

The Chastening of the Lord
Hebrews 12:1-11
(Part 1 of 2)
By Randy Wages
6/2/13

Note: The text below was prepared for oral delivery rather than for publication in print. As such, be aware that sentence fragments are intentionally used and that this document has not been edited to correct the errors in grammar, sentence structure, etc.

- I. Introduction: Today I am beginning a 2 part series covering the first 11 verses of Hebrews 12. And the title I've chosen for this 1st segment is "The Chastening of the Lord."
- A. As our text will show us, this chastening is the means by which God produces what verse 11 calls the "Peaceable Fruit of Righteousness," which will be the title for the 2nd segment of this series. But our emphasis today will be on how God providentially yields in the believer this peaceable fruit of righteousness by the means of chastisement (the loving, corrective, disciplinary measures) appointed by Him for His adopted children in Christ. As we'll see, this chastisement is likened to the discipline children receive at the loving hand of their earthly parents.
- B. And the believer's endurance of these circumstances is part of the cross believers are said to bear as we take up His cross. The life of faith involves taking up His cross according to the Bible. Six times in the New Testament we have recorded the words of Christ saying if any will come after Him, they must deny themselves and take up His cross daily and follow Him. In Luke's Gospel Christ adds that those who don't bear His cross cannot be His disciple (or follower). Now taking up His cross is not pleasant to our flesh because a cross is a burden. And so it is grievous (not something naturally sought after by us). And that's how the Lord's chastisement of His people is described in our text today – as that which seems "grievous" to us. That simply means that it's sorrowful, painful to us, a matter of grief.
- C. And I believe it's helpful to our understanding of the chastening of the Lord if throughout this study we will keep in mind God's words through Paul to the Romans in Romans 8:28, where he wrote, "***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.***" And all these things (which includes the chastening of the Lord) – all work together for good for each and every one of God's adopted children in Christ, the called according to His purpose, those in whom God the Holy Spirit produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness through chastisements.
- II. Background: Now leading up to today's text, in the preceding 11th chapter of Hebrews we're given a brief history of some of the Old Testament saints. Many refer to Hebrews 11 as the Hall of Fame of Faith. And in that chapter, God relates how all of these objects of His everlasting mercy and grace had endured great difficulties in bearing His cross (and so we're prone to applaud their great faith). But chapter 11 really is a testimony of God's faithfulness – how that in each of their trying circumstances, He supported them all the way, gave them the strength to run their race and the grace to persevere to the end in the faith. And with that as the example set forth, he continues into chapter 12 saying...

III. Hebrews 12:1-11:

A. Verse 1-3: *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight*, <in other words anything that would hinder us> *and* <lay aside> *the sin which doth so easily beset us*, <unbelief that would have us doubt or despair> *and let us run with patience* <i.e. so as to endure...> *the race that is set before us*,² *Looking unto 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.* ³*For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.* Being sinners, we deserve the wrath of God so let us keep in mind the cross our sinless, unblameable Savior bore. This One who knew no sin, suffered, bled and died – (He who was without spot) dying at the hand of sinners (those full of spots). There’s the contradiction. So let us endure (seeing the joy set before us in Christ) and faint not. Continuing in verse 4 he says...

B. Verses 4-5: *Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.* <These to whom he writes (like us) had not been called upon (at least not yet) to die a martyr’s death as God had so purposed in the lives of some of those cited in the previous chapter> ⁵*And ye have forgotten* <Or as some believe this should be translated more in the form of a question, as “Have you forgotten...> *the exhortation* <that is the encouragement > *which speaketh unto you as unto children*, <as the children of God. And so he reminds them of it by quoting from Proverbs 3, saying...> *My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord*, <Now this chastening of the Lord is not in any sense to be considered as punishment due unto the sins of God’s children. That would not be dealing with them as children but rather in a vindictive way. No, for those of the household of faith, their Surety, the Lord Jesus Christ, took on that responsibility. He bore the full punishment due unto all their sins. As God said through the Prophet Isaiah. He, Jesus Christ, was bruised for the iniquities of God’s children; the chastisement of their peace was upon Him (Isa. 53:5). So the chastening of the Lord upon His children is not punishment but rather correction that is instructive and for their benefit.

And notice it is called the “chastening of the Lord.” Every affliction a believer endures under the providence of our Sovereign God is appointed by Him in love and mercy, governed by Him, and limited by Him (how difficult, how long, how many), and takes place for His own glory and the believer’s own good. So as much as our flesh dreads being so disciplined, and as sorrowful as it may be at the time, we’re not to despise it but rather we should highly regard it. That doesn’t mean we will enjoy it, but we should regard it highly, knowing it will achieve that for which God intended for our good. Paul continues citing this encouragement to God’s children, saying...> *nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:* Verse 6...

C. Verses 6-8:

1. Verse 6: ***For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*** So this chastening is done in perfect love. And this loving discipline is only for the children which He receives and it is for every one of them, every son whom He receiveth – those whom God the Father has predestined to the adoption of children, those who He determined in the everlasting covenant of grace that He would be their Abba Father, those for whom God the Son took on a human nature and for whom He lived and died and thereby redeemed that they might receive the adoption of children, those who manifest they are the accepted children of God by their faith in Christ, those who shall enjoy all the privileges of son-ship and communion with God, those who ultimately will be received by Him into His presence in heaven's eternal glory. Now you should rejoice if this describes you even though it means you will most certainly endure difficulties (chastisements) appointed by your heavenly Father in perfect love for your good because as we see in verse 7....
2. Verse 7-8: ***If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ⁸But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers,*** <i.e. – speaking of all of His children, but if you are without this chastisement...> ***then are ye bastards, and not sons.*** None of God's children are exempted from chastisement. No chastisement = not in His family. And not all who profess to belong to Him are His true children – they may not be what they profess to be, what they may even believe themselves to be. And here is an indicator of that: If there is no chastisement they are bastards, not sons. That shoots a hole in the health and wealth gospel that suggests that outward peace and prosperity in this life is an indicator of who is eternally blessed by God. No, God's children are not without chastisement. Continuing in verse 9 he adds...

D. Verses 9-10: ***Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh*** <earthly fathers> ***which corrected us, and we gave them reverence:*** <We submitted to their correction, knowing they loved us and so we respected them for it> ***shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits,*** <the Creator of our eternal souls> ***and live?*** <eternally> ¹⁰***For they*** <our earthly parents> ***verily for a few days*** <the days of our youth when we were under the guidance of our parents> ***chastened us after their own pleasure;*** <i.e. – as they judged best in their wisdom, fallible though it was> ***but he*** <our all-wise heavenly Father> ***for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*** Now this isn't speaking of the essential holiness of God. Holiness is not a communicable attribute. That only belongs to Deity. Rather we partake of the holiness which is in Christ, received out of His fullness. We partake of it or enter into fellowship with it, in communion with God as we see our holiness in Christ by God-given faith. The only holiness that believers have is His holiness, based upon His perfect righteousness imputed or charged to their accounts.

Our difficulties, troubles, and afflictions (chastisements) bring us to a greater sense of our sin, they cause us to acknowledge our sin, and so remind us of the full pardon and forgiveness of all our sins – reminding believers of their completeness in Christ, accepted in Him, having His perfect righteous accounted to them, knowing God sees them in Christ as holy, unblameable, and unreprouable (saved sinners are described that way in Col. 1:22) all due to their oneness (their union), with Christ, their sinless Substitute and Representative before the holy justice of God. And then in verse 11 he declares...

E. Verse 11: *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 afflictions believers endure under the chastening of the Lord do not at all seem to be a matter of joy – though they really are when viewed by faith. But this speaks of that which we naturally grieve over – circumstances that we would not choose for ourselves. Notice this wording indicates believers are “exercised” by the Lord’s chastening. I know some folks claim to enjoy physical exercising but personally, I never have. I do exercise because I know it is good for me. And whether you find physical exercise enjoyable or not, we know it is for our own good. But like physical exercise is to me, this chastening of the Lord involves the believer’s experience of things that none of them enjoy. Nevertheless, they are the tokens of the love of God in Christ, the work of God the Holy Spirit in the believer and evidences of son-ship – of being one of the adopted children of God. And the very things we grieve over all work together for the good of God’s children. Our senses scream otherwise, but faith believes that. And patience will have us experience it.

IV. Chastisement: Now it’s clear from our text that this peaceable fruit of righteousness is (1) produced in all the children of God (and only in them) and (2) by God’s appointed means – by the chastening of the Lord. So let’s consider in more detail what this chastening of the Lord is about.

A. First as we’ve seen, it is that which seems grievous to us, not something enjoyed as it is endured. As I mentioned in my introduction, this chastisement is akin to bearing His cross – a burden that opposes our own wills. As I’ve also said, it consists of that which we would not choose for ourselves. Well, can’t everyone honestly say that things don’t always go according to their wishes or wills? Yet many of them are not sons – not to be found among God’s adopted children in Christ. So while we can know that the chastening of the Lord seems grievous, we cannot conclude that just because one experiences grievous things, that it is the chastening of the Lord.

B. But here’s something for you to think about: Since it is a clear truth from God’s Word that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose, (Rom 8:28), then all grievous things that true believers endure may well be considered as the chastening of the Lord for it yields or produces that which is good for the believer – the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

I suggest this because the believer's eternal good can all be attributed to the finished work of Christ for them. All their good is a fruit and effect of His finished work on the cross, His righteousness imputed or charged to them so that they (otherwise guilty, hell-deserving sinners) are reconciled to a holy God, peace made between them and God. So all of the fruit and effects produced in the believer as a result of Christ's accomplished righteousness for them may well be considered to be peaceable fruits of righteousness.

- C. Well, does that mean that believers should not worry about committing sin and suffering its consequences in this life because they know that all things work together for their good – knowing that even the consequences of their sins might likewise yield afterward the peaceable fruit of righteousness as produced by the chastening of the Lord? No – In fact the embracing of that philosophy brings to doubt whether one is among those for whom all things work together for good, the called according to His purpose. Paul dealt with that mindset beginning in Romans 6:1 as he wrote, ***“What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? ²God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”*** Continuing down in verse 11 he adds, ***“Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*** <In other words, based upon seeing the peaceable fruit of Christ's righteousness derived from your union with Him, then...> ¹²***Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.*** ¹³***Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.***”

There's the motive of grace and gratitude impressed upon true believers by the Holy Spirit. Their motive in striving to obey God and avoid sin is not in order to gain God's favor or spiritual life. Rather, they strive to obey and avoid sin as those who are already alive from the dead due to their union with Christ in His death and resurrection. If one professes to believe on Christ and yet persists in an attitude of blatant disregard for God's revealed will as it pertains to their character and conduct, it exposes an absence of a love for God and ingratitude that would indicate the love of God hasn't been shed abroad in their hearts. But just because our fallen, sinful natures are prone to that, it doesn't alter the truth of Romans 8:28. But it does remind us that its promise (that all things will work together for good) is limited to those who do love God, who are the called according to His purpose. Think of the grace of our God who commended His love toward us while we were yet sinners, ingrates, at enmity with the true and living God!

Now back to our text it is clear: The Lord's chastening is grievous to us at the time. But not all grievous circumstances are chastisements just as all things do not work together for the good of those who are not the called according to His purpose.

D. The chastening of the Lord includes what one credible Bible commentator referred to as the “afflictive providence” of God. In other words it includes all the trials, temptations, difficulties or afflictions, appointed by God and brought about according to His own sovereign will in the lives of His children, all flowing from His everlasting love for them. **“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth...”** (Heb 12:6a). Now just as I’ve shown that not all which is grievous to us can be considered as the chastening of the Lord; likewise, not all trials, temptations, difficulties and afflictions are chastisements from the Lord.

To the believers at Corinth Paul wrote, **“There hath no temptation** <and the word “temptation” there includes trials and afflictions> **taken you but such as is common to man:** <The point here being that your difficulties are not unique to you, but to the believers at Corinth Paul adds...> **but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”** (I Cor. 10:13). No matter how difficult our trials may seem, we know from this promise that God doesn’t give His children any more than He will give them grace to handle. We have a record of His faithfulness in so doing through the example of those saints as recorded for us in Hebrews 11. So the outward afflictions, trials, and difficulties endured by true believers are chastisements from the Lord. But since all (both saved and lost) endure grievous, providential afflictions, then those circumstances alone do not distinguish the sons from (as our text puts it) the bastards – those who illegitimately may profess to believe in Christ and may even mistakenly presume to be a true child of God, but aren’t.

Many preachers will speak words of comfort to those in their congregations in their times of difficulty by quoting to them Romans 8:28, that all things work together for their good, including the chastisements of the Lord. And that truly is a source of comfort to true believers. But if the “gospel” (the body of faith) that is believed doesn’t set forth the imputed righteousness of God in Christ as the only ground for their peace with God, they have no basis for concluding that the difficulties in their lives are the chastisements of the Lord – not where the peaceable fruit of righteousness remains absent. And I say this because sadly, so many remain deceived in counting themselves as Christians while knowing nothing about the peaceable fruit of righteousness that belongs to all of God’s true children.

Like many of you in years past, there was a time I took comfort from these same words, but back then, in applying them to myself, it was like I was reading somebody else’s mail. If God doesn’t at some point bring you to value (by the Spirit’s work of regeneration and conversion, through the preached Gospel of God’s grace in Christ wherein His righteousness is revealed) – bring you to value and rest in the peaceable fruit of righteousness, then you’re not a son but a bastard. That ought to make us all want to know more about this righteousness, His righteousness, that alone brings peace – reconciles a sinner unto a holy God.

E. Now, there are some difficulties and afflictions that only true believers experience:

1. First there is the persecution over their identification with and promotion of God's Gospel. When you consider the context of Hebrews 12 which begins by referring us back to chapter 11 and the trials of many of the Old Testament saints, much (not all, but much) of the afflictions they endured were due to their identification with the Gospel. As Christ said, "***Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*** ¹¹***Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.*** ¹²***Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.***" (Matt 5:10-12). Thankfully we haven't been called upon to suffer as most of those listed in Hebrews 11 but all believers are persecuted (at least to some extent) by the rejection of family and friends due to what the Bible calls the "offence of the cross" (Gal. 5:11) – the offence that the Gospel of pure, unadulterated grace brings to the natural mind which will have us cry out, "Don't tell me there is nothing I can do to be saved." When I thought like that, I wouldn't have phrased it that way, but in essence wasn't I saying, "Don't tell me I really do need God's mercy and grace."
2. Secondly, only the children of God (true believers) experience what some have referred to as the inward cross – the internal warfare between the flesh and the Spirit. Those without the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit do not experience the chastisement of the Lord and the eternal good derived from bearing that inward cross. And yet so many mistakenly think they experience that warfare in which the Bible teaches all believers are engaged. By nature, as fallen sinners, all (even before we hear God's Gospel of grace) – all of us struggle internally if we attempt to live upright, moral lives consistent with God's revealed will, fighting our natural, sinful tendencies. But again, if afterward there is no peaceable fruit of righteousness produced in you, then there is no basis for characterizing your struggle as that internal warfare that God's children are said to experience – no justification for considering that to be the chastening of the Lord. Where the peaceable fruit of righteousness remains absent, the struggles are not between the flesh and the Spirit, but rather it's a vain struggle in which the sinner presumes to be able to measure up and gain their own victory – in essence presuming to produce their own righteousness, that which they imagine will find them acceptable in God's sight.

In contrast to that, in the believer's warfare between the flesh and the Spirit, they discover they are in a battle that serves as a continual reminder of their inadequacy to gain their own victory. It's a battle that won't go away until we leave this sinful body of death. So the believer is reminded of the peaceable fruit of righteousness they have in Christ – the perfect, justice-satisfying, peacemaking righteousness He rendered for them by His doing and dying.

And so while they fight the good fight to the end, they do so as they are sustained by a perfect peace that has been made for them, knowing that the battle in which they are engaged is one they could never win for themselves. But instead they know it is one that has already been won for them. The sin nature stays with them and plagues them throughout this life, but having been given a new principle of life, born again of the Spirit; they now also have the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit. And that means war.

The life of a true believer is not necessarily one of continual outward difficulties and afflictions under the providence of God. At times God causes some of His children to prosper in this life, to enjoy happiness in their circumstances, in their family, in their health. And the believer should (and does by God's grace) see God's goodness in those mercies and thanks God for them. So at times God removes the burden of those outward crosses we bear, but He never removes the inward cross in this lifetime. The believer (a sinner saved by grace) will carry that burden until the day he or she dies because of the corruption of our fallen sinful nature, that which the scripture calls "the flesh." And the internal warfare that results is between that sinful nature (flesh) that opposes their new principle of life and the influence of the indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit.

Until God brings spiritual life and gives us the gift of faith to believe on Christ as He is revealed in the Gospel, as the Lord our righteousness, that warfare has yet to be engaged. In the state of unbelief, there is no spiritual life to do battle with our fallen sinful natures. And that very sinful nature, the flesh, is manifested as being unopposed (without opposition) in the hearts of unbelievers, even religious ones as it is evidenced by their false hope or ground of salvation – something that proceeds from them, a product of the flesh, having confidence in the flesh – a work of their own hand presumed to make the real difference in their being saved.

Think of the masses who believe that Christ died for everyone and, as such, are reduced to believing that the real difference in salvation has to be something other than (or in addition to) the cross work of Christ – most typically believed to hinge on some decision they make to get themselves saved. That's not the hope of God's true children. Their hope is in Christ and His finished work alone, the righteousness of God that He rendered for them by His obedience unto death on the cross, whereby perfect, everlasting peace was made between God and His reconciled children – all those for whom He lived and died and to whom His righteousness has been imputed, who in time shall all receive the adoption of children by His blood-bought gift of faith.

V. Closing: Well, in the next segment of this 2 part series, we'll spend more time discussing the peaceable fruit of righteousness and how various chastisements of the Lord might be used to bring that about in the believer. But to summarize today's message, we've seen from God's word the following:

- That all whom the Lord loves He chastens, dealing with them as sons
- We've seen that any who are without chastisements, are not sons but illegitimate, though they may imagine themselves to be sons
- We've seen that while the Lord's chastening is described as that which seems grievous as we go through it, not all grievous afflictions or difficulties can be characterized as the chastening of the Lord,
- Nor can all the internal conflicts (experienced within by those who strive to avoid sin and live a moral life) be characterized as the chastening of the Lord.

So let us examine the tree by the fruit that is yielded afterward, not by the trying circumstances themselves. Some of the more popular preachers of our day are excellent motivational speakers, who are very skilled at inspiring their listeners to look past their various difficult circumstances so as to gain some sense of peace and comfort. They may successfully divert their attention from their present difficulties by having them take comfort in their presumed future eternal bliss in heaven's glory. And often it is suggested that it's "there for the taking" simply on the basis of whether or not you prefer heaven over hell. Pretty easy sell wouldn't you say.

Granted their messages may be laced with biblical language but often there is little, if any, doctrinal substance. It is not uncommon to hear it suggested that your salvation simply requires a decision to be made by you. True, they may talk a bit about Jesus and things He has done – not to single-handedly save them, but to make their salvation possible. But here's the abbreviated version: "Ultimately, it's up to you." Their false gospel message could often be summarized like this: If you want to go to heaven, just choose to do so by believing something (perhaps even by invoking the name Christ) and now let's smile and feel good about it. Just decide for Jesus and take comfort – take comfort in your decision.

For the children of God, the called according to His purpose, all things do work together for their eternal good. And this is a great comfort to them as they endure the chastening of the Lord. But don't be fooled. Many can and do experience a temporary peace of mind through the power of positive thinking. Charismatic, dynamic, motivational speakers can effectively have their listeners looking past their temporal difficulties for a time as they speak to them as if they are the children of God and so can look for better days in expectation of an eternity in heaven's glory.

But “...*the peace if God, which passeth all* <natural> *understanding,...*” (Phil. 4:7), the peace true believers experience, is not just a mind game. True religion is not, as Karl Marx put it, a mere opiate for the people. There is doctrinal substance to the Gospel of God’s grace which they believe. As Roman 1:16 and 17 declares to us, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation because therein is the righteousness of God revealed. Is that the basis of your hope, the ground of your salvation?

Think of the masses who have their ears tickled by the popular preachers who head these mega churches (and even the majority of those who consider themselves Christians in churches whether large or small). It is a sad fact that most of them know little if anything about the righteousness of God in Christ. I was raised in church from the cradle roll on up, but that ignorance of His righteousness described me as well for the 1st 32 years of my life. I had never even heard of the imputed righteousness of God in Christ.

So, if you take comfort in your times of difficulty by perceiving them to be the loving chastisements of the Lord, among the “all things” that work together for the eternal good of His children – be willing to test that by looking at the fruit produced afterward. Do these difficulties lead you to reflect back upon a presumed salvation, a sense of peace derived by your own doing (perhaps your decision for Jesus) or do they drive you to look to Jesus Christ alone as the author and finisher of the faith – the One whose justice-satisfying obedience unto death, the righteousness He established, fully reconciled His children unto Himself, made peace between God and these otherwise hell-deserving sinners for whom He lived and died. If that peaceable fruit of righteousness describes the after-effects produced in you by your difficulties, then count it all joy to have been chastised by your loving heavenly Father – for this is the mark of His true children.

“...*whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,...*” (Heb. 12:6a) so “...*despise not thou the chastening of the Lord,...*” (Heb 12:5b).

Footnote from the author: While this sermon was prepared and delivered by me, I often utilize the commentaries, study helps, and teachings of others to supplement my own prayerful study of the scriptures. Since this document was not originally prepared for publication in print, please excuse and recognize that it was unfeasible to properly identify and credit all of the various original sources used to develop the content herein. Ultimately, it is my sincere and foremost objective to accurately present the gospel of God’s grace found in the only infallible source, God’s word itself – the Bible.