

Chastening and its Fruit

Hebrews 12:1-11

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12/29/19

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's text is taken from Hebrews 12:1-11 and the title of the message is "Chastening and its Fruit."
 - A. God produces in the believer what verse 11 of our text calls the peaceable fruit of righteousness. And He does so by the means of chastisement – the loving, corrective, disciplinary measures that are appointed by God 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 I believe it will help our understanding of the fruit the Lord's chastening produces if we consider it within the mindset of Romans 8:28 where Paul wrote, "***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.***" And all these things (which includes the chastenings of the Lord) – all work together for good for each and every one of those in whom God the Holy Spirit ultimately produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness through these 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. 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). Many even refer to Hebrews 11 as the "Hall of Fame of Faith," but this chapter 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 examples 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, ²Looking 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. ³For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.***

Being sinners, if judged on our own very best efforts, we would deserve the wrath of God so let us keep in mind this contrast: On the cross, God's wrath was poured out on our sinless, unblameable Savior. This One who knew no sin, suffered, bled and died – He who (according to scripture) offered Himself without spot) – dying for (and 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 faced with having to die a martyr's death (at least not yet) as God had so purposed in the lives of some of those cited in the previous chapter> ***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 ultimately 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 God's 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:***"

- 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. Now you should rejoice if this describes you, even though it means you will most certainly endure difficulties as everyone does, but for God's children, these are afflictions 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, saying 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 from the Lord = 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 sincerely believe themselves to be. And if their difficulties don’t ultimately yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness (as we will see in verse 11), then they are bastards (illegitimate professors), not sons. That shoots a big 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 the Lord’s chastisement in this life. 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 eventually 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 their upbringing> ***chastened us after their own pleasure;*** <i.e. – as they judged best in their own finite wisdom> ***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 Holy God as we see our holiness in Christ by God-given faith. The only holiness that believers have is His holiness, based upon the merit of His perfect righteousness having been 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 as set apart in Christ; Or as saved sinners are described in Col. 1:22, God sees them as holy, unblameable, and unprovable all due to their oneness (their union), with Christ, their sinless Substitute and Representative in whose righteousness they stand before the holy justice of God, not guilty. 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. 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. While I do physical exercise because I know it is good for me I never have enjoyed it as some folks do. But whether you find physical exercise enjoyable or not, this chastening of the Lord by which believers are exercised involves the 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 that we grieve over are among the “all things” that are working together for the eternal good of God’s children. Our senses may scream otherwise, but faith believes that. And patience will have us experience it.

IV. Chastisement: Let’s consider in more detail what this chastening of the Lord is.

- A. First as we’ve seen, it is that which seems grievous to us, not something enjoyed as it is endured – a burden that opposes our own wills. Well, can’t everyone honestly say that things don’t always go according to their wishes or wills? Yet the majority of our fellow human beings 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 others experience grievous things, that it is necessarily the beneficial chastening that is from 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 should 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. As we saw in verses 7 and 8, this distinguishes the true sons, God’s adopted children, from the bastards, those who are not spiritually born-again of God.

The believer’s eternal good can all be attributed to the finished work of Christ for them. All their eternal good is a fruit and effect of His finished work on the cross, His righteousness, and that 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. 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. As we read in verse 6, “***For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth...***” (Heb 12:6a).

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.

I know that many false preachers also 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, even their difficulties. And that verse is certainly a source of comfort to born-again believers. But if the “gospel” they believe (the body of faith concerning how God saves sinners) doesn’t set forth the imputed righteousness of God in Christ as the only ground of peace between them and God, they have no legitimate basis for concluding that the difficulties in their lives are chastisements from the Lord so as to be for their eternal good – not when the peaceable fruit of righteousness remains absent because that is what the Lord’s chastisement produces. 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 true believers.

In years past, before I’d ever heard anything about an imputed righteousness, I took comfort from Romans 8:28, but back then, I had no basis to apply that verse to myself so it was really as if I was reading somebody else’s mail in doing so. If God hasn’t at some point brought 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) – brought you to value and rest in His righteousness, this peaceable fruit, then there is no evidence yet that you are one of God’s children. And despite any claim or profession to the contrary, to continue in that and die in ignorance of (or not in submission to) His righteousness alone, exposes one who is not a son, but rather an illegitimate professor. That ought to make us all want to know more about this righteousness, His righteousness – which alone brings the peace that reconciles a sinner (a law breaker) unto a holy and just God.

The righteousness of God is that which Christ, the God-man, (and He alone) produced by His obedience unto death on the cross, perfectly satisfying God’s law and justice on behalf of all those for whom He lived and died, providing for them (as their Substitute and Surety) that which they could never produce for themselves – this perfect righteousness.

God freely puts this righteousness to the account of each of His dear children (the very “sons” in our text whom He chastises).

D. Let’s consider a couple of the 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 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. ¹¹Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (Matt 5:10-12).***

Thankfully we haven’t been called upon to be martyred or to suffer as most of those listed in Hebrews 11 but all believers are persecuted (at least to some extent) and often, that by the rejection of family and friends with whom they attempt to share the Gospel. And this is due to what the Bible calls the “offence of the cross” (Gal. 5:11) – the offence which 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. Why, God would be unfair.” When I thought like that, I wouldn’t have phrased it this way, but in essence we might as well have been saying, “Don’t tell me I really am in need God’s mercy and grace.” And often these things are said in anger toward you. But as Christ went on to say in the next verse, Matthew 5:12, ***“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”***

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. By nature, as fallen sinners, (and even before we heard and believed God’s Gospel of grace) – all of us struggle internally if we merely attempt to live upright, moral lives consistent with God’s revealed will, fighting our natural, sinful tendencies. 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. Rather it’s a vain struggle in which the sinner (which by definition means one who falls short of the perfect righteousness God requires) presumes to be able to measure up and gain their own victory – in essence presuming to produce their own righteousness, which they imagine at least contributes to finding them accepted in

God's sight. So it would be presumption for one who has never heard of, or never submitted unto the righteousness of God for all their salvation to imagine their internal struggles to be the Lord's chastening.

So some clear conclusions that can be drawn from this passage are that this peaceable fruit of righteousness is (1) produced in all the children of God and (2) only in them and (3) that by God's appointed means – by the chastening of the Lord. And since both believers and unbelievers experience difficulties and afflictions, it's obvious that we can only distinguish between them (believers and unbelievers) or judge the tree (so to speak) by the fruit that is yielded afterward, not by the trying circumstances themselves. As the scripture declares, God causes it to rain on both the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45). So let's look further at this fruit.

V. The Peaceable Fruit of Righteousness: Now, as we read in verse 11 of this chastening of the Lord we are told that “***...afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.***” (Hebrews 12:11b). As with most things of value, this benefit comes at a cost. And this fruit of righteousness cost no less than the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, His obedience unto death on the cross whereby He established righteousness.

A. In Isaiah 61, God's children are called “***...trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.***” (Isa 61:3b). Christ lived and died for these trees of righteousness (that were planted in Him, made one with Him) to do for them what they could not possibly do for themselves – and this all so that God alone might receive all glory, not the sinner. It's all His doing, not theirs. God doesn't save anyone because of anything they do. He doesn't save you because you believe.

If you believe, it's because the Lord has already saved you and given you His blood-bought gift of faith. God gets all the glory! Having His righteousness, believers stand in Him complete, or perfect. That is what it means to be justified. It is to be declared righteous, not guilty. As we read in Romans 5:9 sinners are “***...justified by His blood...***” Back in the first verse of that chapter (Romans 5:1) we read, “***Therefore being justified, <Comment on moving comma> by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:***” – the peaceable fruit of His righteousness.

B. Believers, think of your own conversion under the Gospel of God's sovereign grace. In that process we are convinced of a sin that we had been oblivious to previously – the evil of daring to believe that salvation was conditioned in any degree upon us – based upon our decision or response. And for me, it was troubling to discover how wrong I had been in my belief of what was being exposed to me as a false gospel of works.

So, that too was a difficulty, a chastisement if you would, as at first I wrestled with trying to make the true Gospel of how God saves sinners (that I was now hearing) somehow fit in with my former false notions. And that was impossible because grace and works don't mix. They can't coexist (Rom. 11). And this process was not a joy at first – not until God humbled me and granted me the gifts of faith and repentance to fully embrace His wonderful Gospel of free and sovereign grace in Christ.

How do I know that the troubling conviction I came under was a chastisement from the Lord? Because of the “afterward.” In hindsight I know that the Lord was correcting me (and that big time). I know now that this chastisement was from the Lord because it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness as I came to rest in (and value) His imputed righteousness as the only ground of my salvation. And that fruit is all to the glory of God. All believers experience this peaceable fruit of righteousness in their born-again conversion because belief of God's Gospel, wherein His righteousness is revealed, is the 1st recognizable occasion in this lifetime in which the peaceable fruit of righteousness is delivered to God's children. By faith they discover the perfect peace that has been made for them so as to reconcile them unto their heavenly Father.

So it is peaceable fruit for it is produced in consequence of the covenant-love of the Godhead, by which (1) God the Father is revealed as the God of peace, (2) God the Son as the One who made peace, the Peacemaker, and (3) God the Holy Spirit as the One who makes this peace known to us – breathing life into the spiritually dead sinner. Through the spiritual eye of God-given faith, in belief of God's Gospel, we then experience what Roman 15:13 describes as “...joy and peace in believing.”

- VI. How do Chastisements Produce this Fruit: Whatever cross or burden is sent the believer's way; he or she can know that it is sent to promote their fellowship (or communion) with God, not hinder it. And we can see various ways God might use our afflictions (His chastening) to rid us of those things that would hinder or distract us from being constantly aware of the debt of gratitude we owe to our Lord and Savior, to have our minds fixed on things above rather than the things of this world. So, let's consider a few examples of difficulties and how the Lord might use them to produce this peaceable fruit of righteousness in true believers.
- A. Outward Trials or Difficulties: Through James we are told of some of the benefits that result as we read beginning in James 1:2, “**My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;** <again temptations here referring to trials or testing> ³**Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.** ⁴**But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire** <as in complete, complete in Him>, **wanting nothing.**” (James 1:2-4).

God uses our various difficulties, trials, and testings to wean us from our reliance on the things of this world, so as to grow in our reliance upon (and our love for) Him. And we experience these blessings afterward – whether that means we will understand the benefit in each difficulty in this lifetime (as we often do once the trials are over) or whether it's in the hereafter. Faith knows it to be so because faith believes God and knows the faithful God who so promises.

- B. Consider circumstances in which we are prospering, whether we're prospering financially, rich in friendships, prosperous in our health, rich in love or in family relationships – whatever. And there is nothing wrong with these things in and of themselves and they are to be enjoyed. But any type of prosperity can be a curse if and when it draws our attention away from God, from worshipping Him, and from our focus on that which we possess in Christ. But if you're one of God's dear children, He'll regain your attention.

Aren't you glad that even your persevering in the faith is not of yourself but of God's mercy and grace? So God may use chastisements to regain the attention of His dear children. And if He does so, remember, in no sense is this punishment for a believer's sinful neglect. No, Christ bore that. As today's text teaches, we are exercised by the loving chastening of our heavenly Father – corrected for our profit – for our own good!

- C. Consider other undesirable circumstances that are common to many, but a form of the Lord's chastening to those in God's family. First...
1. Poverty – What if God strips you of your wealth, be that whatever it is? Poverty could be used as the means of improving a believer's love for (and reliance upon) their untold spiritual riches. Doesn't God tell believers that He shall supply all our need and that according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus?" (Phil. 4:19) Why, as believers, we have an eternal inheritance from the King of Kings!
 2. Health – You know if we live long enough, all of us eventually will see our health decline as these bodies of sin and death age. Perhaps the Lord will use our declining health to make us more submissive to His sovereign will and to remind us that our conversation (or citizenship) is not of this world. Our sickness, even our bodily death, is due unto the curse of man's sin. Perhaps God will use such afflictions to humble us further and see even clearer what we are and what we deserve as totally depraved sinners apart from God's grace in Christ. And seeing that makes you value Christ all the more – the peaceable fruit of righteousness.
 3. Injustice – Consider if God providentially causes you to suffer some injustice. With all the talk in our day about socialism, who knows if someday the government evolves into such a socialistic state that your property or whatever wealth or savings you may have accumulated (not your income, but what you already own) might be more heavily taxed or even seized for the "common good."

Well, we can know that's an affliction that could be used by God for our good because of the example of the believers we read about in the book of Hebrews who lost their worldly goods. And we read in Hebrews 10:34 how they were commended being told, "**<You> took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.**" Their loss heightened their sense (and their enjoyment) of what they had awaiting them in heaven – that which will last forever – the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

Summary of these Examples: Now I don't pretend to know with any certainty just how any one difficulty might all work together for any one believer's good, yet in these few examples you can see how they might realistically be used by God, and that often in order to remind us anew of how truly, eternally blessed we are as children of the one true and living God.

VII. Closing: So if and when that same peaceable fruit of righteousness is brought to your mind after you've endured some trial or difficulty, then count it all joy in knowing that you have been chastised by your loving, eternal, 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.