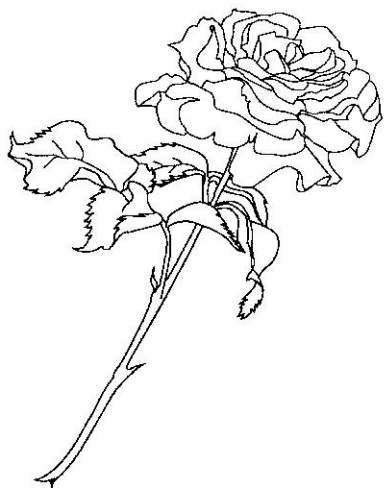


Chastening



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Chastening

Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." (Heb. 12:6.)

How deep is the mystery of God's chastening of His children! And how the soul shrinks at the very mention of the word! Yet, in this Hebrews passage is set forth some of the most precious teaching of God's Word as to His loving dealing with the lives of His own. Let us give heed to it. For it touches the deeps of Christian experience in that it brings us face to face with God's wondrous grace in overruling the mystery of suffering to the enrichment and unspeakable blessing of the lives of His children. And let us note, first, that

Chastening is God's "Child-Training."

That is what the word means. It is built upon the Greek word "Child." It is the root-word for "child" with the verb termination added to it. It means "to deal with as a child," to "child-train." Nine times in the passage occurs the word "son," "child," and "father." God is speaking to His own. We are His own dear children. He has brought us into His great family. And now having saved us, He is going to train us. Up there is the homeland and the glory; down here is the suffering. He is even overruling the suffering to child-train us for the glory. And thus what sweetness and preciousness flow forth from this much misunderstood fragment of His Word as we invest it with its literal significance. Let us read it into the whole passage and mark the blessing in it.

"My son, despise not thou the child-training of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: for whom the Lord loveth He child-traineth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure child-

training. God dealeth with you as with sons: for what son is he whom the father child-traineth not? But if ye be without child-training, whereof all are partakers, then ye are 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 to the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days child-trained us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. Now no child-training for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless afterward it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

Chastening is for Purification

Does God have a grudge against us? Is God trying as it were, to "get even" with us? Is God's "child-training" a kind of parental revenge for childish wrong-doing? Oft-times we think so. But it is far from the truth. "For they (our earthly parents) verily for a few days child-trained us after their own pleasure, but He FOR OUR PROFIT, that we might be PARTAKERS OF HIS HOLINESS." (v. 10). God's one supreme purpose in child-training us, is purification. He is seeking to purge from us all that mars the likeness of Jesus Christ within us. It is His own holiness that He seeks to be perfect within us.

A visitor was watching a silversmith heating the silver in his crucible. Hotter and hotter grew the fires. All the while the smith was closely scanning the crucible. Presently the visitor said: "Why do you watch the silver so closely? What are you looking for?" "I am looking for my face," was the answer. "When I see my own image in the silver, then I stop. The work is done." Why did the silversmith light the fires under the silver? To purify

and perfect it. Is God's child-training an executioner visiting upon us the wrath of God? Nay, it is rather a cleansing angel pouring forth upon us the love of God. The furnace, the suffering, the agony of child-training, what do they mean? *God is looking for a face!* It is the face of His Son. "For He hath foreordained us to be conformed to the image of His Son." And He is purging from us in child-training all that dims that image. Therefore, child of God, do not be associating only with the word "chastise." Couple it also with that beautiful word "chastity," the jewel of perfect, spotless purity of heart and life. Thus "chasten" is to *chaste-en*. It is to *make chaste*, to make pure, spiritually. To purge, to cleanse, to purify—that is God's great purpose in all His "child-training."

Like all true parents, therefore, God has a model, a pattern to which He is fashioning the lives of His children. That pattern is Jesus Christ. And God's great purpose is that Christ should be "formed in us." Thus the will of the Father is perfect. But the will of the child must be plastic. For how can the will of the Father be carried out unless the will of the child be yielded? Otherwise may not the child baffle at every step the highest purpose of the Father for the life of the child? You can do anything with an obedient child. You can do nothing with a disobedient one. Wherefore *the first great lesson God is seeking to teach in chastening is—*

Obedience

"Though He were a Son yet *learned He obedience through the things which He suffered*" is the wondrous word spoken of the Lord Himself. And have you not noted how true this is in the lives of all God's children? The chamber of the suffering—is it not the birthplace of obedience? Is not

the crowning grace of utter submission to His will wrought out in the place of affliction as nowhere else? Go sometimes into such a chamber of suffering. There lies one of God's "shut-ins." For years she has been in the fiery furnace of affliction. By and by you express the hope that this affliction may pass away. A smile flits over the wan face. Quickly from the trembling lips drops this sentence: "If it be God's will."—Not her own will, but God's! That is the the first thought. The words, the spirit, the life of the sufferer all image forth one great truth—absolute submission to the will of God. Somehow—we know not how—but, *somehow*, this spirit of obedience, of perfect submission to the will of God is wrought out in the furnace and the crucible as in no other experience of life. How many of us strong-willed men and women have found that to be true!

We recall a striking story from the lips of a friend. A lady was summering in Switzerland. One day she started out for a stroll. Presently, as she climbed the mountainside, she came to a shepherd's fold. She walked to the door and looked in. There sat the shepherd. Around him lay his flock. Near at hand, on a pile of straw, lay a single sheep. It seemed to be suffering. Scanning it closely, the lady saw that its leg was broken. At once her sympathy went out to the suffering sheep. She looked up inquiringly to the shepherd. "How did it happen?" she said. To her amazement, the shepherd answered: "Madam, I broke that sheep's leg." A look of pain swept over the visitor's face. Seeing it, the shepherd went on: "Madam, of all the sheep in my flock, this one was the most wayward. It never would obey my voice. It never would follow the pathway which I was leading the flock. It wandered to the verge of many a perilous cliff and dizzy abyss. And not only was it disobedient

itself, but it was ever leading the other sheep of my flock astray. I had before had experience with sheep of this kind. So I broke its leg. The first day I went to it with food, it tried to bite me. I left it lie alone for a couple of days. Then, I went back to it. And now, it not only took the food, but licked my hand, and showed every sign of submission and even affection. And now let me tell you something. When this sheep is well, as it soon will be, it will be the model sheep of my flock. No sheep will hear my voice so quickly. None will follow so closely at my side. Instead of leading its mates astray, it will now be an example and a guide for the wayward ones, leading them, with itself, in the path of obedience to my call. In short, a complete transformation will have come into the life of this wayward sheep. It has learned obedience through its suffering."

Friend, from the suffering of baffled plans which have brought you the keenest disappointment of life; from the suffering of personal bereavements, which have torn from your presence loved ones unspeakably precious to your soul; from the suffering of temporal losses and broken fortunes; from the suffering which has stalked into your life through the willfulness and sin of others; from the suffering which seemed at times to bring you to the brink of a broken faith and a broken heart; yea, suffering one, out of your very agony of heart and soul, somehow, oh, somehow, the eternal God of love and mercy is seeking to bring into your life the supremest blessing that can enrich and glorify that life—the blessing of a human will yielded to the will of God.

And to be yielded to the will of God—what a place is that for you! It means more than silver and gold; more than gratified desires and ambition; more than all the sweet blandishments of friend-

ship; more than all the praises of men; more than all the prizes of fame; yea, more than the attainment of all your highest earthly aims and strivings is this richest and deepest of all blessings, to be hidden, sunken, swallowed up in the will of God for all time and amid all circumstances. And it is this that God is seeking to teach you through chastening. It is into this hiding place of peace and power from which the world can never dislodge you, that God is striving to bring you by the way of tribulation, disappointment and pain. All that brings you there is worth its costliest price of blood and suffering. Rather than the life out of His will nothing can be too dear-bought that brings us into that will. Rather than miss it, we can spare nothing from our lives that will compass it.

And, now, as God brings us into this place of obedience, He is able to work out in us the next rich income of His child-training, and that is:

Fruitage

"Afterwards it yielded...FRUIT." (v. 11).

The summer showers are falling. The poet stands by the window watching them. They are beating and buffeting the earth with their fierce downpour. But the poet sees in his imaginings more than the showers which are falling before his eyes. He sees myriads of lovely flowers which shall soon be breaking forth from the watered earth, filling it with matchless beauty and fragrance. And so he sings:

*"It isn't raining rain for me, it's raining daffodils;
In every dimpling drop I see wild flowers upon the hills.*

*A cloud of gray engulfs the days, and overwhelms
the town;*

It isn't raining rain for me: it's raining roses down."

Perchance some one of God's chastened children is even now saying: "O God, it is raining hard for me tonight. Testings are raining upon me which seem beyond my power to endure. Disappointments are raining fast, the the utter defeat of all my chosen plans. Bereavements are raining into my life which are making my shrinking heart quiver in its intensity of suffering. The rain of affliction is surely beating down upon my soul these days." Withal, friend, you are mistaken. It isn't raining rain for you. It's raining blessing. For, if you will but believe your Father's word, under that beating rain are springing up spiritual flowers of such fragrance and beauty, as never before grew in that stormless, unchastened life of yours. You, indeed see the rain. But, do you see, also, the flowers? You are pained by the testings. But God sees the sweet flower of faith which is upspringing in your life under those very trails. You shrink from the suffering. But God sees the tender compassion other sufferers which is finding birth in your soul. You see the disappointments, but God sees the sweet submission to His divine and perfect will which is growing out of the very same. Your heart winces under the sore bereavement. But God sees the deepening and enriching which that sorrow has brought to you. It isn't raining afflictions for you. It is raining tenderness, love, compassion, patience and a thousand other flowers and fruits of the blessed Spirit which are bringing into your life such a spiritual enrichment as all the fullness of worldly prosperity and ease was never able to beget in your innermost soul.

And are you saying: "But, what a fruitless branch I must be that God must needs so to purge me?" Nay, not so. Have you not noticed what kind of branches it is that God purges? Hear His word:

"Every branch that *beareth fruit*, He purgeth it." (John 15:2). It is not the fruitless but the fruitful branch which is purged. And why? "That it may bring forth *more fruit*." Purging is, therefore, not the proof of worthlessness, but the proof of fruit. For it is only the fruit bearers that are purged. The others are "taken away." Wherefore His purging is both the proof that there is fruit, and the pledge that there shall be more.

**God does not expect us to Enjoy Chastening,
but to Endure it for the
sake of its Afterward. (v. II)**

Sometimes we reproach ourselves because we are not *enjoying* affliction. We ought to be like Paul, who, we say, "rejoiced in tribulation." But do we think by this that Paul really *enjoyed* tribulation? Surely not. When they knouted his naked back with the iron points of the leather-thonged scourge, think you he enjoyed it? The stones they hurled at him were no sweet-meats missiles tossed by the sportive hands in friendly carnival. They were businesslike, merciless, jagged, and went home to their target with blows that crushed him into bloody insensibility. Think you he enjoyed that? The "perils by false brethren too"—do you know what that is?—To have a friend play you false—one whom you had taken to your heart of hearts, one whom you leaned upon, and to whom you poured out your soul, what is that but the stiletto-stab that makes the blood spurt from every vein in your innermost being? Did *you* enjoy that? Surely not. Well, neither did Paul. Neither does any man with flesh, and blood, and nerves, and heart. But what did this old hero of Jesus Christ's kingdom say about the affliction? Listen, "I rejoice in tribulation, *for tribulation worketh,*" etc. He

rejoiced not in tribulation, itself, but *amid* tribulation *for the things that come forth from it*. Likewise, God, our Father, does not expect us to enjoy child-training. He is not displeased if we find it hard to bear, and shrink under it. Nay, He distinctly says, "it is grievous," and He only asks us to endure it, not for itself, but for the glorious "afterward" which is to come forth from it.

There are three warnings we need amid child-training. In verse five, God admonishes us to:—

"Despise not."

Do not "esteem lightly" God's child-training. Do not look down upon it. Above all, do not let your heart grow hard and bitter against God because of it. Very needful is this warning to all of us. How many have lost fellowship with God, and have drifted into the dark places of doubt, rebelliousness, and despair because they have suffered their hearts to be embittered against God for His seemingly strange dealings with them! Ah! friend, shun *that* above everything else. "Harden not your heart." Do not rise up in mutiny of spirit against God. When you let *that* serpent coil in your heart, it will sting your innermost soul to the death of peace, and rest, and joy in your Lord. Guard yourself against that. Again, in the same verse, comes the warning:—

"Faint not!"

How great is the temptation at this point! How the soul sinks, the heart grows sick, and the faith staggers under the keen trials and testings which come into our lives in times of special bereavement and suffering. "I cannot bear up any longer; I am fainting under this providence. What shall I

do? God tells me not to faint. But what can one do when he is fainting?" "What do you do when you are about to faint physically?" You cannot *do* anything. You *cease* from your own doing. In your faintness, you fall upon the shoulder of some strong loved one. You lean hard. You rest. You lie still and trust, until your fainting soul comes back to its own. It is so when we are tempted to faint under affliction. God's message to us is not "Be strong and of good courage," for He knows our strength and courage have fled away. But it is that sweet word: "Be still, and know that I am God." Hudson Taylor was so feeble in the closing months of his life, that he wrote a dear friend, "I am so weak I cannot work; I cannot read my Bible; I cannot even pray. I can only lie still in God's arms like a little child, and trust." This wondrous man of God with all his spiritual power came to a place of physical suffering and weakness where he could only lie still and trust. And that is all God asks of you, His dear child, when you grow faint in the fierce fires of affliction. Do not try to *be strong*. Just *be still*, and *know that He is God* and will sustain you, and bring you through.

There is another warning we need in chastening, and it is this:—

Question Not.

There are some questions the believer may ask of his God. We may say "what" to God. For that is the question of service. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It is fair for us to ask that, for we have a right to know the particular ministry He has for us from day to day, even as had Paul. Again, we may say "where" to God. For that is the question of guidance. It is but right we should know the place of our service; where He would

have us walk, as we move on in our daily journey with our Lord. Then, too, we may ask "when" to Him. For that is the question of time. And it is well to know His time for all things, that we neither run before Him in our zeal, nor lag behind Him in our slothfulness. But there is one question no child of His should ever put to God concerning God's dealings with him in chastening. *No man should ever say "why" to God.* For "why" is the question of doubt. It is the assassin of faith. It leads us to the brink of a dizzy cliff—the precipice of rebellion against God. No Christian can afford to say it. Our Lord never uttered it save once, "My God, my God *why* hast Thou forsaken me?" That awful "Why!" It had all His life been a stranger to His lips. And why had it fallen now? Because of *sin*—not His, for He had none. But yours and mine, and the world's which plunged Him, our sin-bearer, into the black despair of the only hour of separation from God He had ever known in all His eternal existence. And you and I are coming close to sin, with its darkness, and broken fellowship, and its rebellion against God when we begin to say "why" to Him. You do not like your little one to say "why" to you, do you? Its mistrust wounds your father-soul. Neither would God have you say it to Him, for it brings like grief to His father-heart.

There are some other things for us to remember, too, in chastening. The first is:—

Remember the Love of God.

Last year there was found in an African mine the most magnificent diamond in the world's history. It was presented to the king of England to blaze in his crown of state. The king sent it to Amsterdam to be cut. It was put in the hands of an expert lap-

idary. And what do you suppose he did with it? He took this gem of priceless value. He cut a notch in it. Then he struck it a hard blow with his instrument and lo! the superb jewel lay in his hand, cleft in twain. What recklessness! what wastefulness! what criminal carelessness! Not so. For days and weeks that blow had been studied and planned. Drawings and models had been made of the gem. Its quality, its defects, its lines of cleavage had all been studied with minutest care. The man to whom it was committed was one of the most skillful lapidaries in the world. Do you say that blow was a mistake? Nay. It was the climax of the lapidary's skill. When he struck that blow, he did the one thing which would bring that gem to its most perfect shapeliness, radiance, and jewelled splendor. That blow which seemed to ruin the superb precious stone was in fact its perfect redemption. For, from these two halves were wrought the two magnificent gems which the skilled eye of the lapidary saw hidden in the rough, uncut stone as it came from the mines.

So, sometimes, God lets a stinging blow fall upon your life. The blood spurts. The nerves wince. The soul cries out in an agony of wondering protest. The blow seems to you an appalling mistake. But it is not, for you are the most priceless jewel in the world to God. And He is the most skilled lapidary in the universe. Some day you are to blaze in the diadem of the King. As you lie in His hand now *He knows* just how to deal with you. Not a blow will be permitted to fall upon your shrinking soul but that the love of God permits it, and works out from it depths of blessing and spiritual enrichment unseen, and unthought of by you.

Remember the Fatherhood of God

A visitor at a school for the deaf and dumb was writing questions on the blackboard for the children. By and by he wrote this sentence: "Why has God made me to hear and speak, and made you deaf and dumb?" The awful sentence fell upon the little ones like a fierce blow in the face. They sat palsied before that dreadful "why." And then a little girl arose. Her lip was trembling. Her eyes were swimming with tears. Straight to the board she walked, and, picking up the crayon wrote with firm hand these precious words:—

"Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight!" What a reply! It reaches up and lays hold of an eternal truth upon which the maturest believer as well as the youngest child of God may alike unshakably rest—the truth that *God is your Father*. Do you mean that? Do you really and fully believe that? When you do, then your dove of faith will no longer wander in weary unrest, but will settle down forever in its eternal resting place of peace. *"Your Father!"* Why, that takes in everything! Because He is your Father, how *could* He fail, or forget you? Look into your own father heart and mark the strength, the tenderness, the unspeakableness of your love for that winsome little one enshrined in your heart of hearts. Then say to yourself, "God's Father love for me infinitely surpasses all this." Your Father! Against that all doubts must at last dash themselves to pieces as the sea-spray beats itself to nothingness upon a rock-bound coast. Down upon that your child-trained soul will find a final resting place in untrembling trustfulness. Rear that up before the devil's subtle, hideous, hissing "why" and he will stagger back, the unmasked, baffled, beaten traitor that he is.

