* it; and therefore does God manifest His grace and power by upholding them: it is the “lambs” which He carries in His arms! But some older Christians seem far less conscious of their danger, and so God often suffers them to have a fall, that He may stain the pride of their self-glory, and that others may see it is *nothing* in the flesh – standing, rank, age, or at attainments – which ensures our safety; but that *He* upholds the humble and casts down the proud. David did not fall into his great sin until he had reached the prime of life. Lot did not transgress most grossly until he was an old man. Isaac seems to have become a glutton in his old age, and was as a vessel no longer “meet for the Master’s use,” which rusted out rather than wore out. It was after a life of walking with God, and building the ark, that Noah disgraced himself. The worst sin of Moses was committed not at the beginning but at the end of the wilderness journey. Hezekiah became puffed up with pride in the sunset of his life. What warnings are these!

God thus shows us there is no protection in years. Yeah, added years seem to call for increased chastening. Often there is more grumbling and complaining among the aged pilgrims than the younger ones: it is true their nerves can stand less, but God’s grace is sufficient for worn-out nerves. Often there is more occupation with self and circumstances among the fathers and mothers in Israel, and less talking of Christ and His wondrous love, than there is among the babes. Yes, there is, much need for all of us to heed the opening “furthermore” of our text. Every physician will tell us there are some diseases which become more troublesome in middle life, and others which are incident to old age. The same is

true of different forms of sinning. If we are more liable to certain sins in our youth, we are in greater danger of others in advanced years. Undoubtedly it is the case that the older we get, the more need there is to heed this “furthermore” which prefaces the call of our being in subjection to the Father of spirits. If we do not need more grace, certain it is that we need as much grace when we are grown old as while we are growing up.

The aged meet with as many temptations as do young Christians. They are tempted to live in the past, rather than in the future. They are tempted to take things easier, spiritually as well as temporarily, so that it has to be said of some “ye *did* run well.” O to be like Paul “the aged,” who was in full harness to the end. They are tempted to be unduly occupied with their increasing infirmities; but is it not written “the Spirit also *helpeth* our infirmities”! Yet, because this is affirmed, we must not think there is no longer need to earnestly *seek* His help. This comforting word is given in order that we *should* frequently and confidently pray for this very thing. If it were not recorded, we might doubt His readiness to do so, and wonder if we were asking “according to His will.” Because *it is* recorded, when feeling our “infirmities” press most heavily upon us, let us cry, “O Holy Spirit of God, do as Thou hast said, and help us.”

In this connection let us remind ourselves of that verse, “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things: so that thy youth is renewed *like the eagle’s*” (Psalm 103:5). The eagle is a bird renowned for its *longevity*, often living to be more than 100 years old. The eagle is also the high-soaring bird, building its nest on the mountain summit. But *how* is the eagle’s youth *renewed*? By a new crop of feathers, by the rejuvenation of its wings. And that is precisely what some middle-aged and elderly Christians need: the rejuvenation of their spiritual wings – the wings of faith, of hope, of zeal, of love for souls, of devotedness to Christ. So many leave their first love, lose the joy

of their espousals, and instead of setting before younger Christians a bright example of trustfulness and cheerfulness, they often discourage by gloominess and slothfulness. Thus God's chastenings increase in severity and frequency!

Dear friend, instead of saying, "The days of my usefulness are over," rather reason, The night cometh when no man can work; therefore I must make the most of my opportunities while it is yet called day. For your encouragement let it be stated that the most active worker in a church of which the editor was pastor, was seventy-seven years old when he went there, and during his stay of three and a half years she did more for the Lord, and was a greater stimulus to him, than any member of that church. She lived another eight years, and they were, to the very end, filled with devoted service to Christ. We believe that the Lord will yet say of her, as of another woman, "She hath done what she could." Oh brethren and sisters, especially you who are feeling the weight of years, heed that word, "Be not weary in well doing, for in due season, we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

"Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence." It is the duty of children to give the reverence of obedience unto the just commands of their parents, and the reverence of submission to their correction when disobedient. As parents have a charge from God to minister correction to their children when it is due – and not spoil them unto their ruin – so children have a command from God to receive parental reproof in a proper spirit, and not to be discontented, stubborn, or rebellious. For a child to be insubordinate under correction, evidences a double fault; the very correction shows a fault has been committed, and insubordination under correction is only adding wrong to wrong. "We gave them reverence," records the attitude of dutiful children toward their sires: they neither ran away from home in a huff, nor became so discouraged as to quit the path of duty.

From this law of the human home, the apostle points out the humble and submissive conduct which is due unto God when He disciplines His children: “Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits?” The “much rather” points to a contrast suggested by the analogy: that contrast is at least fourfold. First, the former chastening proceeded from those who were our fathers according to the flesh; the other is given by Him who is our heavenly Father. Second, the one was sometimes administered in imperfect knowledge and irritable temper; the other comes from unerring wisdom and untiring love. Third, the one was during but a brief period, when we were children; the other continues throughout the whole of their Christian life. Fourth, the one was designed for our temporal good; the other has in view our spiritual and eternal welfare. Then how much more should we readily submit unto the latter.

“Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits?” By nature we are not in subjection. We are born into this world filled with the spirit of insubordination: as the descendents of our rebellious first parents, we inherit their evil nature. “Man is born like a wild ass’s colt” (Job 11:12). This is very unpalatable and humbling, but nevertheless it is true. As Isaiah 53:6 tells us, “we have turned every one to *his own way*,” and *that* is one of opposition to the revealed will of God. Even at conversion this wild and rebellious nature is not eradicated. A new nature is given, but the old one lusts against it. It is because of this that discipline and chastisement are needed by us, and the great design of these is to bring us into subjection unto the Father of spirits. To be “in subjection unto the Father” is a phrase of extensive import, and it is well that we should understand its various significations.

1. It denotes an acquiescence in God’s sovereign right to do with us as He pleases. “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth: because thou didst



it” (Psalm 39:9). It is the duty of saints to be mute under the rod and silent beneath the sharpest afflictions. But this is only possible as we see the hand of *God* in them. If His hand be not seen in the trial, the heart will do nothing but fret and fume. “And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruah? so let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, *Wherefore* hast thou done so? And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: How much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse, for *the Lord* hath bidden him” (2 Samuel 16:10, 11). What an example of complete submission to the sovereign will of the Most High was this! David knew that Shimei could not curse him without God’s permission.

“This will set my heart at rest,  
What my God appoints is best.”

But with rare exceptions many chastenings are needed to bring us to this place, and to keep us there.

2. *It implies a renunciation of self-will.* To be in subjection unto the Father presupposes a surrendering and resigning ourselves to Him. A blessed illustration of this is found in Leviticus 10:1–3, “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censor, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron *held his peace.*” Consider the circumstances. Aaron’s two sons, most probably intoxicated at the time, were suddenly cut off by Divine judgment. Their father had no warning to prepare him for this trial;

yet he “held his peace!” O quarrel not against Jehovah: be clay in the hands of the Potter: take Christ’s yoke upon you, and learn of Him who was “meek and lowly in heart.”

3. *It signifies an acknowledgment of God’s righteousness and wisdom in all His dealings with us.* We must vindicate God. This is what the Psalmist did: “I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are *right*, and that Thou *in faithfulness* hast afflicted me” (Psalm 119:75). Let us see to it that Wisdom is ever justified by her children: let our confession of her be, “Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and upright are Thy judgments” (Psalm 119:137). Whatever be sent, we must vindicate the Sender of all things: the Judge of all the earth cannot do wrong. Stifle, then, the rebellious murmur, What have I done to deserve such treatment by God? And say with the Psalmist, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities” (Psalm 103:10). Why, my reader, if God dealt with us only according to the strict rule of His justice, we had been in Hell long ago: “If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark (“impute”) iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Psalm 130:3).

The Babylonian captivity was the severest affliction which God ever brought upon His earthly people during Old Testament times, yet even then a renewed heart acknowledged God’s righteousness in it: “And now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty and terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on Thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. *Howbeit* Thou art *just* in all that is brought upon us: for Thou hast done *right*, but we have done wickedly” (Nehemiah 9:32, 33). God’s enemies may talk of His injustice; but let His children proclaim His righteousness. Because God is good, He can do nothing but what is right and good.

4. *It includes a recognition of His care and a sense of His love.* There is a sulking submission, and there is a cheerful submission. There is a fatalistic submission which takes this attitude – this is inevitable, so I must bow to it; and there is a thankful submission, receiving with gratitude for whatever God may be pleased to send us. “It is *good* for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes” (Psalm 119:71). The Psalmist viewed His chastisements with the eye of faith, and doing so he perceived the love behind them. Remember that when God brings His people into the wilderness it is that they may learn more of His sufficiency, and that when He casts them into the furnace, it is that they may enjoy more of His presence.

5. *It involves an active performance of His will.* True submission unto the “Father of spirits” is something more than a passive thing. The other meanings of this expression which we have considered above are more or less of a negative character, but there is a positive and active side to it as well, and it is important that this should be recognized by us. To be “in subjection” to God also means that we are to walk in His precepts and run in the way of His commandments. Negatively, we are not to be murmuring rebels; positively, we are to be obedient children. We are required to be submissive unto God’s Word, so that our thoughts are formed and our ways regulated by it. There is not only a suffering of God’s will, but a *doing* of it – an actual performance of duty. When we utter that petition in the prayer which the Savior has given us, “Thy will be done,” something more is meant than a pious acquiescence unto the pleasure of the Almighty: it also signifies, may Thy will be *performed* by me. Subjection “unto the Father of spirits,” then, is the practical owning of His Lordship.

Two reasons for such subjection are suggested in our text. First, *because the One with whom we have to do is our Father.* O how profoundly thankful we should be that the Lord God stands revealed

to us as “Father” – our Father, because the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and *He* rendered perfect obedience unto Him. It is but right and meet that children should honor their parents by being in complete subjection to them: not to do so is to ignore their relationship, despise their authority, and slight their love. How much more ought we to be in subjection unto our heavenly Father: there is nothing tyrannical about Him: His commandments are not grievous: He has only our good at heart. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath be stowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1), then let us earnestly endeavor to express our gratitude by dutifully walking before Him as obedient children, and no matter how mysterious may be His dealings with us, say with the Savior, “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

The particular title of God found in our text calls for a brief comment. It is placed in antithesis from “fathers of our flesh,” which has reference to their begetting of our bodies. True, our bodies also are a real creation on the part of God, yet in connection wherewith He is pleased to use human instrumentalities. But in connection with the immaterial part of our beings, God is the immediate and alone Creator of them. As the renowned Owen said, “The soul is immediately created and infused; having no other father but God Himself,” and rightly did that eminent theologian add, “This is the fundamental reason of our perfect subjection unto God in all afflictions, namely, that our very souls are His, the immediate product of His Divine power, and under His rule alone. May He not do as He wills with His own?” The expression “Father of spirits,” refutes, then, the error of traducianists, who suppose that the soul, equally with the body, is transmitted by our parents. In Numbers 16:22 He is called “the God of the spirits of all flesh” which refers to all men naturally; while the “Father of spirits” in our text includes the new nature in the regenerate.

The second reason for our subjection to the Father is, *because this is the secret of true happiness*, which is pointed out in the final words of our text “and live.” The first meaning of those words is, “and be happy.” This is clear from Deuteronomy 5:33, “Ye shall walk in the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that ye may live, and that it may be well with you, and that ye may prolong your days in the land which ye shall possess:” observe the words “prolong your days” are added to “that ye may *live*,” which obviously signifies “that ye may be happy” – compare Exodus 10:17, where Pharaoh called the miseries of the plagues “this death.” Life ceases to be *life* when we are wretched. It is the making of God’s will our haven, which secures the true resting-place for the heart. The rebellious are fretful and miserable, but “great peace have they which love Thy law and nothing shall offend them” (Psalm 119:165). “Take My yoke upon you,” said Christ, “and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” Alas, the majority of professing Christians are so little in subjection to God, they have just enough religion to make them miserable.

“Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits *and live*?” No doubt words of this verse point to a designed contrast from Deuteronomy 21:18–21, “If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place. . . . And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, *that he die*.” “The increase of the spiritual life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, is that whereunto they (the words “and live”) tend” (John Owen).



## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*Hebrews 12:10*

### SECTION SIX

**W**OULD ANY CHRISTIAN in his right mind dare to pray, Let me not be afflicted, no matter what good it should do me? And if he were unwilling and afraid to pray thus, why should he murmur when it so falls out? Alas, what a wide breach there is, usually, between our praying and the rest of our conduct. Again; if our rescuer dislocated a shoulder when pulling us out of the water in which we were drowning, would we be angry with him? Of course not. Then why fret against the Lord when He afflicts the body in order to better the soul? If God takes away outward comfort and fills us with inward peace, if he removes our worldly wealth but imparts to us more of the true riches, then, instead of having ground for complaint, we have an abundant cause for thanksgiving and praise. Then why should I fear to enter the dark shaft of tribulation if persuaded that it leads to the gold mines of spiritual experience.

In Scripture, afflictions are compared to fire that purges away the dross (1 Peter 1:7), to the fan which drives away the chaff

(Matthew 3:12), to a pruning-hook which cuts off superfluous branches and makes more fruitful the others that remain (John 15:2), to physic that purges away poisonous matter (Isaiah 27:9), to plowing and harrowing the ground that it may be prepared to receive good seed (Jeremiah 4:3). Then why should we be so upset when God is pleased to use the fire upon us in order to remove our dross, to employ the fan so as to winnow away the chaff, to take the pruning-hook to lop off the superfluities of our souls, to give us physic to purge out our corruptions and filth, to drive the plow into us so as to break up our fallow ground and to destroy the weeds which grow in our souls? Should we not rather rejoice that He will not leave us alone in our carnality, but rather fit us to become partakers of His holiness?

A little child requires much coaxing (at times, something more!) in order to make him take his medicine. He may be very ill, and mother may earnestly assure him that the unpleasant potion will bring sure relief; but the little one cries out, "I cannot take it, it is so nasty." But adults, generally, need not have the doctor argue and plead with them: they will swallow the bitterest remedy if convinced that it will do them good. The application of this to spiritual matters is obvious. Those Christians who are but spiritual babes, fret and fume when called upon to endure Divine chastisement, knowing not the gains they will receive if it be accepted in the right spirit. But those who have grown in grace, and become men in Christ, who know that all things work together for good to them that love God, and who have learned by experience the precious fruits which issue from sanctified afflictions, accept from God the bitterest cup, and thank Him for it.

But alas, many of God's people are but infants experimentally, and need much coaxing to reconcile them to the cup of trial. Therefore is it needful to present to our consideration one argument after another. Such is the case here in Hebrews 12: if one line of

reasoning does not suffice, perhaps another will. The Christian is very skeptical and takes much convincing. We have heard a person say to one who claims he has done, or can do, some remarkable thing, “You must *show me* before I will believe you.” Most of us are very much like that in connection with spiritual things. Though the Scriptures assure us, again and again, that chastisement proceeds from our Father’s love, and is designed for our good, yet we are slow, very slow, to really believe it. Therefore does the apostle here proceed from one consideration to another so as to assure the hearts and establish the faith of his afflicted brethren upon this important subject.

O that our hearts might be so taught by the Spirit, our understandings so enlightened, our faith so strengthened by Him, that we would be more grateful and increasingly thankful for the merciful discipline of our Father. What a proof of His love is this, that in His chastening of us, His object is to bring us nearer Himself and make us more like His blessed Son. The more highly we prize health, the more willing are we to take that which would cure our sickness; and the more we value holiness (which is the health of our souls) the gladder shall we be for that which is a means to increase the same in us. We are on a low plane of spiritual experience, if we do nothing more than simply “bow” to God’s hand. Scripture says, “Giving *thanks* always, for *all* things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:20); and again it exhorts us “Rejoice in the Lord alway” (Philippians 4:4). We are to “glory in tribulation” (Romans 5:3), and *we shall* when we perceive more clearly and fully what blessed fruits are brought forth under the pruning knife.

“For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness” (Hebrews 12:10). This is a continuation of what was before us in the previous verse. A further reason is given why Christian



should be “in subjection unto” their heavenly Father, when His correcting rod is laid upon them. Not only is it becoming for them to do so, because of the relationship which exists between them: but it is also meet they should act thus, because of the gains they receive thereby. The consideration which the apostle now presents to the attention of the afflicted saints is really a double one. First, the chastisement we received from our earthly parents had reference mainly to our good in this life, whereas the disciplinary dealings of our heavenly Father looks forward to the life to come (2 Corinthians 4:17). Second, the chastisement of our earthly parents was often a matter of their caprice and sometimes issued from irritability of temper, but the Rod of our heavenly Father is wielded by infinite goodness and wisdom, and has in view our well-being.

We regard the words “for they verily *for a few days* chastened us” as referring not so much to the brief season of our childhood, but more to the fact that our parents had only our *temporal* interests in view: whereas God has our *eternal* welfare before Him. “The apostle seems to bring in this circumstance to contrast the dealings of earthly parents with those of God. One of the circumstances is that the corrections of earthly parents had a much less important object than those of God. They related to this life – life so brief that it may be said to continue but a “few days.” Yet, in order to secure the benefit to be derived for so short a period from fatherly correction, we submitted without murmuring. Much more cheerfully ought we to submit to that discipline from the hand of our heavenly Father which is designed to extend its benefits through eternity” (Albert Barnes).

The added words “after their own pleasure” or “as seemed good” to them, points to another contrast between the disciplinary dealings of our earthly parents and those of our heavenly Father. In their infirmity, sometimes the rod was used upon us in a fit of anger,

rather than from a loving desire to reform our manners. “Meaning that it was sometimes done arbitrarily, or under the influence of passion. This is an additional reason we should submit to God. We submitted to our earthly parents, though their correction was sometimes passionate, and was designed to gratify their own pleasure rather than to promote our good. There is much of this kind of punishment in families; but there is none of it under the administration of God. ‘*But He for our profit:*’ never from passion, from caprice, from the love of power or superiority, but always for our good” (Albert Barnes).

Now the particular contribution which our present verse makes to the subject of chastisement is, the apostle here makes known the general end or design of God in the same, namely “our profit.” And let it be pointed out that whatsoever He purposes must surely come to pass, for He will make the means He employs effectual unto the accomplishment of His end. Many are the blessings comprehended and various other fruits produced through and by means of Divine chastisement. This word “for our profit” is a very embracing one, including the development of our characters, the enrichment of our spiritual lives, a closer conformity to the image of Christ. The same truth is found again in the “that we might be partakers of His holiness:” that our lusts might be mortified, our graces vivified, our souls sanctified. Whatever be the form, degree, or duration of our afflictions, all is ordered by infinite wisdom so as to secure this object. But to particularize: the benefits of Divine chastisement –

1. *It weans us from the world.* One of the greatest surprises of the writer’s Christian life in connection with his fellow-saints has been, not their ignorance, nor even their inconsistencies, but their *earthliness*, their reluctance to leave this world. As “strangers and pilgrims” we should be longing and yearning for our Heavenly

Home; as those who are away from Him whom they love best, we should desire to “*depart* and be with Him” (Philippians 1:23). Paul did. Christ has promised to return for His people, yet how few of them are daily crying, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” How rarely we hear them saying, in the language of the mother of Sisera, “Is His chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of His chariot?”

“And all the trials here we see  
Should make us long to be with Thee.”

Scripture speaks of this world as a “dry and thirsty land, where no water is” (Psalm 63:1), and God intends for us to *prove* this in our experiences. His Word also affirms that this world is a “dark place” (2 Peter 1:19), and He means for us to discover that this *is* so.

One would think that after the soul had once seen the King in His beauty, it would henceforth discover no attractions elsewhere. One would suppose that once we had quenched our thirst in the Fountain of Living Waters, we would no more want to drink from the unsatisfying and polluted cisterns of this world. Surely now that we have experienced a taste and foretaste of Heaven itself, we shall be repelled and nauseated by the poor husks this world has to offer. But alas! the “old man” is still in us, unchanged; and though Divine grace subdues his activities, still he is very much alive. It is because of this that we are called on to “crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts.” And this is not only an unpalatable, but a very hard task. Therefore does God in His mercy help us: help us by chastenings, which serve to loosen the roots of our souls downward and tighten the anchor-hold of our hearts Heavenward.

This God does in various ways. Sometimes He causes us to lose our confidence in and draw us away from fellowship with worldlings by receiving cruel treatment at their hands. “Come out from among them, and be ye separate” is the Lord’s word to His people. But they are slow to heed; oftentimes they must be *driven out*. So

with worldly pleasures: God often makes the grapes of earthly joys bitter to our taste, so that we should no longer seek after them. It is earthly disappointments and worldly disillusionment which make us sigh for our Heavenly Home. While the Hebrews enjoyed the land of Goshen they were content: hard and cruel bondage was needed to make them ready to leave for the Promised Land. We were once familiar with a Christian who had formed a habit of meeting each worldly difficulty or trial to the flesh by saying, “This is only another nail in my coffin.” But that is a very gloomy way of viewing things: rather should the children of God say after each trial or affliction, “That severs another strand in the rope which binds me to this world, and makes me long all the more for Heaven.”

2. *It casts us back the more upon God.* By nature we are filled with the spirit of independency. The fallen sons of Adam are like wild asses’ colts. Chastisement is designed to empty us of our self-sufficiency, to make us feel weakness and helplessness. If “in their affliction they will seek Me early” (Hosea 5:15), then surely afflictions are for our “profit.” Trials and troubles often drive us to our knees; sickness and sorrow make us seek unto the Lord. It is very noticeable in the four Gospels how rarely men and women that were in health and strength sought out Christ; it was trouble and illness which brought them to the great Physician. A nobleman came to Christ – why? Because his son was at the point of death. Jairus sought out the Master – why? Because his little daughter was so low. The Canaanitish woman interviewed the Lord Jesus – why? On behalf of her tormented daughter. The sisters of Lazarus sent a message to the absent Savior – why? Because their brother was sick.

Afflictions may be very bitter, but they are fine tonic for the soul, and are medicine which God often uses on us. Most vividly is this illustrated in Psalm 107 – read carefully verses 11 to 28. Note

that it is when men are “brought down,” when they are “afflicted,” when they are “at their wits’ end” that they “cry unto the Lord in their trouble.” Yes, it is “trouble” which makes us turn unto the Lord, not in a mechanical and formal way, but in deep earnestness. Remember that it is the “effectual *fervent* prayer of a righteous man that availeth much.” When you observe that the fire in your room is getting dull, you do not always put on more coal, but simply *stir* with the poker; so God often uses the black poker of adversity in order that the flames of devotion may burn more brightly.

Ah, my brethren, all of us delight in being made to lie down in the “green pastures” and being led beside the “still waters;” yet it would not be for God’s glory nor for our own highest good to luxuriate spiritually at all times. And why not? Because our hearts would soon be more occupied with the blessings rather than with the Blessor Himself. Oftentimes the sheep has to be brought into the dry and desolate wilderness, that they may be made more conscious of their dependency upon the Shepherd. May we not discern here one reason why some saints so quickly lose their assurance: they are occupied more with their graces or comfortable feelings than they are with the Giver of them. God is a jealous God, and will not tolerate idols in the hearts of His people. A sense of acceptance in Christ is indeed a blessed thing, yet it becomes a hindrance if it be treasured more highly than the Savior Himself.

3. *It makes the promises of God more precious to us.* Trouble often acts on us like a sharp knife which opens the truth of God to us and our hearts unto the truth. Experience unlocks passages which were otherwise closed. There is many a text in the Bible which no commentator can helpfully expound to a child of God: it must be interpreted by experience. Paul wrote his profoundest epistles while in prison; John was “in tribulation” on Patmos when he received the Revelation. If you go down into a deep well or mine in

the daytime, you will then see the shining of stars which were not visible from the Earth's surface; so God often brings us low in order that we may perceive the shining beauty of some of His comforting assurances. Note how Jacob, in Genesis 32, pleaded God's promises when he heard that Esau was approaching with four hundred men! The promises of resurrection mean far more unto Christians when some of their loved ones have been removed by death.

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned” (Isaiah 43:2) means far more to afflicted souls than it can to those who are not under the rod. So, too, the many “fear not” promises are most valued when our strength fails us and we are ready to sink under despair. As the late C.H. Spurgeon was wont to say, “There are some verses written, as it were, in a secret ink, which must be held before the fire of adversity before they become visible.” There are many passages in Job, the Psalms, and the Lamentations of Jeremiah which do not appeal to one while the sun is shining; but which, in times of adversity, are like the welcome beams of the moon on a dark night. It was his painful thorn in the flesh which taught Paul the blessedness of that text, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

4. *It qualifies us to sympathize with others.* If we have never trod the vale of sorrow and affliction we are really unable to “weep with those that weep.” There are some surgeons who would be more tender if they had suffered from broken bones themselves. If we have never known much trouble, we can be but poor comforters to others. Even of our Savior it is written, “For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succor them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:18). Bunyan could never have written the book which he did, unless God had permitted the devil to tempt and buffet him severely for so many years. How clearly is all this

brought out in 2 Corinthians 1:4: “Who comforteth us in all our tribulations, *that we* may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, *by* the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Luther frequently said, “Three things make a good preacher: prayer, meditation, and *temptation*.”

5. *It demonstrates to us the blessedness and sufficiency of Divine grace.* “My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). But in order to *prove* this, we have to be brought into the place of severe testing and trial, and made to feel our own incompetency and nothingness. Brethren, if you have prospered in business all your lives, and have always had an easy time financially, then it is probable you know very little about God’s strength being perfected in your weakness. If you have been healthy all your lives and have never suffered much weakness and pain, then you are not likely to know much about the strength of God. If you have never been visited with trying situations which bring you to your wits’ end, or by heart-rending bereavement, you may not have discovered much of the sufficiency of Divine grace. You have *read* about it in books, *or heard* others speak of it, but this is a very different thing from having an *experimental* acquaintance of it for yourself. It is much tribulation which brings out the sufficiency of God’s strength to support under the severest trials, and demonstrates that His grace *can* sustain the heart under the heaviest losses.

It is in the stormiest weather the captain gives most heed to the steering of his ship; so it is in seasons of stress and grief that Christians pay most attention to, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). If Israel had journeyed directly to Canaan, they would have missed the tender care of Jehovah in the wilderness. If Lazarus had not died, Martha and Mary would

not have received such a demonstration of Christ as the Resurrection and the Life. And if *you*, my brother, my sister, had not been cast into the furnace of affliction, you would not have known the nearness and preciousness of His presence with you there. Yes, God intends us to *prove* the reality and sufficiency of His grace.

6. *It develops our spiritual graces.* This is clearly set forth in that familiar passage Romans 5:3–5: “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed.” This “rejoicing” is not in tribulations considered in themselves, but because the Christian knows they are appointed by his Father, and because of their beneficial effects. Three of these effects or spiritual graces thus developed are here mentioned. First, tribulation worketh “patience.” Patience never thrives except under buffetings and disappointments: it is not even called into exercise while things are going smoothly and pleasantly. Sanctified tribulations call into activity that strength and fortitude which is evidenced by a submissive endurance of suffering. The patience here referred to signifies deliverance from murmuring, refusing to take things into our own hands (which only causes additional trouble), a contented waiting for God’s time of deliverance, and a persevering continuance in the path of duty.

Second, patience worketh experience, that is a *vital* experience of the reality of what we profess; a personal acquaintance with that which before we knew only theoretically; an experience of the sufficiency of Divine grace to support and sustain; an experience of God’s faithfulness, that He *is* “a very present help in trouble”; an experience of the preciousness of Christ, such as the three Hebrews had in the furnace. The Greek word for “experience” also means “the obtaining of proof.” The patient submission which tribulation works in the saint *proves* both to him and to his brethren the reality



of his trust in God: it makes manifest the fact that the faith which he professes is genuine. Instead of his faith being overcome, it triumphs. The test of a ship is to weather the storm; so it is with faith. Real faith ever says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." Third, experience worketh hope. This is a grace which anticipates the future. While circumstances are as we like them, our outlook is mainly confined to the present: but sorrows and trials make us long for the future bliss. "As an eagle stirreth up her nest . . . so the Lord led Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:11, 12). God removes us from our comfortable resting places for the purpose of teaching us to use the wings of hope.

7. *It brings us into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ.* The cross is a symbol of Christian discipleship. Like the scars which the wounded soldier prizes above all other distinctions, so our sufferings are the proof of our oneness with Christ (Romans 8:17). Not only so, they make us appreciate the more what He endured for us. While we have plenty, we cannot properly estimate or appreciate the poverty which our Savior endured. While we enjoy a comfortable bed we cannot truly sympathize with Him who "had not where to lay His head." It is not till some familiar friend, on whom we counted, has basely betrayed our trust, that we can enter into something of what the Savior suffered through the perfidy of Judas. It is only when some brother has denied you, that you begin to understand what Christ felt, when Peter denied Him. As we, in some small measure, obtain an experimental acquaintance with such trials, it makes Christ increasingly precious to us, and enables us to appreciate the more all that He went through on our behalf. In a coming day we are going to share His throne; now we are privileged to taste His cross.

If, then, trials and tribulations, under God, produce such delightful fruits, then *welcome* chastisements that are for "our

profit.” Let the rains of disappointment come if they water the plants of spiritual graces. Let the winds of adversity blow if they serve to root more securely in grace the trees of the Lords planting. Let the sun of prosperity be eclipsed if this brings us into closer communion with the Light of life. Oh, brethren and sisters, however distasteful they are to the flesh, chastisements are not to be dreaded, but welcomed, for they are designed to make us “partakers of God’s holiness.”





## DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

*Hebrews 12:11*

### SECTION SEVEN

**O**NE REASON, PERHAPS, why so little is written today upon Divine chastisement, and why it so rarely forms the theme of the pulpit, is because it suits not the false temper and sentiments of this superficial age. The great majority of the preachers are men-pleasers, and carefully do they trim their sails to the breezes of popular opinion. They are paid to speak “smooth things” and not those which will disturb, to soothe consciences rather than search them. That which is unpalatable, mournful, solemn, dread-inspiring, is sedulously avoided, and attractive, cheerful, and comforting subjects are substituted in their stead. Hence, not only is it now rare for the preacher to dwell upon the eternal punishment of the wicked and bid the unsaved flee from the wrath to come, but Christians hear very little about the Father’s rod, and the groans it occasions, or the fruits it afterwards produces. Fifty years ago a faithful servant of God wrote:

“One of the platitudes of the present day is, that religion is not a gloomy, but a cheerful thing. Although it is easy to see what was

meant by him who first opposed this assertion, either to morbid and self-assumed gloom, or to the ignorant representation of the world; yet as it is generally understood, nothing can be less true. Blessed are they that mourn. Woe unto you that laugh. Narrow is the way. If any man will serve Me, let him take up his cross, and follow Me. He that seeketh his life shall lose it. Although the Christian anointeth his head and washes his face, he is always fasting; the will has been broken by God, by wounding or bereaving us in our most tender point; the flesh is being constantly crucified. We are not born to be happy either in this world or in our present condition, but the reverse – to be unhappy; nay, to try constantly to be dead to self and the world, that the spirit may possess God, and rejoice in Him.

“As there is a false and morbid asceticism, so there is also a false and pernicious tendency to cover a worldly and shallow method of life under the phrase of ‘religion being joyous, and no enemy to cheerfulness.’ To take a very simple and obvious instance. What is meant by a ‘cheerful, pleasant Sunday?’ No doubt men have erred on the side of strictness and legalism; but is a ‘cheerful Sunday’ one in which there is much communion with God in prayer and meditation on God’s Word, much anticipation of the joys of Heaven in praise and fellowship with the brethren? Alas! Too many understand by a cheerful Sunday a day in which the spiritual element is reduced to a minimum” (Adolph Saphir).

Alas, that conditions have become so much worse since then. The attractions of the world, and everything which is pleasing to the flesh, have been brought into thousands of “churches” (?) under the plea of being “necessary if the young people are to be held.” Even in those places where the bars have not thus been let down, where the grosser forms of worldliness are not yet tolerated, the preaching is generally of such a character that few are likely to be made uneasy by it. He who dwells on the exceeding sinfulness

of sin, who insists that God will not tolerate unjudged sin even in His own people, but will surely visit it with heavy stripes, is a “kill joy,” a “troubler of Israel,” a “Job’s comforter”; and if he persists in enforcing the precepts, admonitions, warnings, and judgments of Holy Writ, is likely to soon find all doors closed against him. But better this, than be a compromiser; better be deprived of all preaching engagements, than miss the Masters “Well done” in the Day to come.

“Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11). In this verse the apostle concludes his discussion of that theme which is now so unwelcome to the majority of professing Christians. Therein he brings to a close all that he had said concerning those disciplinary afflictions which an all-wise God brings upon His people in this life, His gracious design in the same, and the duty incumbent upon them to receive these in a right spirit. He sums up his argument by balancing the good over against the evil, the future over against the present, the judgment of faith over against the feelings of the flesh.

Our present text is added to what has been said in the previous verses for the purpose of anticipating and removing an objection. After all the comforting and encouraging statements made, namely, that chastisements proceed not from enemies but from our Father, that they are sent not in anger but in love, that they are designed not to crush but “for our profit”; carnal sense and natural reason interposes an objection: “But we find no joy under our afflictions, instead much sorrow. We do not *feel* that they are for our profit; we cannot *see* how they can be so; therefore we are much inclined to doubt what you have said.” The apostle grants the force of the objection: that for the present, chastening *does* “seem to be grievous and not joyous.” But he brings in a double limitation or

qualification: in reference to outward sense, it only “seems” so; in reference to time, this is only for “the present.” Having made this confession, the apostle turns to the objector and says, “Nevertheless.” He reminds him that, first, there is an “afterword” beyond the present moment, to be borne in mind; second, he presses on him the need of being “exercised thereby”; third, he assures him that if he is so exercised “peaceable fruit” will be the happy issue. There are four things told us in the text about chastisement as it is viewed by human reason.

1. *All that carnal reason can perceive in our chastenings is BUT SEEMING.* All that flesh and blood can discover about the nature and quality of Divine afflictions is but their outward and superficial appearance. The eye of reason is utterly incapable of discovering the virtue and value of sanctified trials. How often we are deceived by mere “seeming”! This is true in the natural sphere: appearances are proverbially deceptive. There are many optical illusions. Have you not noticed some nights when the sun is sinking in the west, that it is much bigger than at its zenith? Yet it is not so in reality; it only “seems” to be so. Have you stood on the deck of a ship in mid-ocean and, while gazing at the horizon, suddenly been startled by the sight of land? – The outline of the coast, with the rising hills in the background, so clearly defined? Yet after all, it was but “seeming”; it was nothing but clouds. In like manner, you have read of a mirage seen by travelers in the desert: away over the sands, they see in the distance green trees and a shining pool of water; but this is only an optical delusion, effected in some way by the atmosphere.

Now if this be so in connection with natural things, the “seeming” *not* being the actual, the apparent *not* being the reality, how much more is it true in connection with the things of God! Afflictions are *not* what they “seem” to be. They appear to work for our ill,

and not for our good; so that we are inclined to say, “An enemy hath done this.” They seem to be for our injury, rather than our “profit,” and we murmur and are cast down. So often *fear* distorts our vision; so often *unbelief* brings scales over our eyes, and we exaggerate the dimensions of trials in the dark and dim light. So often we are selfish, fond of our fleshly ease; and therefore spiritual discernment falls to a low ebb. No, chastenings for the present do not *seem* to be joyous, but “grievous”; but that is because we view them through our natural senses and in the light of carnal reason.

2. *Carnal reason judges afflictions in the light of the PRESENT.* The tendency with all of us is to estimate things in the light of the *now*. The ungodly are ever ready to sacrifice their future interests for present gratification. One of their favorite mottos is, “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush:” it may be to the slothful, but the enterprising and diligent would rather be put to a little trouble and secure the two. Man is a very shortsighted creature, and even the Christian is often dominated by the same sentiments that regulate the wicked. The light of the *now* is generally the worst in which to form a true estimate of things. We are too close to them to obtain a right perspective, and see things in their proper proportions. To view an oil painting to the best advantage, we need to step back a few feet from it. The same principle applies to our lives. Proof of this is found as we now look back upon that which is past. Today the Christian discovers a meaning, a needs-be, a preciousness, in many a past experience, and even disappointment, which he could not discern at the time.

The case of Jacob is much to the point, and should guard us against following his foolish example. After Joseph had been removed from his doting father, and when he thought he had lost Simeon too, viewing things in the light of “the present,” he petulantly said, “All these things are against me” (Genesis 42:36).



Such is often the mournful plaint which issues from our short-cited unbelief. But later, Joseph discovered his mistake, and found that all those things had been working together for good to himself and his loved ones. Alas, we are so impatient and impetuous, so occupied with the present, that we fail to look forward and by faith anticipate the happy sequel. Then, too, the effects which afflictions have upon the old man, *disqualify* us to estimate them aright. If my heart is palpitating, if my mind is agitated, and my soul is cast down, then I am in no fit state to judge the quality and blessedness of Divine afflictions. No, chastenings *for the present do not* “seem to be joyous, but grievous;” that is because we take such a shortsighted view of them and fail to look forward with the eyes of faith and hope.

3. *To carnal reason afflictions never seem JOYOUS.* This logically follows from what has been before us under the first two points. Because carnal reason sees *only* the “seeming” of things, and because it estimates them *only* in the light of “the present,” afflictions are not joyous. Nor does God intend that, in themselves, they should be. If afflictions *did* “seem” to be joyous, would they be chastisements at all? It would be of little use for an earthly parent to whip his child in such a way as to produce only smiles. Such would be merely a make-belief; no smart, no benefit. Solomon said, “It is the blueness of the wound which maketh the heart better;” so if Divine chastisements are not painful to the flesh and extort a groan and cry, what good would they serve? If God sent us trials such as we wished, they would not be chastenings at all. No, afflictions do not “seem” to be joyous.

They are not joyous in *the form* they assume. When the Lord smites, He does so in a tender place, that we may feel the smart of it. They are not joyous in *the force* of them. Oftentimes we are inclined to say, If the trial had not been quite so severe, or the disappointment had not been so great, I could have endured it.

God puts just so much bitter herbs into our cup as to make the draught unpleasant. They are not joyous in *the time* of them. We always think that they come at the wrong season. If it were left to our choosing, they would never come; but if we *must* have them, we would choose the time when they are the least grievous; and thus miss their blessing. Nor are they joyous in *the instruments* used: “If it were an enemy, then I could have borne it,” said David. That is what we all think. O if my trial were not just *that!* Poverty I could endure, but not reproach and slander. To have lost my own health would have been a hard blow, but I could have borne it; but the removal of that dear child, the light of my eyes, how can I ever rejoice again? Have you not heard brethren speak thus?

4. *To carnal reason, afflictions ever seem to be GRIEVOUS.* Probably the most grievous part to the Christian is that he cannot *see* how much a loss or trial can possibly benefit him. If he could thus see, he *would* rejoice. Even here we must walk by faith and not by sight. But this is easier said than done; yea, it can only be done by God’s enabling. Usually, the Christian altogether fails to see why such a trouble is sent upon *him*; it seems to work harm and not good. Why this financial loss, when he was giving more to the Lord’s work? Why this breakdown in health, when he was being most used in His service? Why this removal of a Sabbath school teacher, just when he was most needed? Why was my husband called away, when the children most required him? Yes, such afflictions are indeed grievous to the flesh.

But let it be pointed out that these reasonings are *only* “seeming.” The Christian, by grace, eventually triumphs. Faith looks up at the cloud (though it is often very late in doing so) and says, The chastisement was not as severe as it might have been, certainly it was not as severe as I deserved, and truly it was nothing in comparison to what the Savior suffered for me. O let faith expel carnal reason, and

say, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But note carefully that this is only "*while* we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Corinthians 4:17, 18). For much in the above four points the writer acknowledges his indebtedness to a sermon by C.H. Spurgeon on the same verse.

"Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." This is what the apostle sets over against the estimate of carnal reason and the feelings of our natural senses. Medicine may not be a pleasing thing to take, but if it be blest by God, the renewed health that it gives is good compensation. The pruned vine at the end of the winter presents a sorry appearance to the eye, but its heavily-laden branches in the autumn vindicate the gardener's efforts. Did not the "afterward" prove to Jacob that his doleful reasonings were quite unwarranted? Job squirmed under the rod, as well he might, but was not his end more prosperous than his beginning? Thank God for this "Nevertheless afterward."

Yet this "afterward" is also a very searching word: it is one which should pierce and test each of us. Have we not all passed through sorrow? Can any of us look back on the past without recalling seasons of deep and heavy affliction? Has no sword pierced our souls? No painful sacrifice been demanded of us? But, my reader, do these experiences belong to the *past* in every sense? Have they gone, disappeared, without leaving any *effects* behind them? No, that is impossible: we are either the better or the worse because of them. Then ask yourself, *What* fruits have they produced? Have your past experiences hardened, soured, frozen you? Or have they softened, sweetened, mellowed you? Has pride been subdued, self-pleasing been mortified, patience developed? How have afflictions, chastisements, left us? *What* does the "afterward" reveal?

Not all men are the gainers by afflictions; nor are Christians

so always. Many seek to flee from trials and troubles, instead of being “exercised” thereby. Others are callous and do not yield: as Hebrews 12:5 intimates, they “despised” the chastenings of the Lord. There are some who imagine that, when visited with affliction, it is a display of courage if they refuse to be affected. They count it weakness to mourn over losses and weep over sorrows. But such an attitude is altogether un-Christian. Christ wept and again and again we are told that He “groaned.” Such an attitude is also foolish to the last degree, for it is calculated to counteract the very design of afflictions, and only calls for severer ones to break our proud spirits. It is no mark of weakness to acknowledge that we feel the strokes of an *Almighty* arm.

It is the truest wisdom to humble ourselves beneath “the mighty hand of God.” If we are among His people, He will mercifully compel us to acknowledge that His chastenings are not to be despised and made light of. He will – and O how easily He *can* do it – continue or increase our afflictions until He *tames* our wild spirits, and brings us like obedient children into subjection to Himself. What a warning is found in Isaiah 9:9–11. “And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, The bricks are fallen down, *but we will* build with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, *but we will* change them into cedars. *Therefore* the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together.” This means that, because the people had hardened themselves under the chastening hand of God, instead of being “exercised” thereby, that He sent sorer afflictions upon them.

The ones benefited by the Father’s chastenings are they who are “exercised thereby.” The Greek word for “exercised” was borrowed from the gymnastic games. It had reference to the athlete stripping himself of his outer clothing. Thus, the word in our text is almost parallel with the “laying aside of every weight” in verse:1.

If afflictions cause us to be stripped of pride, sloth, selfishness, a revengeful spirit, then “fruit” *will be* produced. It is only as we *improve* our chastenings, that we are gainers. The natural effect of affliction on an un-sanctified soul is either to irritate or depress, which produces rebellion or sinking in despair. This is the result of hardness of heart and unbelief. Even with regard to the Christian it is true that, only as he views them as proceeding from his Father in order to bring him into subjection, and as he is “exercised thereby,” he is truly profited.

1. The *conscience* needs to be “exercised.” There must be a turning unto the Sender of our trials, and a seeking from Him of the meaning and message of them. “There was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David *inquired* of the Lord” (2 Samuel 21:1)! So should we when the providences of God frown upon us. There must be an honest self-examination, a diligent scrutiny of our ways, to discover what it is God is displeased with. Careful investigation will often show that much of our supposed godly zeal in service is but the result of habit, or the imitating of some eminent saint, instead of proceeding from the heart, and being rendered “unto the Lord.”

2. *Prayer* has to be “exercised” or engaged in. It is true that painful afflictions have a tendency to stifle the voice of supplication, that one who is smarting under the rod feels little inclination to approach the Throne of Grace, but this carnal disposition must be steadily resisted, and the help of the Holy Spirit definitely sought. The heavier our load, the more depressed our heart, the sorer our anguish, the greater our need to pray. God requires to be sought unto for grace to submit to His dealings, for help to improve the same, for Him to sanctify unto our good all that perplexes and distresses us.

3. The grace of *meekness* must be “exercised,” for “a meek and quiet spirit” is of “great price” in the sight of Him with whom we have to do (1 Peter 3:4). Meekness is the opposite of self-will and hardness of heart. It is a pliability of soul, which is ready to be fashioned after the Divine image. It is a holy submission, willing to be molded as the Heavenly Potter determines. There can be no “peaceable fruit of righteousness” until our wills are broken, and we have no mind of our own. How much we need to heed that word of Christ, “Take My yoke upon you, and *learn of Me*, for I am meek” (Matthew 11:29).

4. *Patience* must be “exercised.” Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him” (Psalm 37:7): “wait” for *His* time of deliverance, for if we attempt to deliver ourselves, we are very likely to plunge into deeper trials. Fruit is not ripened in a day; nor do the benefits of chastisements appear immediately. Patience must have her perfect work if the soul is to be enriched by afflictions. In the interval of waiting, allow nothing to deter your plodding perseveringly along the path of duty.

5. *Faith* must be “exercised.” *God’s* hand must be seen in every trial and affliction if it is to be borne with meekness and patience. While we look no further than the malice of Satan, or the jealousy, enmity, injustice of men, the heart will be fretful and rebellious. But if we receive the cup from the Father’s hand, our passions will be calmed and the inward tumult stilled. Only by the exercise of faith will the soul be brought into the disposition to quietly submit, and digest the lessons we are intended to learn.

6. *Hope* must be “exercised.” As faith looks upward and sees *God’s* hand in the trial, hope is to look forward and anticipate the *gains* thereof. Hope is a confident expectation of future good. It is the

opposite of despair. Hope lays hold of the promised “Afterward,” and thus it sustains and cheers in the present. Hope assures the cast-down soul “I shall *yet* praise Him for the help of His countenance” (Psalm 42:5). “That the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, *after* that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

7. *Love* must be “exercised.” It is the Father’s *love* which chastens us (verse 5); then ought not we to love Him in return for His care and patient training of us? Instead of doubting His wisdom or questioning His goodness, there should be an affectionate gratitude flowing out to the One who is seeking naught but our welfare. “We can never find any benefit in chastenings, unless we are *exercised* by them, that is, unless all our graces are stirred up by them to a holy, constant exercise” (John Owen) – how different that, from the fatalistic inertia of many hyper-Calvinists!

What we have sought to bring out above is the fact that spiritual “fruit” *is not* the natural or spontaneous effect of affliction. Nay, have we not observed that few of those who suffer severe financial reverses, heavy domestic bereavements, or personal bodily pain, are, spiritually, the gainers thereby. Yea, do we need to look any further than ourselves, to perceive how little we have learned by and profited from past trials? And the cause is plain: we were *not duly exercised* thereby. May this word abide with each of us for the future.

What is meant by “the peaceable fruit of righteousness”? If we took this expression by itself, it would signify *the effects* of righteousness, the fruit which righteousness itself brings forth. But in our text it is chastenings or afflictions which are specifically mentioned as producing this fruit. It is the spirit tranquilizing and purifying the heart. “Righteousness” in our text is parallel with “His

holiness” in verse 10. It may be summed up in the mortification of sin and the vivification of vital godliness. It is called the “*peaceable fruit*” because it issues in the taming of our wild spirits, the quieting of our restless hearts, the more firm anchoring of our souls. But this only comes when we truly realize that it is the Father’s *love* which has afflicted us. May the Spirit of God grant us all “exercised” hearts, so that we shall daily search ourselves, examine our ways, and be stripped of all that is displeasing to Him.







## A CALL TO STEADFASTNESS

(*Hebrews 12:12–13*)

**T**HE DIDACTIC (TEACHING) portions of Scripture are very much more than abstract statements of truth: they are designed not only for the instructing of the mind, but also for the influencing of the heart. This is far too little recognized in our day, when the craving for information is so often divorced from any serious concern as to the *use* to be made of the same. This, no doubt, is one of the evil fruits borne by the modern school-methods, where instead of seeking to *draw out* (the meaning of the word “educate”) and develop the mind of the pupil, he is made to “cram” or fill his head with a mass of facts and figures, most of which are of no service to him in the later life. Not such is God’s method. His method of instruction is to set before us moral and spiritual principles, and then show us how to *apply* them in a practical way; inculcate a motive, and thereby call into exercise our inward faculties. Hence, the test of Christian knowledge is not how much we understand, but how far our knowledge is affecting our lives.

It is one thing to possess a clear intellectual grasp of the doctrines of grace, it is quite another to experience the grace of the doctrines in a spiritual way. It is one thing to believe the Scriptures

are the inspired and inerrant Word of God, it is another for the soul to live under the awe of their Divine authority, realizing that one day we shall be judged by them. It is one thing to be convinced that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the King of kings and Lord of lords, it is another to surrender to His scepter and live in personal subjection to Him. What does it profit me to be convinced that God is omnipotent, unless I am learning to lean upon His mighty arm? What avail is it to me that I am assured of God's omniscience unless the knowledge that His eye is ever upon me acts as a salutary restraint to my actions? What does it advantage me to know that without holiness no man shall see the Lord, unless I am making the acquirement of holiness my chief concern and aim!

That which has been pointed out above has to do with no obscure and intricate subject which lies far above the reach of the rank and file of the common people, but is plain, self-evident, simple. Alas, that our hearts are so little impressed by it and our consciences so rarely exercised over it. When we measure ourselves by *that* standard, have we not all of us much cause to hang our heads in shame? Our intellects are stored with Scripture truth, but how little are our lives moulded thereby. Our doctrinal views are sound and orthodox, but how little we know experimentally of "the truth which is after godliness" (Titus 1:1). Has not the Savior much ground for saying to both writer and reader, "Why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and *do not* the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). O that we may be duly humbled over our sad failures.

The above reflections have been suggested by the *use* which the apostle makes in our text of the subject he had been discussing in the previous verses. His opening "Wherefore" denotes that he was now going to make a practical application unto those whom he was writing to of the exposition just given of the truth of Divine chastisement. In this we may see him following out the course he pursued in all his epistles, and which the servants of God are

required to emulate today. No matter what was the doctrine under consideration, the apostle always turned it to a practical end, as his oft-repeated “Therefore” and “Wherefore” intimate. Was he contending for the Christian’s emancipation from the ceremonial law, then he adds, “Stand fast *therefore* in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Galatians 5:1). Was he opening up the glorious truth of resurrection, then he concludes with “*therefore* . . . be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Was he setting forth the blessed hope of Christ’s return, then he finishes with “*Wherefore* comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

It is this which urgently needs to be laid to heart – *the use* we make of the precious truths which the Most High has so graciously revealed to us. That is (partly, at least) what the Savior had in mind when He said, “Take heed therefore *how* ye hear” (Luke 8:18) – see to it that your hearts are duly affected, so that the truth will regulate all your conduct. It is not sufficient that I assume a reverent demeanor when attending the means of grace, that I pay close attention to what I hear: it is the assimilation of the same, so that I go forth and live under the power thereof, which is the all-important matter. The same is true of our reading; it is not the book which adds to my store of information, or which entertains and thrills, but the one which stirs me up to godly living, which proves the most helpful. So it is with our response to the Scriptures, it is not how many difficult passages do I have light upon, nor how many verses have I memorized, but how many of its commands and percepts am I honestly endeavoring to obey.

This is the keynote struck by the apostle in the verses which are now to engage our attention. He had thrown not a little light on the distressing circumstances in which the Hebrews then found themselves, namely, the bitter persecution they were encountering at the hands of their unbelieving countrymen. He had pointed out

that so far from their afflictions being exceptional, and a warrantable ground for consternation, they were, in some form or other, the common portion of *all* God's people, while they are left in this scene. He had set before them some most blessed truths, which were well calculated to strengthen their faith, comfort their hearts, and raise their drooping spirits. He had given an exposition of the subjection of Divine chastisement, such as must bring peace and consolation to all who mix faith therewith. He had silenced every objection which could well be made against the duty to which he had called them. And now he presses upon them the practical profit to which they must turn the doctrine inculcated.

“Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed” (Hebrews 12:12–13). Here we have, First, the conclusion drawn from the preceding premises. Second, the several duties enjoined. Third, the reason by which they are enforced. The duties are expressed in figurative language, yet in such terms as the meaning is not difficult to perceive. The enforcing reason or motive for compliance is taken from the evil effects which a non-compliance of one's duty would have upon others, which plainly inculcates the importance and value of personal example, and the influence which it exerts upon our fellows.

“Wherefore” means, in view of what has been said: because of the preceding considerations a certain course of conduct ought to follow. There is, we believe, a double reference in this opening “wherefore,” namely, an immediate and a remote one. Immediately, it connects with the preceding verse, the most important word of which is “exercised.” The apostle was alluding again to the well-known Grecian “Games.” In the gymnasium, the instructor would challenge the youth to combat. He was an experienced man, and knew how to strike, guard, wrestle. Many severe blows would the

combatants receive from him, but it was part of their training, preparing them for their future appearance in the public contests. The youth whose athletic frame was prepared for the coming great venture, would boldly step forward, willing to be “exercised” by his trainer; but he who shirked the trial and refused to encounter the master, received no help at his hands; but the fault was entirely his own.

This, it seems to us, is the figure carried forward in our text; “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are *exercised* thereby. *Wherefore* lift up the hands which hang down.” The Christian who gives way before trial, who sinks under affliction, who sulks or repines beneath persecution, will bring forth none of the “peaceable fruit of righteousness.” If he “faints” under chastisement, if his hands become idle and his legs no longer capable of supporting him, a profitable use cannot be made of the tribulation through which he is called upon to pass. Then let him pull himself together, gird up the loins of his mind and “*endure* hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:3). Let his attitude be, Now is the time of my training, so I will seek to play the man; I will seek grace from God to muster all my faith and courage and valiantly wrestle with whatever opposes and oppresses me.

More remotely, our opening “Wherefore” looks back unto *all* that has been said in the previous verses. Hebrews 12 opens with a stirring call for God’s people to persevere in the course of Christian duty, to go forward in the spiritual life, no matter what impediments might stand in their way; to “run with patience (or perseverance) the race which is set before us,” drawing strength from the Christ for enablement (verses 1, 2). Then he anticipated an objection: We are being sorely oppressed, tempted to renounce our profession, hounded by our unbelieving brethren. To this he

replies, Consider your Master, who went before you in the same path of suffering (verse 3). Bear in mind that your lot has not become extreme: ye have not yet been called upon to experience a martyr's death (verse 4). Furthermore, you are losing sight of that scriptural exhortation, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord" (verse 5). This led the apostle to open to them, in a most precious manner, the whole subject of Divine chastisement. Let us present a brief summary of the same.

The trials through which the children of God are called upon to pass are not Divine punishments, but gracious discipline designed for their good. We are expressly bidden "not to faint" beneath them (verse 5). The rod is wielded not in wrath, but in tender solicitude, and is a manifestation not of God's anger but of His love (verse 6). Our duty then is to "endure" chastening as becometh the children of God (verse 7). To be without chastisement, so far from being an evidence of our spiritual sonship, would demonstrate we were not sons at all (verse 8). Inasmuch as we gave reverence to our earthly parents when they corrected us, how much more ought we to be in subjection to our heavenly Father (verse 9). God's design in our afflictions is our "profit," that by them we might become increasingly "partakers of His holiness" in an experimental way. Though these chastenings are unpleasant to flesh and blood, nevertheless "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" issues therefrom when we are suitably "exercised thereby" (verse 11).

Now from these considerations a very obvious conclusion is drawn, and by them a bounden duty is enforced. In view of the "great cloud of witnesses" by which we are encompassed (verse 1), seeing that the saints of other days – in themselves as weak, as sinful, as much oppressed by the world as we are – fought a good fight, kept the faith, and finished their course, let us gird ourselves for the contest and strain every effort to persevere in the path of duty. In view of the fact that our Leader, the Captain of our salvation,

has left us such an example of heroic endurance (verse 3), let us earnestly seek to follow His steps and acquit ourselves like men. Finally, because God Himself is the Author and Regulator of our trials – the severest of our chastenings proceed from a loving Father, seeking our good – then let us not be cast down by the difficulties of the way nor discouraged by the roughness of the path; but let us nerve ourselves to steadfastness in the faith and fidelity to our Redeemer.

Thus the coherence of our opening “Wherefore” is perfectly obvious and the duty it presses so plain that there cannot be misunderstanding. In view of all the above-mentioned considerations, and particularly in view of the fact that the most precious fruits issue from afflictions when we are duly “exercised” by them, then let us not be dejected in our minds nor faint in our spirits by reason thereof. As the champions in the public “Games” used their hands and arms to the very best of their ability, and as the runners in the races used their legs and knees to the best possible effect – and in case their hands and knees began to fail and flag, exerted their wills to the utmost to rouse up their members to renewed effort – so should we be very courageous, zealous and active, and in case our hearts begin to fail us through multiplied discouragements, we must marshal all our resolution and strive prayerfully and manfully against giving way to despair.

“Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down.” The duty here enjoined is set forth in figurative language, but the meaning is nonetheless obvious because of the graphic metaphors used. The apostle transferred unto members of our physical body the condition in which the faculties of our souls are liable to fall under certain trials. For the hands to hang down and the knees to become feeble are figurative expressions, denoting the tendency to abandon the discharge of our Christian duty because of the opposition encountered. For the hands of a boxer or fencer to hang down means that



his arms are become weary to the point of exhaustion; for the knees to be feeble signifies that through the protracted exertions of the runner his legs have been debilitated by their nervous energy being spent. The spiritual reference is to a decay in the Christian's courage and resolution. Two evils produce this: despondency as to success – when hope is gone effort ceases; weariness in the performance of duty.

This same figure is employed in other passages of Scripture. In Ezekiel 7:16, 17 we read, “But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be as weak as water:” here the reference is to that inertia which is produced by poignant conviction of sin after a season of backsliding. Again, in Ezekiel 21:7 we are told, “When they shall say unto thee, Wherefore sighest thou? that thou shalt answer, For the tidings, because it cometh: and every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, and every spirit shall fail, and all knees shall be as weak as water:” where we behold the paralyzing effects of consternation in view of the tidings of sore judgment. But in our text the reference is to the disheartenment caused by fierce opposition and persecution. Despair and becoming weary of well doing are the two evils in all our afflictions which we most need to guard against. It is failure at this point which has led to so many scandalous backslidings and cursed apostasies. Such an exhortation as the one before us intimates that the Hebrews had either already given way to an enervating spirit of gloom or were in great danger of so doing.

Now “It is the duty of all faithful ministers of the Gospel to consider diligently what failures or temptations their flocks are liable or exposed to, so as to apply suitable means for their preservation” (John Owen). This is what the apostle is seen doing here. In view of the lethargy of the Hebrews he exhorts them to “*lift*

up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.” The word “lift up” signifies not simply to elevate, but to “rectify” or set right again, restoring them to their proper state, so as to apply them to duty. It was a call to steadfastness and resolute perseverance: be not dejected in your minds nor faint in your spirits by reason of the present distress, nor be so terrified of the threatening danger as to give up hope and be completely overwhelmed. Under sore trial and affliction, persecution and the prospect of yet sorer opposition, the temptation is for the heart to sink within us and the path of duty to be forsaken.

“Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees:” literally, “hands which are loose” or slack, dangling inert; “feeble knees” is still stronger in the Greek, being almost the equivalent of palsied knees – enervated knees which need bandages to brace them. In view of which he calls them to arouse themselves, to stir up all their graces unto exercise, to refuse taking the line of least resistance, to renew their courage and bear up under their trials. Resolution will accomplish much to stimulate jaded nerves and flagging energies. The Christian life, from start to finish is a struggle, a fight, an unceasing warfare against foes within and without, and only he who endures to the end shall receive the crown of life. To give way to dejection is harmful, to sink into despair is dangerous, to quit the discharge of our duties is the fore-runner of apostasy.

But the question arises *how* are we to set about this particular task? To say that we are helpless in ourselves affords no encouragement; in fact to affirm that the Christian is utterly impotent is to deny that there is any vital difference between himself and those who are dead in sins. Christians in their greatest weakness have some strength, some grace, some spiritual life; and where there is some life, there is some ability to stir and move. And God is pleased to assist where there is *sincere endeavor*. The believer is responsible to arm his mind against discouragements by considering God’s

design in them, and the blessed fruits which issue from trials and afflictions when we are duly exercised by them. Of what value is a clear intellectual grasp of the nature and end of Divine chastisements unless it produces a practical effect upon the heart and life? Let the distressed saint ponder anew the blessed considerations set before him in Hebrews 12:1–11 and find in them motives and incentives unto renewed courage, fidelity and perseverance.

Let the hope of ultimate victory nerve you. Look forward to the goal: the determination to reach home is a powerful stimulus to a weary traveler. Earnestly endeavor to counteract every disposition to faintness and despondency by viewing your trials and persecutions as a part of God's discipline for your soul: then submit to them as such, and seek to get them sanctified to your spiritual profit. Remember that you cannot fight with hands hanging down, nor run the race set before us if your knees give way; so summon all your resolution to remain steadfast in the discharge of every duty God has appointed and assigned you. Rest in the love of your heavenly Father, assured that all of the present distress is designed for your ultimate good, and this will reinvigorate the soul. Finally, seek grace to lay hold of and plead the promise, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31).

It is to be noted that this exhortation is couched abstractly. It is not "lift up *your* hands," which would restrict it individually; nor is it "lift up the hands of those who are dejected," which would limit the exhortation to a ministry unto others. Worded as it is there is a *double* reference: it is a call to the individual Christian to persevering activity, and it is an exhortation for him to seek the well being of his fellow-Christians. That our text *has* a reference to our seeking to encourage and strengthen fellow-pilgrims is clear from a comparison of Job 4:3, 4 and Isaiah 35:3, 4, with which 1 Thessalonians 5:14 may be compared. The best way for the individual Christian to strengthen the hands of his feeble fellows is

by setting before them a worthy example of faith, courage, and steadfastness. In addition, he is to pray for them, speak words of encouragement, remind them of God's promises, relate to them His gracious dealings and powerful deliverances in his own life.

“And make straight paths for your feet.” The previous verse concerns the inward frame and spirit of the believer's mind; this one has respect to his outward conduct. As Albert Barnes has well pointed out, the term used here signifies “straight” horizontally, that is level and plain, all obstacles are to be removed so that we do not stumble and fall – cf. Proverbs 4:25–27. The word for “paths” is derived from one meaning “a wheel” and signifies here “the marks made by a wheel” – it is paths marked out for others, leaving the tracks which may be followed by them. The reference, then, is to the believer so manifesting his course that his fellows may see and follow it. The Christian course is *exemplary*, that is, it is one which impresses and influences others. How very careful should we be then as to our conduct!

Here, then, is an exhortation unto the Christian to see well to his *walk*, which means the regulating of all his actions by the revealed will of God, to be obedient unto the Divine precepts, to follow not the ways and fashions of an evil world, but to cleave to the narrow way, and turn not aside from the Highway of Holiness. “It is our duty not only to be found in the ways of God in general but to take care that we walk carefully, circumspectly, uprightly and diligently in them. Hereon depends our own peace, and all our usefulness toward others. It is a sad thing when some men's walk in the ways of God shall deter others from them or turn them out of them” (John Owen).

“And make straight paths for your feet.” A most timely word for us today when iniquity abounds and the love of many waxes cold, when the poor and afflicted in Zion stand in need of all the godly encouragement they can obtain. We are surrounded by a “*crooked*

generation,” both of professing and profane, whose evil ways we are but too apt to learn; we are beset on every hand by temptations to turn aside into what John Bunyan termed “By-path Meadow,” to enter paths which God has prohibited, to feed on pride and indulge our lusts. How the heart of the mature Christian aches for the lambs of Christ’s flock, and how it behooves him to walk softly and carefully lest he put some stumbling-block in their way. Solemn indeed is “As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity” (Psalm 125:5), and also “They have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein *shall not know peace*” (Isaiah 59:8).

“Lest that which is lame be turned out of the way.” The word “lest” is a translation of two Greek words, “that not.” It is a word of caution and prevention, warning each of us that carelessness as to our own walk is likely to have an ill effect upon weaker Christians. The word “lame” is transferred from the body to some defect of our graces which unfits the soul for the discharge of Christian duty: one who is lame is ill-capacitated to run in a race, and one who is lacking in courage, zeal, and perseverance is ill-fitted to fight the good fight of faith. Walk carefully then, my brother, if for no reason than for the sake of the feebler saints. Backslidden Christians are the plague of the church: inconsistencies in God’s people spread discouragements among weak believers.

There are always some “lame” sheep in God’s earthly flock. While there are some Christians with strong and vigorous faith, so that they “mount up with wings as eagles, run and are not weary,” and make steady progress in practical holiness, all are not so highly favored. In most families of any size there is one frail and sickly member; so it is in the various branches of the Household of Faith. Some are constitutionally gloomy, temperamentally vacillating, physically infirm, and these have a special claim upon the strong. They are not to be snubbed and shunned: they need

an example of cheerfulness set before them, wise counsel given to them, their arms supported by prayer and love's solicitude for their good. Whatever is weak in their faith and hope, whatever tends to dishearten and discourage them, should be carefully attended to, so far as lies in our power. A stitch in time saves nine: many a sheep might have been kept from falling into the ditch, had one with a shepherd's heart gone after it at the first sign of straying.

"But let it rather be healed." "Heal" signifies to correct that which is amiss. It is the recovering of a lapsed one which is here in view. Instead of despising sickly Christians, exercise love's sympathy toward them. While we should be thankful if God has granted us healthy graces, we must beware of presumption: "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; *considering thyself*, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). To those groaning under the burden of sin, tell them of the sufficiency of Christ's blood. To those fearful about the future, remind them of God's faithfulness. To those who are despondent, seek to cheer by citing some of God's precious promises. Study the holy art of speaking a word in season to the needy. You will be of great value to the church if you develop a spirit of compassion and the gift of lifting up those fallen by the wayside.



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## A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

**A**RTHUR WALKINGTON PINK was born in Nottingham, England on April 1, 1886.<sup>1</sup> He died on July 15, 1952 and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Sandwich Burial Ground just outside the small seaport town of Stornoway, Scotland, on the Isle of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, the Northwest extremity of Scotland.<sup>2</sup> When Arthur Pink died in July of 1952 only his wife Vera was at his side. His funeral was attended by barely a handful of people. But this does not begin to tell the story of A.W. Pink or the influence of his life and writing on the second half of the twentieth century or the important lessons that can be learned today from his life.

Pink was born to Christian parents and raised in a Christian home, but prior to conversion Pink was deeply involved in the Theosophical society, an occult Gnostic group popular in England during the latter part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries.

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1. Iain H. Murray, *The Life Of Arthur W. Pink*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1981. Rev. ed., 2004), 1.

2. Richard P. Belcher, *Arthur W. Pink: Born To Write*. Rev. ed. (Columbia, S.C., Richbarry Press, 2003), 128.



The human instrument God used to bring about his conversion to Christianity was his father and his patient admonitions from Scripture. It was the verse, “*There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death*” (Proverbs 14:12), which the Lord applied to his heart and compelled him to renounce Theosophy and become a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Pink was converted in 1908 at the age of 22. He spent the first twenty years of his Christian life largely in preaching, in England, the United States and in Australia. In 1910 he came to the United States to study at the Moody Bible Institute. Before the first semester was over, Pink left the school and became, successively, the pastor of a church in Silverton, Colorado (1910–1912), Garden Grove, California (1913–?), Burkesville and Albany, Kentucky (1915–1917), where, in 1916 he married Vera E. Russell (January 8, 1893–July 17, 1962). Later, Pink became the pastor of churches in Spartanburg, South Carolina (1917–1920) and Sydney, Australia (1925–1928). After his experiences in Australia he traveled back to England in 1928 and then moved back to the United States in 1929, where he remained until 1934 when he left the United States for the last time and returned to England. Pink made the decision to retire from public preaching in 1936 and gave himself to full-time writing. Ultimately, in 1940 he took up residence on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, where he remained until his death in 1952.

In 1922 Pink started a monthly periodical entitled *Studies In The Scriptures*, which was solely concerned with the exposition of Scripture. Pink said, “When we began publishing it in 1922 we had a regular subscription price, but in 1927 we were led to remove it and for several years have offered it ‘Free to all who will read it,’ looking to the Lord alone to supply the necessary funds.”<sup>3</sup> From that time

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3. Arthur W. Pink, “Our Annual Letter,” *Studies In The Scriptures* 20 (December 1941): 27.

on the periodical was sent out free-of-charge to any interested Christians worldwide. The magazine was produced continuously from 1922 until 1953. The monthly articles from this periodical are being reproduced today by two publishers in the United States and are widely distributed through various Internet websites. From this little periodical most of Pink's books have been extracted. Pink himself wrote and edited all of the paper's content. The paper was started at the suggestion of I. C. Herendeen, the initial publisher of Pink's books. After the second year, Herendeen resigned. During 1924–25 Charles and Elsie Pressel helped with the paper and Mrs. Pressel taught Mrs. Pink how to type. After this time – primarily with the help of Vera, his wife – Pink worked to produce the magazine until his death. The periodical was a work of faith from the beginning. To quote Pink's own words, "We had no earthly organization behind us, no influential friends who guaranteed their support. Nor had a company of Christians offered to subscribe if we would print. We were the pastor of no church, belonged to no denomination, and were 'in fellowship' with no assemblies. At that time we had not a single reader in sight! We were cast entirely upon Him whom we believe put it into our heart to embark on this enterprise. And He did not fail us."<sup>1</sup> Hence, without regular financial support from any particular denomination, association, or group of churches, the magazine was produced for 31 years. For those who have been instructed, convicted and moved to study God's Word more diligently and to seek a closer walk with God by reading Pink's books, the result of his years of study and writing speak for themselves. Truly, "he has labored, and we are entered into his labors." (John 4:38).

These are the essential, basic facts of Arthur W. Pink's life. But

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1. Arthur W. Pink, "Welcome Tidings," *Studies In The Scriptures* 16 (July 1937): 220–221.

these facts by no means tell the whole story. During his life Pink had written, besides several books, over 2,000 articles for his monthly magazine and over 20,000 hand-written personal letters. And even though he preached in several countries, on several continents, and in churches of nearly every protestant denomination, when he died he was virtually unknown and certainly unappreciated. In some ways that situation has not changed. For example, even today, Pink is left out of most biographical dictionaries and overlooked in many religious histories. For example, there is no mention of Arthur Pink in *The New International Dictionary Of The Christian Church*, edited by J.D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1978) or *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*, 2 volumes, edited by Donald Lewis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) or *The Concise Dictionary Of The Christian Tradition*, edited by Walter Elwell, J.D. Douglas and Peter Toon (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1989) or *The Dictionary of Christianity In America*, edited by Daniel Reid and Bruce Shelly (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990). However, from another perspective, things have changed dramatically because since his death his writings have been repeatedly republished by a number of Christian publishing houses, among them, Zondervan Publishers, Baker Book House, Moody Press, Banner of Truth Trust, Reiner Publications, Christian Focus Publications, Truth for Today, and many others. Through this republishing work the writings of Arthur Pink have wider audience today than ever before. So much so, Iain H. Murray, one of Pink's primary biographers, wrote, "the widespread circulation of Pink's writings after his death made him one of the most influential evangelical authors in the second half of the twentieth century."<sup>2</sup>

From the Publisher's viewpoint, there are, at the very least,

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2. Murray, *The Life Of Arthur W. Pink*, xiii.

three things about Arthur Pink that deserve our attention. First, A.W. Pink was an ordinary man. He was a man of changing convictions. He was a man of questionable actions. Arthur Pink was, like all of us, a sinner, as he would be the first to admit. In 1933 Pink wrote, “in ourselves we are leprous beggars, entirely dependent upon the grace and mercy of our sovereign God, and every cause have we to say with the Psalmist, ‘He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.’”<sup>3</sup> Pink was a man of changing convictions. For example, among other things, Pink changed his views regarding the end-times. When Pink began his study of the Bible he was initially taught dispensational theology. Hence, he was at one time an ardent advocate of dispensational Premillennialism, which can be seen in some of his earliest writings like *The Redeemer’s Return* (1918) and *The Antichrist* (1922–23). But through his studies he realized the errors of dispensational theology, especially the pretribulational rapture theory, and prior to his death he wrote a series of 5 articles refuting dispensationalism. These were published in 1952 in the June through October issues of *Studies In The Scriptures* as “A Refutation Of Dispensationalism.” Changes in Pink’s theology have been recognized by both of Pink’s primary biographers, Richard P. Belcher<sup>4</sup> and Iain H. Murray<sup>5</sup> as well as Pink himself.<sup>6</sup> Another example of both his changing convictions and questionable actions is his statements about the authority of God’s Word being the Christian’s only guide and final rule of faith and practice and not the Providence of God. For example, in 1937 Pink wrote, “The providential interposition

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3. Iain H. Murray, *Letters of A. W. Pink During the period 1924–1951* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 18.

4. Belcher, *Born To Write*, 43.

5. Murray, *The Life of Arthur W. Pink*, 105–112, 194 and 197.

6. Arthur W. Pink, “Our Annual Letter,” *Studies In The Scriptures* 20 (December 1941): 27.

of God is not a rule for us to walk by. The Word of God is given us for that purpose! Oftentimes God, as it were, sets before us an open door, not as intimation he would have us enter it, but to test our hearts! How often the wish is father to the thought! How readily we jump to a conclusion that such and such a thing is ‘the Lord’s will for me’, when that conclusion coincides with our secret desires!”<sup>7</sup> But in 1941 Pink wrote, “When we began publishing this magazine we were members of a Baptist church, and we still believe that according to their constitution and principles Baptists are nearer the New Testament pattern than any other body. But in the Providence of God we were soon obliged to sever our connection with that church, and it was not long before our Master made it plain why He led us to take that step; the written ministry to which He had called us was designed for a wider circle than any single ecclesiastical fold.”<sup>8</sup> In making decisions about where he should minister or when he should leave, Pink often relied upon how he “felt” or upon God’s providentially “indicating” to him in what direction to proceed.<sup>9</sup> This is directly opposite of his conviction about the Scripture being our only guide and not God’s providence. This is an indication of his changing convictions and questionable actions.

Second, A.W. Pink was a decided man, that is, he was a man of decided Biblical, practical, temporal, and monetary opinions. He was an evangelical Christian, a devoted student of the Bible, an itinerant evangelist, a Baptist pastor, and a prolific author. He was known for his staunchly Calvinistic theology and Puritan-like teachings. Intense, independent, and prolonged Bible study

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7. Murray, *Letters*, 87.

8. Arthur W. Pink, “Our Annual Letter,” *Studies In The Scriptures* 20 (December 1941): 284–285.

9. Arthur W. Pink, “Our Semi-Jubilee Letter,” *Studies In The Scriptures* 25 (December 1946): 283–285; Murray, *Letters*, 103–104.

convinced him that much of modern preaching, evangelism, and worship was defective. While the Puritans were generally disregarded by the vast majority of Christians, he advanced their primary principles with untiring zeal. It was Pink's opinion that the progressive spiritual decline of Christianity in the Western world was the inevitable consequence of the prevalence of a watered-down gospel that could neither wound nor heal. Because of his firm convictions, Pink was, and is, controversial. For many people, he seemed unfriendly, was too blunt in his speech and writing and spent too much of his time in isolation. Thus he was very often misunderstood – a “hyper-Calvinist” to some, a legalistic “free-will Arminian” to others. He was too much of a Calvinist for the Baptists, and too much of a Baptist for the Calvinists. But despite his failures and contrary to the opinion of others, the Publishers believe Arthur Pink was a real Christian – a Christian who was earnestly concerned about obeying the Word of God and absolutely committed to promoting the glory of God in a world under judgment because of sin and careening headlong toward destruction.

Third, A. W. Pink was also an extra-ordinary man. He was extraordinary in his abilities and talents, his reading and study habits, his focus and attention to detail, his diligence and perseverance, his selflessness and self-sacrifice, his devotion to the eternal God of the Bible and His Word, his unwillingness to compromise, his unwavering belief in the importance of obedience to God and his resolute desire to promote the glory of God. For example, concerning Pink's reading and study habits, Professor Richard Belcher wrote, “It can be established that he was a dedicated student of the Bible and an avid reader of books related to the Bible from the hour of his conversion.”<sup>10</sup> Pink himself wrote, “In my early years I assiduously followed this threefold course of Bible reading: first, I

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10. Belcher, *Born To Write*, 26.

read through the entire Bible three times a year (eight chapters in the Old Testament and two in the New Testament daily). I steadily persevered in this for ten years, in order to familiarize myself with its contents, which can only be done by consecutive reading. Second, I studied a portion of the Bible each week, concentrating for ten minutes (or more) each day on the same passage, pondering the order of it, the connection between each statement, seeking a definition of the important terms in it, looking up all the marginal references, being on the look-out for its typical significance. Third, I meditated on one verse every day; writing it out on a slip of paper in the morning, memorizing it, consulting it at odd moments through the day; pondering separately each word in it, asking God to open to me its spiritual meaning and to write it on my heart.”<sup>11</sup> Concerning his other reading, especially theological books, in 1935 Pink wrote that after twenty-seven years of continuous study, he had read, “more than one million pages of religious literature.”<sup>12</sup> If one averages the one million pages over that time span, it amounts to reading over thirty-seven thousand pages per year for twenty-seven years! Extra-ordinary indeed!

The life of Arthur W. Pink has much to tell us and whether we share all of his convictions or not, we can’t help but be sympathetic with the man and inspired by his diligence. No Christian can know him without appreciation and profit. He was led by God along a difficult path, and could say himself, ‘Much failure attached to us at every point,’ but, in retrospect, we can now see how he was providentially guided to be a God-honoring witness in a day of vast superficiality. We are humbled in the presence of his love of Scripture and his single-minded devotion to Christ.

From one perspective, this biographical sketch has an intro-

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11. Murray, *Letters*, 23–24.

12. Belcher, *Born To Write*, 27.

ductory, informative purpose. On the other hand, it has a critical purpose. However, the Publisher is particularly concerned that those who read this biographical sketch will not draw the wrong conclusion about the type of criticism we have in mind. This information was not meant to be anything like the hateful, mean-spirited criticism that is often leveled against Arthur Pink. Instead, we hope this material will be seen as an honest effort to recognize some of the strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures of Arthur W. Pink and learn from them. We hope this information will be seen as something written by those who have sincerely tried to learn what Arthur Pink believed, who have been convicted by the singular focus, dedication and diligence of Pink's life and who have a personal appreciation of him and indebtedness to him that would be difficult to describe.

It is our prayer that the Lord might be pleased to use this biographical sketch to remind us all of five things: (1) the most dedicated Bible preachers/teachers have been and can be wrong; (2) the most knowledgeable Bible preachers/teachers must change and mature in their thinking because no man has a perfect knowledge of the Scriptures; (3) each individual Christian has a personal need for vigilant, prayerful, constant examination of his own heart and his own opinions; (4) the glory of God is promoted through serious Christians who live in Biblical separation from the world; and (5) the teaching of the Word of God has supreme authority and takes precedence over the opinions of all men. Our lives (Luke 6:46), our opinions (1 Timothy 6:3-5), our professions (Titus 1:16), and everything we read must be judged by God's infallible Word, "*To the law and the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them*" (Isaiah 8:20).





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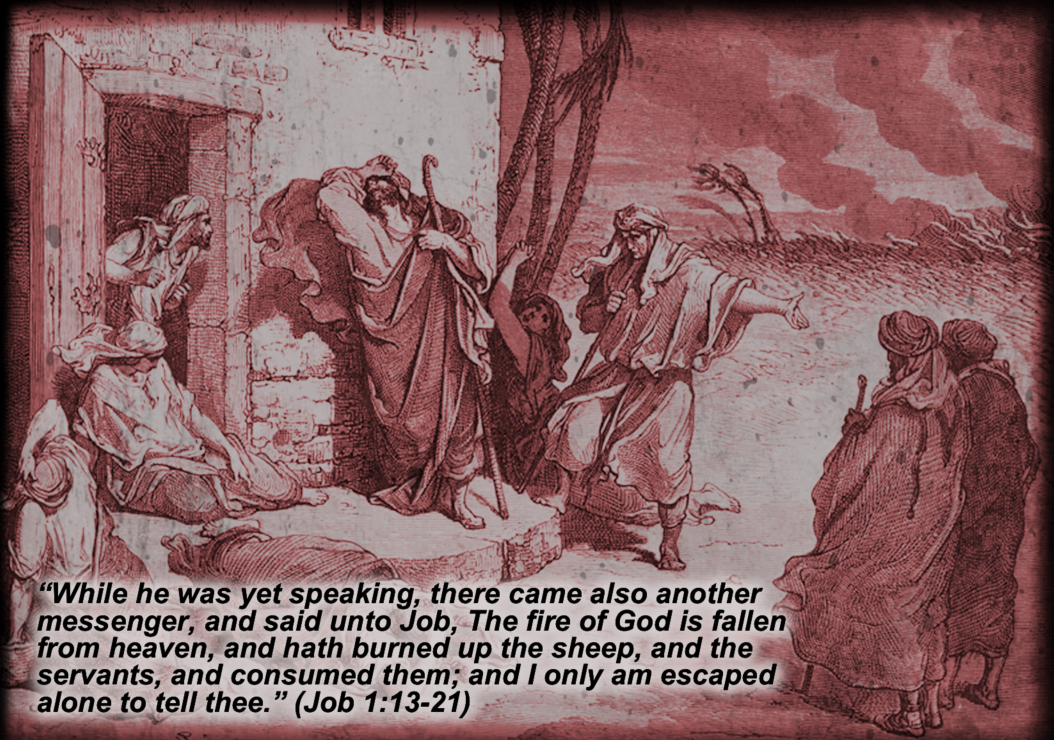
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Thou hast given a *standard* to them that fear thee;  
that it may be displayed because of the truth.

—*Psalm 60:4*

# DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

No man lives a trouble-free life in this world. *"Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward"* (Job 5:7). Thus, men can no more prevent or avoid trouble, than they can prevent sparks from flying upward in the night sky. *"Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble"* (Job 14:1). Hence, all men will, sooner or later, face adversity and endure suffering of some kind. Furthermore, the Bible reveals that just as wickedness does not exempt unsaved men from trouble, so salvation does not exempt saved men from trouble. In fact, Christian men suffer *two kinds* of trouble. They must endure both *natural* and *spiritual* troubles. But lost men are not disturbed by the "spiritual" troubles of a Christian. To repeat, no man lives a trouble-free life, not even Christians. Such an idea is an unrealistic fantasy and the figment of an imagination completely uninformed by what the Bible teaches (John 16:33; Acts 14:22, etc.). One wonders if those who espouse such ideas have ever read the truths set forth in the Book of Job and depicted in the cover pictures of this book (Job 1:13-21; 2:10). Therefore, the question is not, can you prevent or avoid having trouble. The question is do you understand: (1) the origin, nature and purpose of your troubles and (2) how you should respond to them. Under the blessing of God, Arthur W. Pink's book will assist you in both.



***"While he was yet speaking, there came also another messenger, and said unto Job, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee."*** (Job 1:13-21)

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