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**'What really is meant by 'the chastening of the Lord?' Who and especially how does He chasten?'**

CHASTENING primarily denotes to train children and suggests the broad idea of education. It is in this context that the Bible teaches about it. The dictionary definition is 'to correct by punishment; to inflict pain for the purpose of reforming; to purify from errors and faults; to subdue

The idea of chastisement is expressed first in the Old Testament in the book of Proverbs; "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" (Prov. 3:11,12). The truth that man needs correction is expressed by Jeremiah the prophet, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. O Lord, correct me, but with judgement; not in thine anger lest thou bring me to nothing" (Jer. 10:23,24).

It is also quite evident that the Deuteronomists knew that God intended something good by His correction, for we read: "Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee. Therefore thou shalt keep the commandments of

the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. For the Lord thy God bringeth thee into a good land a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills..." (Deut 8:5-7).

If we then were to answer the question 'what is meant by the chastening of the Lord', we would have to say that it is God training, education, and correcting His children so that He may bring them to that blessed state where they may partake of all of the blessings that He has graciously prepared for them. It is, in effect and in fact, God exercising His discipline on His children for their good.

#### What is Discipline?

True discipline, is not, as many people imagine, the wielding of the 'big stick'. When punishment has to be administered it usually means that the offender has repeatedly failed to respond to instructions. True discipline is seen in the person who has responded to the promptings of God and exhibits that self-control which God attempts to inculcate in each one of us; as Paul put it when he wrote to Timothy, "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind (self-control)". Therefore, it makes sense to us when we read the writer to the Hebrews saying, "And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives' (Heb. 12:5,6). This brings us to the consideration of suffering, and of how this fits into God's scheme of bringing us to the point of self-control.

#### Discipline and Suffering

It seems that suffering goes together with sonship. The writer of the Hebrew letter reminds us that as sons we are to "look to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction (opposition) of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds" (Heb. 12:2,3). The writer is reminding us that when we feel that the Lord's discipline is resting heavily upon us, that we look to Jesus who endured all things for us so that we might have the privilege of being sons. He reminds his readers that some had suffered shame for Christ. "But call to mind the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used" (Heb. 10:32,33). Later, he contrasts Christ's sufferings with theirs and makes the telling point, "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. (12:4). It seems that the writer is suggesting that as Christ was allowed by God to endure physical suffering so we too may have to endure correction which is painful to us.

Before we can fully understand the teaching in the Hebrew passage it is necessary for us to appreciate the operation of the family in the ancient world. The father was not only responsible for the welfare of the family unit, but he was also the source of authority in the family. The education of children embodied the principle of corporal punishment: "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Prov. 23:13,14). Physical correction was a fact of life. Fear was a necessary part of education. From this it would naturally follow that God the Father would also 'lay the rod on every son that He accepts'.

#### How does God Discipline?

We see one example of correction in 1 Tim. 1:20 where Paul writes, "Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme". This is a severe discipline by apostolic authority and probably refers to exclusion from the assembly of saints. This is a similar type of punishment to that recorded in 1 Cor. 5:5 but you will notice that the express purpose is 'so that they may learn'.

Another way is in bringing the word of God before His children, but in the proper manner. "And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (2 Tim. 2:24,25). This is why it is

important that God's children should study His word and present themselves for instruction whenever it is being taught. Incidentally, it is also why God's word should not be used as a bludgeon, 'in meekness instructing'.

Then there is the problem of the endurance of physical suffering. The writer of the Hebrew letter says, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not"? (Heb. 12:7). He furthermore goes on to suggest that if we do not endure the chastening of the Lord then we are illegitimate sons (v8). You will no doubt recall that when Jesus was before Pilate, and Pilate could find no guilt in him, he said, "I will therefore chastise him and release him" (Luke 23:16). This would undoubtedly be a chastisement with blows, to scourge. Therefore, when we are called upon to endure physical suffering, it may be that God is allowing this so that we might be refined as sons. But we can be assured that God will never allow more than we can bear and will always provide a way of escape.

The writer of the Hebrew letter sums it up by saying, "We had fathers in the flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits and live?" (Heb. 12:9).

### **The purpose of Discipline**

God never does anything without a purpose, nor is He a sadist. It would be unnatural for us to enjoy physical suffering at the time it was taking place, and so the writer says, "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" (v11). We cannot enjoy the good life until we have accepted God's discipline. We learn to accept that discipline because of the example which we have seen in Christ who always accepted the discipline of God. In v10 the writer says that it is for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

This is a fascinating study and I do not pretend to have exhausted all that is contained in the teaching, but I would advise all God's children to place themselves unreservedly under the discipline of our Heavenly Father so that He may bring us to that state of righteousness and holiness which will make for our eternal salvation and happiness.