

Teaching Sound Doctrine

The Nature of Chastening

Hebrews 12:1-11 is the source of the majority of New Testament teaching on the subject of chastening. In this lesson we will attempt to define and discuss the nature of chastening as revealed in this passage. First, the actual root words will be defined and their derivatives discussed, then a study of the context of the passage will be made, and the third segment will consult parallel passages in an attempt to broaden the perspective of our understanding of the term's application.

The English word chastisement is translated in Old Testament texts from the Hebrew word *musar* or from the verb form *yasar*. When translated into English these words mean discipline (of the moral nature), chastening, admonition, or correction. However in some instances the words are used to mean physical punishment, The Hebrew word *yakach* is used in 2 Samuel 7:14 and Job 33:19 as "to make manifest or to convict." Another Hebrew word which implies chastisement is *tokachath*, which when used in Psalms 73:14 means reproof or conviction.

In the New Testament two related words are translated by the English words "chastening" and "chastisement." *Paideua*, the verb form means to train, such as the training or rearing of children; hence to educate. In Titus 2:12 it is translated "instructing," which implies training, gracious and firm, which brings salvation. *Paideua* also carries the meaning of correcting with words, reproof, and admonishing. This application is made in 2 Timothy 2:25. Yet another application of this word is found in I Corinthians 11:32 and Hebrews 12:6, 7, 10, where it refers to chastening by the inflictions of evil and calamities. The second Greek word is the noun, *Paideia*, which also denotes training a child. From this definition, discipline, particularly the Christian discipline that regulates character can be inferred. In 2 Timothy 3:16, the word is translated "instruction."

It is obvious that all the various translations and applications of these words are very closely related. Webster defines chastisement as punishment, especially by beating, and chastening as punishment inflicted to make an individual better. We must consider the nature of chastening in the light of the text of the book of Hebrews.

The main thought of Hebrews 12 is the three sources from whence physical and emotional strains may come. The three sources of strain are the discipline of

God, the weakness of self, and the contradiction of and by sinners. Our Study deals primarily with the first two of the enumerated sources; however, the other sources often play a vital role in the exercise of God's discipline.

The Hebrew writer introduces the subject of chastening by admonishing the readers concerning the teaching of the Old Testament. The writer reproves them for forgetting the teachings of the Old Testament, and then used the scriptures as an admonition to bear up under their present stress. The passages quoted in Hebrews 12:5, 6 are found in Job 5:17 and Psalms 94:12. The quotation from Job admonishes the receiver of God's chastisement not to despise the chastening. In the words of William Barclay, "A man that despises God's chastening accepts it, but he resents it. He considers it an act of vindication by a vengeful God." Against such an attitude the people are warned. They are also encouraged not to faint in the face of rebuke. Robert Milligan points out that while on the one hand they were not to despise, or treat lightly the rebuke of God, they on the other hand were not to faint, or become discouraged and disheartened by what seemed to them to be such a heavy burden?

The reference to Psalms 94:12 gives the readers the reason why they should not on the one hand treat lightly the chastening of the Lord, or on the other hand be too dejected by it. The simple fact that this chastening is from God makes it a very grave and momentous matter, and at the same time it gives us the assurance that chastening is not the punishment of revenge, but the discipline of love. After all, no life can have value apart from discipline. We should look at discipline as the sign of love and responsibility shown by the Father.

So we can see that chastening is the act of a loving God, but the latter part of this passage contains another significant point. Chastisement is placed upon his children by God. No child of God need, therefore, expect to enter heaven without on his way thither, passing through the furnace of afflictions. As is said in Acts 14:22, "We must through much tribulation enter in the kingdom of God." Every son, whom God accepts and receives, is made to feel his chastening rod. Hastings echoes this thoughts and adds, "Suffering is the rod in the Father's hand, and the sole instrument by which the purposes of the Father's love can be effected." So we can indeed look upon the scourging of God as a sign of acceptance and recognition on the part of God.

The seventh verse begins with a conditional statement, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons;" we are admonished to endure the chastening. That means that we should bear up patiently under the chastisement and not merely undergo it. Rotherham points out in connection with this verse that, "For the sake of discipline we should persevere." The idea is the same; we should not shrink back from our responsibility to accept chastisement. The statement goes on to tell us the result, for if we endure chastening; then God deals with us as sons. The second clause of the verse asks, "For what son is he whom the Father

chasteneth not?" This is certainly true for no genuine child lives without the experience of fatherly reproof.

This line of reasoning is carried into the next verse, where the writer states, "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." So we can see that if all the children of God experience chastisement, and we do not experience it, then we are not sons. In the words of Barclay, "Chastisement is the discipline of a loving father; the supreme punishment is when God lets us alone as unteachable." Truly if we do not experience chastisement we are like bastards, the illegitimate children, whose education is commonly neglected, much to their own injury and disgrace. Certainly, we should recognize that when God deals with us as sons, there will naturally be tribulations put upon us. Historically it can be observed that the most saintly of men suffered the most. "Instead, therefore, of murmuring and complaining at the chastening of the Lord, you should rather feel encouraged by it, knowing that it is evidence of your sonship, and of God's love for you as his adopted children."

In the first division of our study of Hebrews 12 we are reminded that the chastening of the Lord which we are called upon to endure is the sign of our sonship. We will now look at the conclusion of the Hebrew writer's argument.

"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?" In this passage the fathers of our earthly corporeal being are contrasted with the Father of spirits, the Author not only of our spiritual being, but of all spiritual beings.

This verse can best be understood when observed in the light of the next verse which reads, "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."

Taken together these two passages present several contrasts. One such contrast is that of parentage. "We owe our earthly fathers for our bodily life., it is God to whom we owe our immortal spirit." In the words of the Pulpit Commentary, "Earthly parents transmit carnal life, our spiritual part is due to our Divine parentage." There are also contrasts that can be made between the chastening of the earthly fathers and the chastening that comes from God. As the passage states, fleshly parents chasten "after their own pleasure" or in other words, as they judge to be best. The discipline of an earthly parent is the expression of his ideas and wishes, while on the other hand the discipline of God is meant for the individual's well being and is intended to profit them morally and spiritually. In like manner, the physical parent in the process of chastening is likely to give vent to temper or wounded personal feelings, and even when restraint is practiced

the tendency is to put emphasis on the authority over the child. With God this is not the case. God's chastisement is one characterized by self-control and exercised with divine wisdom.

Another aspect of the passage is that fatherly discipline is a process of education. We are educated through our physical needs; we are brought into the world helpless. We must be cared for and nurtured through our early years. In this physical existence the parents must train and chasten a child until he is ready to live in the world on his own.

The same is true as children of God; we enter his family helpless, and we are capable of feeding only upon the milk of the word. We must be built up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord until we are strong enough to digest the meat of the word. We are built up through a process of chastening administered by the Father.

Too often we confuse the concept of chastening connecting it only with the idea of physical punishment. But we can be chastened by spiritual suffering for the cause of Christ and not always is it in the form of physical persecution for Christ. Another valid point to consider is that without suffering we tend to settle down in easy nests until the slightest disturbance of the pleasant routine irritates us.

Another way in which we are educated is through our mental needs. The human being is by nature curious, so that we hunger and thirst after knowledge and truth. But the human tendency is to exalt or even deify our wisdom. The chastening of the Lord helps us remember that the wisdom of man is foolishness in the eyes of God. The third way in which we should look upon chastening as education is as a means of meeting our spiritual needs. We all feel the need of propitiation and reconciliation and as in the case of Job, suffering or chastisement taken in the proper frame of mind reconciles one to the father.

There are two relevant comments which should be made concerning the "few days" of this passage. First our earthly parents only chastise us for a short while and then leave us to go on in our own unguided erring way. Even while our fathers were guiding us, they corrected us according to what seemed good unto them, and many times they were in error. This is not true of the chastisement of God. For one thing, we are under the training of our heavenly Father all our life. And secondly, we have no need to fear error in His chastisement for He is the unerring almighty God.

The latter phrase of the passage tells us why the chastisement of the Lord is superior. The chastisement of our earthly parents may better suit us for life in today's world, but the chastisement of the Lord is to enable us to partake of his holiness. We should look on the hardships of life only as the discipline of God, sent to work not injury or harm, but for the ultimate and highest good? Discipline is the mercy of God.

The final verse of the text sheds light on the impression chastisement makes upon the thoughts and emotions of those who receive it. "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." The observation of the writer that all chastening is at the time of its administration a thing of grief or displeasure is easily proved through our own personal experiences. The inspired writer just acknowledges the fact. All chastisement, both human and divine, gives us present pain. Sometimes the correction of a necessity must be painful, the chastening being consequential to the act which precipitated it.

No matter how grievous the chastisement seems, the endurance of it brings reward that is out of perspective with the amount of chastisement. The efficacy of chastisement of the disciple depends upon the spirit with which it is received. In other words, if a disciple accepts chastisement graciously and applies it to himself, he will reap bountiful gifts. Although when first being exposed to chastisement the experience may seem unpleasant, the experience yields fruits of peace. Righteousness is its fruit, and this fruit gives us peace and consolation when our soul is grieved and troubled.

The final point of the passage is probably the most important, as an admonition to those who are to receive the chastisement. There it says that the chastisement yields peaceable fruits "unto them who are exercised thereby." Therefore, the fruits are granted not to everyone, but only to those who take advantage of God's training. A large part of chastisement is the struggle to accept that teaching, although the immediate results may be unpleasant, fully realizing that they will result in greater joy.

There are bountiful gifts in chastisement, consisting of the fruits of peace and righteousness, but these are available only to those who are willing to accept chastisement.