

The Evidence of God's Love Indicated through Discipline

a Devotional by Rev. Keith Cobb

This meditation is not intended to dampen your appreciation of God's love although we will be reflecting on a severe facet of it; instead, may we love our Father more because we see *the heart behind the hand*. The Apostle Paul reminded us that God demonstrated His love for us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us; well, if "while we were yet sinners, He loved us," surely now that we are His children, He loves us still - more so because we are united to Him in covenant. Therefore, may we find consolation in even His demonstrations of that love in His disciplining of us.

As you read the Scripture passages, join me in praying: *Lord, increase our appreciation for the loving hands that wield the rod of correction.*

We turn first to the words of our Lord Himself in Revelation 3.19.

"Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent."

Next, Hebrews 12.4-11 is a restating and expansion of an OT Scripture, Proverbs 3.11, and we read:

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, so that we may share in His holiness.

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

And now, finally, a Scripture which ties these together, Psalm 94.12:

Blessed is the man whom you chasten, O Lord, and whom You teach out of Your Law.

Let's get right into these texts with a few basic observations from each:

1. The passage from Revelation is directed corporately to a body of believers (a church), but still has personal application. It was to individuals within the church that the admonition was given (see context).
2. The Hebrew Christians were in a struggle -they were striving against sin, and it seems they had forgotten an important teaching of God's Word from Proverbs: those difficult and trying times - times of suffering - are to be often visitations of God's disciplinary measures. They knew from their own history that seasons of drought and famine or enemy attack were signs of God's displeasure with His people because of their sins, and no doubt they were recoiling as they experienced early waves of persecution (see Hebrews 10.32-38), and wondering about God's love for them.
3. The Psalmist, in his reflections on God's dealings with His covenant people, saw a connection between chastening and teaching, a most important principle for us to keep in our minds as we proceed.

Now, let us make some observations from the collect of these passages:

Chastisement is INEVITABLE -it WILL come to those who are God's people.

There are no exceptions, no exemptions, and no exclusions. God has promised it and predetermined it to happen in your life as a Christian.

Chastisement is IMPOSING IN ITS WEIGHTINESS, i.e., it can definitely interrupt our calendars, plans, and schedules. Because it is such, there are a few pitfalls we need to avoid when the struggles that accompany chastening become opportunities for the God's adversary to "threaten to undo us":

- Pitfall ONE: we can be glib and trite, and make too little of it, shrugging it off and not getting the lesson the Lord intended.
- Pitfall TWO: we can do a stoic resigned acceptance of it, and miss the whole point of it as well. "If ye *endure* chastening ..." (v. 7). This is a dangerous response to have because it is so close to that which is true, but this is the response of the super-duper pious saints. To me they are like the Indian fakir who crawls up on a board filled with nails and lies down. He doesn't have to lie down there, but he does it. There are a lot of saints who accept the discipline of the Lord in a passive way: "Oh, this is of the Lord, and I will endure it." God never asks you to take that pessimistic, super pious attitude. If you are in trouble, why don't you go and ask Him, "Lord, why did You send this to me? There is a lesson here, and I want to learn it." Don't accept it in a passive manner, simply enduring it but complaining all the time.

- Pitfall THREE: we can be crushed underneath it, and "languish in anguish."

In other words, God intended that there be a proper assessment of His chastisement, first that negatively, we don't regard it lightly, nor faint, and secondly and positively, that we reverence the Father, weighing our difficulties in the balancing scales of its results (cf. 2 Corinthians 4.13-18). The Father intends that we "bear up" (cf. verse 12), and even "lift up" our feeble hands (see the extended Hebrews passage) in worshipful praise for His expression of love.

Chastisement is INSTRUCTIVE IN NATURE; there is purpose in it from beginning to end - its purpose is to train us.

One of the key terms used here, "sons," (or children) is not a reference to infants, but *maturing* children; God disciplines those who are able to receive the instruction He intends to convey.

A second consideration for us is the fact that the word "discipline" is itself derived from the root of the word for a child who was being instructed in a formal setting; in other words, it is like we might take the word *training* and add *child* in front of it to form the word *child-training*.

Next, the word "training" is -the word from which we get our words *gymnasium* and *gymnastics*. This is not simply an academic discipline to help us think correctly; it is a practical guidance to enable us to do what God wants us to do well - to demonstrate His character.

Finally, the word "endure" is a theme of this first section of Hebrews 12. We endure by faith (v. 7), yielding to God as He works out His perfect plan to get us to the blessedness of the *afterward* of v. 11 - and that is what most helps us when we are weakened under His rod, and what transitions us into our next observation.

Chastisement is INTENTIONAL IN ITS GOALS; there is no uncertainty that, when it comes knocking, it is bringing its books. It intends to affirm sonship and relationship. It intends our good -it is always for our profit. It intends holiness. One cannot become a full-grown child of God living in fellowship with Him (the idea implied in the word "holiness" as used here) *except* through the discipline of God.

Further, chastisement intends fruit. There is deliberate and willful pruning when God wields His rod of discipline.

Finally, chastisement is **INCREMENTAL IN INTENSITY**, i.e., it worsens with defiance and lessens with compliance. This is demonstrated even in the order of the wording in the texts used above: first, there is reproof, which is verbal. It is in this way that God brings His word to penetrate the heart; He warns, He calls out to us to return to obedience: *Be zealous, and repent!*

It is afterwards that either the blossom of righteousness which results in fruit begins to appear, or a battle of wills begins - the un-win-able resistance of sinful child against the Almighty Father. This is where physical and emotional struggles begin to manifest, as in I Corinthians 11 where we read of many of glib and flippant saints who treated with contempt the Lord's Table and became sick, some even dying. James wrote that the physical healing of his readers was directly related to their confession and acknowledging of sin. From these (and other) passages, it is not incorrect to infer that chastisement may increase to eventual destruction, a frightening thing to consider in which God, in bringing about the loneliness, the feelings of abandonment, the purposeful calamities described in such passages as Amos 4 (and other passages), and even death, brings to an end the behavior that dishonors Him.

We need to re-read Proverbs 29:1, and fear. Yes, it is better to be pruned to grow and disciplined to obey than to be abandoned to burn, so let us turn our hearts to trust His discipline, to even long for it, for, as the psalmist said, "Thy ROD and Thy staff, they comfort me."