

PURSUIT OF PEACE

"Seek Peace and Pursue it" - Psalm 34:14

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CHAPTER TWELVE

MUST I BE CHASTENED?

"PASTOR, I know why my family is suffering so much," sobbed a strong, handsome man in our living room one night. "The Lord is punishing me for a terrible sin that I committed years ago." His wife was chronically ill, his son had run away, and the man had lost his job. But the greatest suffering came from the belief that GOD was punishing him for a past sin. Though he had confessed it and long since put such things out of his life, he thought GOD was still holding it against him. GOD had forgiven him but he had never been able to forgive himself or to forget what he had done. After my husband had helped him, he was the most relieved man that I have seen.

For some reason through lack of knowledge of the Bible or some erroneous teaching, many Christians believe that all suffering comes because GOD is punishing them for their sins. This feeling only unnecessarily doubles the agony through which the person is going. The question of our sins was settled the day that CHRIST died on the Cross. **"Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures"** (I Corinthians 15:3,4). **"Who [CHRIST] his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed"** (I Peter 2:24).

The prophet Isaiah says, **"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities... the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all"** (Isaiah 53:5, 6).

David tells us in Psalm 103 that he **"forgiveth all thine iniquities"** and **"as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us"** (verses 3, 12). (No matter where you stand on this earth, there will always be an east and a west, and the two can never meet.)

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). This verse and many others prove that all the punishment we deserve has been placed on the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

GOD does demand punishment for sin, yes, for He says that **"the wages of sin is death"** (Romans 6:23), and that the wrath of GOD abideth on the one who has not believed on the Son of GOD (John 3:36). But the wages and punishment of that sin were laid on CHRIST. He died

for your past, present and future sins. Now after coming to CHRIST for salvation and letting His death take your place, you are freed from the penalty of sin.

GOD cannot demand another payment for that sin. It was paid in full when CHRIST said, "**It is finished,**" as He died on the Cross. GOD can never be fair or just to punish you or me for the sins already paid for. If He did He would not be merciful or true, and all of our faith would be in vain. He cannot be holy and still be dishonest in His treatment of mankind. While we are not punished for our sins as Christians, we must carefully consider the fact that oftentimes we pay the consequences of our sins. We reap what we sow, though in His gracious love GOD often spares us the full results of our deeds.

We have been discussing suffering in general. There is one special kind of suffering that we want to spend more time taking about because it holds an important place in scriptural teaching and because it seems to present such a large problem in the lives of many believers.

This type of suffering is called chastisement. There are several misunderstandings concerning this.

The first is that all suffering is punishment for sin as we have illustrated in the beginning. We have already shown by GOD's Word that this is not true.

The second misconception is that all chastening comes because of present sin in a Christian's life. It is true that GOD uses this method to correct and check us in sin's progress, but it goes much further than that. Chastisement comes from a word that means a "child-at-school" or child training. This is discipline or correction that we might learn. It is often the result of some wrong in our lives but just as frequently it is to teach us more about GOD, about sin, about His care and to make us see that we must depend on Him to live a successful Christian life. All suffering that teaches or trains us or makes us change ways that are displeasing to GOD is chastisement.

I send my girls to school that they may learn the subjects taught there. It has nothing to do with any sin in their lives. My husband and I train them in spiritual things, in table manners, to behave in ladylike ways. We don't do this because we are angry with them or because they have sinned but because we want them to learn the things that make a happy, useful life.

In the same way, GOD sends chastisement to train us in spiritual things apart from sin in our lives.

Job is a good illustration of this (Job 1, 2). GOD's testimony to Satan was that Job was "**a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil.**" Three times these same words were used to describe Job.

We also see by his actions that he was a godly man. Job made sacrifices for his sons and daughters just in case they might have sinned in their hearts. "**Thus did Job continually**" (1:5).

After GOD allowed Satan to let Job suffer more than you and I have, we are told, "**In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly**" (1:22).

Even when Job's wife turned against GOD and encouraged him to do the same, Job said, "**Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips**" (2:10).

God let Satan take away all of Job's possessions and all of his children, but Job sinned not. When this did not bring about Satan's purposes, he asked that he might touch Job's body. "**Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life**" (2:4).

While Job was suffering miserable sores and bodily afflictions, three of his friends came to talk to him (2:11).

Though their philosophy was that trouble could only come from some hidden sin, Job denied it. Later GOD stepped in to settle the argument (Job 38-41). When Job had a clear vision of the holiness of the Lord, he saw himself as he really was. He cried, "**I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes**" (Job 42:5, 6).

In the light of GOD's holiness, Job saw how little he really knew of GOD and how far short he fell of His holiness. This was the only way Job could be taught these truths. His chastisement brought him to a new and wonderful acquaintance with GOD. GOD blessed him by giving him the same number of children again, a long, useful life and doubling his material possessions. When Job learned the lesson GOD wanted to teach him, He was able to remove the suffering.

It is generally believed that the Book of Job was the first one in our Bible to be written. It is a wonderful book full of encouragement for all who suffer whatever the cause. GOD wrote a book on the causes, meaning, and results of suffering before He saw fit to write about creation, the fall, and later the plan of salvation. Doesn't that suggest to you that suffering is a very present and ever-active force in life and that GOD wants us to understand why He allows suffering? If you have trouble along this line (and who doesn't), why not spend time studying the Book of Job? I have more marked verses in Job than in any other book of my Bible.

In direct contrast to Job, a godly man in GOD's estimation, we see Jonah, who was suffering chastisement because he had disobeyed God (Jonah 1-4). He was not being punished for that sin, but was suffering as a result of the sin.

It was GOD's method to bring Jonah to the place where he wanted to obey GOD. GOD commissioned Jonah as a missionary to the city of Nineveh, but Jonah fled the other way. It seems strange to us that he would completely disobey GOD's direct command until we realize what this would mean to his country.

Think of it this way. Suppose GOD sent you to Russia to preach. But you knew that GOD had already prophesied that in a few more years Russia would conquer the United States and take everyone into captivity. You wouldn't want to go either. This was the situation Jonah found himself in. GOD had said that the Jewish people would be captured at the hand of the people of Nineveh. It was a natural desire for Jonah to want GOD to destroy the city before they could take his people into slavery.

At first everything seemed to work out just fine for Jonah even though he was walking in the path of disobedience.

He went to the seaport of Joppa. There he conveniently found a ship and had enough money to get a ticket to take him to Tarshish. If we judged by the opened doors and the circumstances, we would think that GOD was directing Jonah's way:

- Even through a terrible storm, Jonah was enough at peace to sleep through it.
- The sailors had to wake him to have him call upon his GOD (1:6).
- Jonah knew what was causing the trouble. He freely confessed (Jonah 1:10).
- Jonah suggested that they throw him overboard so the innocent could be spared.

This has such a modern ring to the story. It is amazing how many people who recognize GOD's hand in chastisement for disobedience try to atone for it by protecting others or trying to make restoration. They are still not willing to turn to GOD, ask for forgiveness and change their ways.

GOD had not forgotten nor forsaken Jonah in spite of his continued stubbornness. He had prepared a whale to swallow Jonah as soon as he was thrown overboard (1:17). It was while Jonah was in the fish, he came to himself, much as the prodigal son did in the far country who returned home to admit that he had sinned. "**When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord,**" and "**Salvation is of the Lord**" (Jonah 2:7, 9).

As soon as Jonah had learned GOD's lesson, He instructed the whale to spit Jonah up on the dry land. He was released from his suffering because the purpose for which it was sent was accomplished.

We cannot leave the story here without the added comfort that Christians find in GOD's dealings with Jonah following this experience. He recommissioned Jonah and gave him a second chance to preach in the city of Nineveh. This Jonah did; because of that the people turned to GOD and were spared. We have all had experiences of getting a second chance to go GOD's way even after disobeying Him. After we confess our sin, it is forgiven and many times, though not always, GOD uses us in some way. However, this might not be in just the same way.

How gracious and kind the Lord is to continue dealings with His wayward children by not only restoring us to fellowship in the family but in using us for His glory in spite of our failures in the past!

Unhappily there are times when we soon forget the lessons that the Lord has taught us and we return to sinful ways. My own life has been an illustration of that. Since I had learned that "**there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked**" (Isaiah 57:21), whether saved or unsaved, I knew that my life must be pleasing to the Lord. I started trying to make sure my heart was spiritually right with the Lord so that I would be relieved from the emotional symptoms I was suffering.

That is better than no reason for seeking a life right with GOD, but it is not the right motive.

When GOD brought me to the place where I saw that my life must be holy before Him for the sake of pleasing Him alone, then I made a wonderful discovery. Peace automatically followed as

a natural result. Now my heart is set on keeping myself pure and clean before Him just because He wants it that way. Hard things come into my life and peaceful circumstances seem far removed, but through it all there is a quiet feeling inside that all is well because everything that touches me comes from the hand of GOD, even though it might be sent because of my disobedience.

Sometimes we learn our lesson from chastening and come to the Lord confessing the wrong in our lives but we are not truly sincere about it. We still love that sin. We want peace and bodily healing so much that we will do anything that is suggested to us, even reading through a dictionary or telephone book. This is not true repentance, as is usually demonstrated later. When one who comes to GOD for this reason only begins to feel better or is healed, he usually goes right back into the old ways and habits, leaving GOD out of his life. This was not true confession.

Many Christians seem so confused because GOD allows them to suffer. Two factors contribute to this idea: the type of preaching we hear, and the Bible's wonderful promises of GOD's love, protection, care and provisions.

Listen carefully to your own minister and to those who speak on the radio. It is interesting to notice how many well-trained Bible preachers promise that when one comes to CHRIST as Saviour - "All your troubles will be over; CHRIST is the answer to every problem in your life. You will have wonderful peace and joy. Everything will be all right from that moment on" and other statements similar to these.

Now all of these things are true, but the preachers seldom have time to explain the conditions under which GOD often sends these things. Many times they can only come as the result of child-training. It is no wonder that a newborn babe in CHRIST is perplexed when suddenly he finds himself in more problems or trials than he ever had before.

- He may find that he can no longer cut corners in business as his unsaved partners insist on doing.
- The newly-Christian wife realizes that she can't go places with her unbelieving husband now. There is no end of misunderstanding between the two because of her convictions.
- A teen-ager finds that instead of the wonderful peace and joy that was promised, his friends are calling him a "Holy Joe" and leaving him out of all the fun. Or he might still try doing the same things with the gang, covering up the fact that he has become a Christian. But he is miserable inside because the HOLY SPIRIT is convicting him that what he is doing is wrong for a Christian. These illustrations could be multiplied many times over. Is it surprising that people cry out to GOD in despair, "My GOD, why do I suffer this way?"

These godly ministers aren't lying and would be the last people to want to add to the suffering of others, but they have left a false impression because of the ignorance of the Bible on the part of the hearers.

This brings us to the second reason why it is hard for Christians to understand why they suffer. They are given verses from the Word that promise wonderful experiences for them. Seldom are they instructed in the facts that a changed heart will naturally bring a changed life. Stepping from a life that is lived in Satan's realm of this world into a new life lived spiritually in the heavenlies

will mean many adjustments, decisions, often misunderstanding and suffering.

Usually knowledge of the Bible is so limited that all such people know are a few precious promises of peace, joy, care and protection. But all they seem to experience in life is trial and persecution. It is only natural that they wonder what is wrong. Since GOD can't fail, they assume that they have in some way failed. The burden of the tribulations only takes on more weight because they can't explain why these things are so.

I was fooled in this way. I looked for books to help. At that time (twenty years ago) there were very few written that I could find on the problem of suffering on the layman's level. Other books I did read left me completely unsatisfied and only filled my mind with more questions. It was at that time I set out to find from GOD's Word without the aid of any person or another book why Christians suffer. The twenty-three reasons I found for suffering are woven into this chapter and the one immediately preceding.

The verses that teach us the most about GOD's plan of suffering as chastening, are found in Hebrews 12, from which I get my argument that chastisement is any suffering that trains and teaches us as well as disciplines because of sin.

As is true today, there must have been many Christians in those days who did not understand GOD's dealings with them in suffering. This is obviously not a new problem. It is the same old problem happening to new people, and it will go on happening until the Lord JESUS takes us to be with Himself.

These Jewish Christians were suffering "**chastisement**," which they couldn't understand. This is plain from several verses. The writer of the Hebrews had to remind them of a quotation from Proverbs written in v. 5 as "**My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.**" "**My son**" shows that these words were written to GOD's adult children. A little child often has to be spanked to keep him from doing wrong. It is usually impossible to reason with him. All he understands is that certain actions always result in correction or pain of some kind. "**Son**" in Scripture suggests one of more maturity, or an adult. As mature Christians we can be reasoned with and can see that chastening is necessary for training in our lives.

In this same verse, we also see two reactions to chastening.

One is to "**despise**" and the other is to "**faint**."

They show two extremes. To despise the chastening hand of the Lord is to take it lightly. Some do not even recognize GOD's dealings with them at all and thus cannot be exercised for good. I cringe inwardly when I hear Christians say, "That's just my luck" or "Life is just a gamble and I have to take the bad with the good." They seem to completely ignore the fact that their lives are planned by the Lord and that He sends chastening to keep us walking in His plan.

At the other extreme, we are admonished not to "**faint**." By that the author means that we are not to give up and give in to the suffering with the attitude that one must stand it because there is no choice.

I once had a great-aunt who "took to her bed," to use her own expression, whenever something unpleasant or hard to take came her way. She just gave up and let others take all the responsibility. We have interesting stories in the old classics of women unrequited in love becoming invalids for the rest of their lives. They were never able to face the facts of life and make the best of things. Often the "fainting" comes after a long period of sorrow or trial or physical suffering. I think this is especially true of those who suffer emotionally and physically. There is so little fight left in us.

I had suffered pain every day for ten years. Somewhere along the way, I just gave up. I had tried to find GOD's purpose in it; I had taken the doctor's advice and many suggestions made by friends, but to no avail. I dreaded to wake each morning and realize that I had to live through another day. It just didn't matter any more what happened as I felt nothing could be worse. Of course, this attitude always leads to self-pity and GOD's work cannot be accomplished in these circumstances.

One day, the doctor spoke rather harshly to me, but he made me see what I was doing to myself. "You're never going to get well as long as you persist in your present attitude! You don't care about anything. You've given up and lost all your fight. No amount of medical knowledge or medication will ever make you well. Hope is the greatest healer of all." Later as I thought about what he had said my mind turned to Luke 18:1, "**Men ought always to pray, and not to faint,**" That was the beginning of my healing. I replaced fainting with praying and GOD answered.

Hebrews twelve gives us proof of the two greatest facts in the world. We are sons of GOD and we are the objects of GOD's special love. Chastening is GOD's way of showing us these facts.

People on the earth are subject to some kinds of suffering because they are a part of the human race. But not all are partakers of GOD's chastisement or child-training. This training is for members of GOD's family. Unless you are GOD's child through receiving CHRIST as your Saviour, you will not have chastisement.

I discipline my children because I know what is best for them. I have a hard enough time just keeping up with my children, without disciplining my neighbor's children, which is not my business. I wouldn't dare spank someone else's children. They do not belong to me and are not my responsibility.

Chastening is proof that we are sons of GOD, that we belong to GOD not only because He created us but because we have been given "**power to become the sons of God**" (John 1:12), through the Lord JESUS CHRIST. If GOD makes no effort to teach or train you through some trials, you should check carefully to make sure that you are saved. "**The Lord . . . scourgeth every son whom he receiveth**" (Hebrews 12:6). Notice the "**every son.**" "**But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not [GOD's] sons**" (v. 8).

Chastisement is also proof of GOD's special love for His children. In contrast to those who feel that GOD cannot be a GOD of love and still allow suffering, we are told that suffering is a sure sign of His love.

GOD loves us so much that He sends something unpleasant in our lives to check our way of sin or teach us whatever lesson we need to learn to live a more happy, trusting life. It is because He does love us that He keeps us from walking in a way that will lead to more suffering and perhaps physical death. He checks us if we are ruining our testimony to others, so He can train us to be more useful in His service.

This same principle holds true in the family life. It would be much easier for me to ignore what my children do wrong and forget that they need training in everything from combing their hair to how to get along in school. It takes years of training to prepare a child for life and it is hard on parents. It is much easier to let a child just grow up in his or her own ways. But we often see that such a course is disastrous.

There is a child in our community that no one wants to be near. He has never been trained. He gets into trouble with children and adults alike. He is in trouble at school and is getting in trouble with the law. He is disliked by everyone and is a sorrow to his parents. They can't bear to correct or spank him. They think they brought him up this way because they love him so much; it is really the other way around. They love themselves so much that their own interests and activities are more important than preparing their son to enjoy life and be a useful Christian citizen.

The writer of the Hebrews then gives us everyday illustrations that everyone can understand. He reminds us of the times that our earthly fathers had to correct us in some way and we respected them for what they were trying to accomplish. Parents corrected us in ways that they felt were best for the short while we were under their rule. Sometimes our correction errs because it is not like GOD's.

There are times when we punish for the bad deeds done because we are mad or sorry for what the child's actions will mean to us. Sometimes we are careful only to train their bodies and minds. We are often more concerned about outward manners than spiritual training.

When GOD corrects it is for "**our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness**" (v. 10).

Holiness in man is separation from the world and dedication to GOD. So GOD's design in His work of training is to remove us more and more from the things of this world's Satanic system and make us more like Himself. This is the process that makes us "**conformed to the image of His Son (Christ)**" (Romans 8:29).

Since CHRIST is GOD's pattern for our lives, you can see that chastening is a must to accomplish His purpose.

Some people have the idea that because we are told to "**rejoice evermore**" (I Thessalonians 5:16), we are to find joy in the heavy hand of the Lord upon us. Verse eleven of this twelfth chapter of Hebrews shows that this is not GOD's thought. "**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.**"

It does not follow that we must enjoy chastening. If we liked it, it wouldn't be suffering at all, and if it didn't hurt, it wouldn't do us any good. It has to try us in some way to make us want to

make a change. However, we must always rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4). We can rejoice in the certain knowledge that GOD has sent this trouble in His love and wisdom. Our joy can come in looking forward to what the trial is going to accomplish for us in the future as we let ourselves be exercised by it.

Now if we take GOD's training and let it do its perfect work in us the result will be "**peaceable fruit of righteousness**." The fruit that chastening yields is righteous but notice that it is also peaceful.

Holiness and peace go together. For those who are properly responding to the discipline, there is not only peace through the conflict but a new and deeper sense of peace after the troubles are over.

This brings us to a new and very important question. How can we be sure that we are letting GOD do His perfect work in us through chastening? There are several suggestions in this chapter that might be a help.

First, we are to "**lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees: and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way: but let it rather be healed**" (verses 12, 13). If we faint we are of no use to the Lord. Often we are ruining our testimony and affecting our families and friends as well as ourselves. Let's learn the lesson that GOD has for us so that the tribulation can be removed and we can profit by the new lesson that GOD has taught us. Then and only then can GOD bring about the desired healing, or take away the sorrow or trial that He has sent.

In spite of what you are suffering keep your feet in a straight path and in GOD's plan. There are some Christians who have gotten into all kinds of "isms" and faith healing meetings in search of healing. They have refused to walk in GOD's ways or recognize what GOD is doing through them, and turned away from GOD. They have not only failed to be helped by GOD's training method but they are only heaping up later suffering for themselves.

Then we are told to "**Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord**" (v. 14). Chastening often reaches farther than to one individual exercised thereby. We have to be careful of the way we take GOD's dealings not only for ourselves but for the effect it will have on others. There can be real comfort and encouragement in a group while some are suffering. We have found that true in our church. As we have prayed for each other, not only have there been many marvelous answers but also those who have suffered have testified many times to the goodness of the Lord and His sustaining grace.

They have told how the suffering has produced more holiness and the peaceable fruits of righteousness. If your trial is not being a testimony to others and producing a new holiness in your life, watch out; you may be missing GOD's blessing for you through that trial, and be suffering in vain.

The third way of knowing whether we are properly receiving GOD's exercising through chastening is probably the quickest and easiest to recognize. It is suggested to us in verse 15, "**Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness**

springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." There is one word in this verse, bitterness, that will let us know what our attitude toward GOD's dealing with us is.

Bitterness is a sure sign of rebellion. If you resent what GOD has sent into your life and you let it grow in your heart to bitterness, you can be sure that the suffering is being wasted on you. You can't learn GOD's lessons as long as bitterness against His will is possessing your heart. It is sin. Have done with that feeling by confessing it and refusing to let yourself dwell on it. Let your mind remember GOD's goodness to you and willingly accept His will as best. Keep refreshing your memory with verses that promise that GOD's will is best and is for your good and the bitterness and rebellion will go away.

If these verses in Hebrews 12 were all that GOD had to say about chastisement it would be enough to show us that it is necessary for all Christians to be disciplined and trained. What GOD says once, He means. But there are many other verses that tell us the different purposes for which GOD is training and teaching us.

First, GOD sends chastisement to keep us from sinning and to bring us to repentance when we are living in sin. We have discussed this at length in this chapter so no further word need be added here.

Second, GOD sends chastisement in order for us to "**be conformed to the image of His Son**" (Romans 8:29). GOD has a purpose in each of our lives and He can only bring out that plan by our suffering. He would have taken us all to Heaven to Himself the minute we were saved if He didn't have a special purpose for us here on earth. We have a right to be in Heaven where there are no tears, sorrows, problems and trials, and where everyone is blissful in the presence of the Lord. He would have spared us all the suffering and testings if it were possible.

He is preparing us for Heaven. All of our lives are spent in getting ready for Heaven. So many Christians miss GOD's purposes and blessing because they think that GOD has promised them happiness and prosperity for this life.

GOD's purpose is very different. This is a training school to prepare us for future glory. When we realize that our average span of seventy years is a short time of preparation and training for all eternity, then our attitude toward our chastening should be very different. After all, what is seventy years compared to all eternity?

CHRIST is doing His part.

- He has promised that He has gone ahead of us to prepare Heaven for us.
- He has promised to come again to receive us to Himself.

GOD is doing His part in preparing our hearts for our Heavenly home and for His presence. If we were to be presented to the Queen of England, we would spend much time learning just what is the proper way to address her, how to act, etc. Why, then, are we surprised when GOD is getting us prepared to be presented to CHRIST as His Bride? It is sheer egotism and pride to think that even though we are saved through CHRIST, we are fit to stand in GOD's presence without His perfecting work first being done in our hearts.

Even though there will be many times that we cannot understand why GOD sends unpleasant things into our lives, we can rest on His wonderful promise that, "**All things work together for good**" (Romans 8:28). It is right that we should ask GOD in an unrebelling way why He has sent some problem. He wants us to know so He can work His purpose out in our lives!

- Is this suffering to show forth His glory?
- Is it for your testimony to others?
- Is this so that you can bring comfort and help to others?
- Is it sent to show you that there is sin in your life or some doubtful practice that is keeping you from living closer to the Lord?

When you find the answer there will be little problem left to the suffering.

Chastisement also teaches us to pray. There are so many verses in the Bible on prayer that we have become calloused to them and we forget how important a part prayer must have in our lives. As long as everything is going well in our lives, we neglect the ministry of prayer but when something beyond our control is sent, we run back to GOD.

Few ever learn to really pray consistently unless they are backed into a corner that seems to have no way out.

There is nothing left but to turn to GOD for help.

A minister asked one of his church members if he had prayed that day. "No, I didn't need anything from GOD so I didn't bother." That is the attitude of far too many Christians. Prayer for them is only asking GOD for things that they can't manage to get for themselves.

GOD's chastisement makes and keeps us humble. "**Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time**" (I Peter 5:6). GOD wants His children humble. It was pride that caused Lucifer to sin and then become Satan. It was pride that caused Adam and Eve to fall into sin. Pride is one of the greatest sins of Christians today. GOD wants us humble and then He will exalt us when He knows He can trust us to be given a high place of honor.

An outstanding Christian. Paul, who probably suffered more physically than any of us for CHRIST's sake, had to have an additional trial of physical suffering in his life to keep him humble. "**And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure**" (II Corinthians 12:7).

Chastisement is GOD's way of teaching us to depend on Him. GOD loves us so much that He will not be ignored. We have a way of going along in our own plans forgetting about GOD until some trial brings us short with a jolt to show us how long it has been since we truly lived close to GOD. It is so easy for us to forget that all things, spiritual, physical, and material are given us by GOD and He can remove them at any moment. Sometimes these very things lead us to a feeling of independence of GOD.

When we keep taking GOD's pleasant gifts while ignoring Him, He has to send some pain to make us turn back to Him again. We can see this type of story repeated time and again in the lives of the Jewish people in Old Testament days. As long as they were at peace with the surrounding countries and the harvest was good, they gradually forgot GOD and turned to worshiping idols. Each time GOD sent prophets to warn them and when they wouldn't listen, GOD had to send famine, warfare, and often captivity before they realized that they had sinned. Then when they confessed that sin, GOD loosed the captivity and they were freed again.

One word of warning by which we might profit: There came the time when GOD would no longer deal with them as a nation and scattered them to the four corners of the earth, not to be returned to their homeland again until CHRIST should come to rule over them.

GOD also sends chastisement to teach us His power and sufficiency. There was more for Paul to learn from the thorn of suffering than just humility. He also learned that in his weakness, he was the strongest because he was now strong in the power of the Lord.

When Paul asked the Lord three times to remove this trial, GOD said, "No." In place of the removal GOD promised, **"My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of CHRIST may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong"** (II Corinthians 12:9, 10).

True spiritual strength only comes when we are weak and we live in CHRIST's power. Self-sufficiency is insufficiency. CHRIST is the only all-sufficient One. It is not until we come to the end of our sufficiency that we realize how important it is to depend on the all-sufficient One.

Chastisement is necessary to make us learn obedience. This is a trait that has to be taught. We never have this naturally. We see this truth many times in our children. Stubborn wills are set to please us and get our own way whatever the cost. It is seldom that a scolding will correct a child and keep him obedient. It usually takes a spanking or something that hurts to make him remember to obey.

My little daughter and I went to buy her a pair of shoes. She wanted the more expensive pair though the others were perfectly satisfactory for her use. She wanted her own way and insisted on the shoes. Though I said, "no," and explained why, it did no good. She cried and fretted. All the way home in the car she cried about the shoes. Even a spanking didn't avail. I had to find some way that would hurt the most to make her learn to obey. So I told her if she didn't stop crying by a certain time, and not mention the shoes again, it would be a week before she would be allowed to wear the pair that we bought. She kept on crying and it was a week before she wore the shoes, but it taught her obedience.

When I have to deal with the problems of training my girls, I often ask the Lord, "Do I act this way in Your sight? Do I make it necessary for You to send hard things to teach me that I must obey Your Word without a question? Does it hurt Your heart for me to sound so whiny and dissatisfied as I am hurt when my girls do it?" Then I know why GOD had to make me learn

obedience by the things that I suffer. That is the only way He can teach me to obey Him cheerfully and instantly.

Just in case you are tempted to take this matter of learning obedience lightly, it would be well to consider CHRIST our perfect example. Hebrews 5:8, **"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."**

Let's say right off that the Lord JESUS CHRIST was and is obedient to His Father. He did not learn to obey in the sense that we must, for He is GOD and as such can never sin.

Disobedience is sin. CHRIST experienced what perfect obedience to GOD's will means. **"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him"** (verse 9). Somehow we often think that because CHRIST is GOD, the sufferings that He knew on earth, and especially on the Cross, didn't matter to Him as much as it would have to us humans. But look at verse seven and get a little glimpse of what it meant to Him to obey GOD's will. He **"offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."** (The word "fear" here means a reverential trust of GOD.)

When we look at CHRIST in the Garden of Gethsemane we get a little insight into what obedience cost Him. Matthew and Mark record these words. **"My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death"** (Matthew 26:38; Mark 14:34), and Luke describes CHRIST's suffering: **"And being in agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground"** (Luke 22:44). Three times CHRIST prayed that this cup be removed, but three times he also said, **"Not my will, but thine, be done."**

GOD sent an angel to strengthen Him. There was no other way for you and me to be saved but for CHRIST to go to the Cross.

He had a human body just as we do and His body suffered just as any human body does. The physical body always cringes when facing death and suffering. But He was GOD too, and He had the added burden of being the holy One, apart from sin, to carry the sin and filth of this world on His shoulders. The greatest suffering was not physical, but to bear the weight of our sin on Him and go into death, because He was Life from all eternity past to eternity future.

CHRIST knows the uttermost cost of doing GOD's will. He did it to save us. It seems a little thing that we should now obey Him in our everyday walk.

GOD sends chastisement into our lives so we will learn not trust in ourselves but in Him (II Corinthians 1:9). **"But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead."** There is a famous poem that many love to quote that is just the opposite of what a Christian should feel. "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." GOD says that it is **"not in man that walketh to direct his steps"** (Jeremiah 10:23), and the sooner we learn that fact the happier and more peaceful will be our lives.

We like to talk about the men "who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps." Even Christians

find it hard not to make their own plans and attempt to carry them out in their own strength. Many a child of GOD has started on the pathway to great success only to be suddenly plunged into financial ruin or complete physical disability because they were running their lives apart from GOD's plan and sufficiency. Here are GOD's words on this matter. **"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of GOD"** (II Corinthians 3:5).

This is just the attitude that GOD is looking for from us, and if it doesn't come, He has to turn to methods of disciplining to make us change. GOD seems rather far away and unimportant as long as our lives run smoothly, but when disaster comes, we see our need of Him. Some people have been heard to say, "That family is in such a mess that only GOD can straighten them out." Only GOD can control our lives no matter how large or small the problems are.

It often takes chastening to let us see what is in our hearts. **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"** (Jeremiah 17:9). We usually think of this verse as applying to the unsaved man, but it is just as true of the Christian. Though we are saved, our hearts still long for the things of the world, and they still fool us many times into believing that our course of action is pleasing to the Lord.

Doris Mannon had been a Christian for over twenty years. She tried to live close to the Lord and was active in a good church. She thought that she would never knowingly let any sin in her heart. GOD knew her heart but she didn't, so He sent a testing to show her how deceitful it was. There was one sin that she enjoyed. From time to time she confessed it and found little or no strength to withstand its power. There were even times when she was fooled into believing that it wasn't really a sin at all. Finally, to her amazement, she had to admit that she enjoyed that sin more than her fellowship with the Lord!

GOD wouldn't allow that condition to go on for long; He stepped in and put her through a furnace of real suffering. She confessed, cried for deliverance, all the time knowing that she loved her sin. Nothing happened. Soon the hurting became so acute that she knew the sin must go. At first there was victory and then defeat but with GOD's help that sin was completely conquered once she made up her mind to forsake it. Now she knows better than to ever trust herself again without living momentarily in GOD's power. Now she knows from experience that even the hearts of long-time Christians can still deceive, and become wicked unless they are always under GOD's control.

Right along with this thought: Child-training teaches us just what we are in GOD's sight. It shows us how far short we fall of GOD's standards. Job is a good example. He was a good, upright man in GOD's estimation but after GOD let him get a glimpse of himself and go through a long period of lost possessions and physical suffering, Job began to see himself as GOD saw him.

We are tempted to measure our spirituality by other Christians, not by CHRIST. The more we study the Word and see what GOD's standard is, the more we realize how our puny efforts to live the Christian life must appear to GOD with His perfect holiness. The more we suffer, the more we judge ourselves by GOD and not by others.

This is especially true when we have been betrayed by a dear Christian friend or seen a minister fall into sin. The best of us are so far short of GOD's holiness that we would be in utter despair if it were not for the fact that we stand complete before GOD in CHRIST's righteousness.

GOD sends chastening to help us in our Christian walk. It is hard for us to live pleasing to Him, as we have a constant struggle with the old nature within. The suffering is sent, not to plague us, but to help us have victory in our lives. GOD does not afflict "**willingly . . . the children of men**" (Lamentations 3:33).

It is done for our profit, not His pleasure or revenge. This type of suffering is only sent when we make it necessary. The choice is really up to us.

We can walk in GOD's ways and be spared much suffering or we can be stubborn and make it necessary for GOD to discipline us. Paul said that the thorn in the flesh, though a messenger from Satan, was given him to keep pride out of his heart because of the wonderful revelations that GOD had given him (II Corinthians 12:4-11).

One would think that Paul had enough sufferings to control his pride but GOD knew better. If we had been Paul we might have been inclined to say that we had already suffered more than any other for CHRIST's sake, and now why this added physical suffering? But Paul saw the reason for GOD's hand on him, though Satan was the means through which it came. Paul saw that it was helping him to live more pleasing to GOD and in constant victory over sin. It all came first from GOD's hand and was sent in His love and wisdom.

A closer walk with Him is GOD's purpose in sending much of the hard things in our lives. GOD's main plan and purpose in saving us was to have a people who willingly loved and served Him; He wants our devotion and fellowship more than anything else.

It is not always the wrong things that keep us from a close walk with the Lord. In many Christians it is often too much activity and service for the Lord that keeps from a closer walk with the Lord. We can be like Martha, being so busy for GOD that we forget that He wants us more than He wants any of our gifts or service. Many a businessman has worked so hard getting wealthy in order to give his wife and family every luxury and desire that he doesn't have time to give them any of himself. Often in the end, he finds that he has lost his wife because it was not these things that she wanted as much as his presence and love.

Spreading the gospel was an uppermost desire in Paul's heart - "**That I may know him**" (Philippians 3:10).

Paul wanted a close personal relationship between himself and the Lord more than anything else. Many Christians have testified that it was not until GOD laid them aside with some illness that they really took time to realize that their service was taking the place the Lord should have. Many times there is no other way for GOD to teach us this lesson.

Chastening is sent to bring out true Christian character in us. "**Now no chastening. . . seemeth to be joyous, but. . . afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby**" (Hebrews 12:11).

Notice that the "**fruit of righteousness**" comes "**afterward**." The suffering is first. We learn from the trial if we let ourselves be trained by it. In other words, these are training exercises, like the lessons school children have in arithmetic, spelling, and reading. They go over and over these things before they really learn them.

Young folks throw their books in the air after graduation from high school or college and say, "My schooling is over for life." How little they have learned of the ways of life! Their training is just beginning and for the Christian this is especially true. There is so much to learn in so little time that GOD has to help us along by sending rough places in our lives. We are going to school to prepare us for our heavenly home. We will go through this learning process as long as we live, but it makes us develop true Christian character.

We are chastened by the Lord when we refuse to judge ourselves. "**For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world**" (I Corinthians 11:31,32).

GOD gives us a chance to judge our sins and confess them and put them away from us. If, however, we refuse to do it, or are not in earnest when we confess them, then GOD finds it necessary to chasten us to keep us from being "**condemned with the world**."

These verses are taken from a chapter in which Paul is dealing with the proper use of the Lord's table or communion service. The Corinthians were misusing this privilege and had to be corrected. GOD had already laid His hand of judgment on some of them. "**For this cause** [lack of judging and confession of their sins] **many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep** [are dead]" (I Corinthians 11:30).

There is no mistaking the meaning of these verses. They were spoken to Christians. If they will not judge sin in their own lives, GOD judges in ways ranging from weakness and illness even to physical death.

We have been told to celebrate the Lord's Supper for three reasons.

- First, we are to remember the death of CHRIST and what it has done for us.
- Second, we are to examine ourselves to see if there is any known sin in us.
- Third, if there is sin, we are to judge it by confessing it to GOD and putting it out of our lives.

Unless we do, we are eating and drinking judgment to ourselves in taking the symbols of CHRIST's death. Many ministers only emphasize the death of CHRIST in our stead at the communion service and our thanksgiving for it. They completely overlook these verses that give us the important duty of seeing that we have a perfect standing before GOD. This should be a time of real heartsearching and judging ourselves before GOD to see if there is any known sin, then a time of confessing if we find any sin. If we refuse to do this then GOD finds it necessary to send suffering to make us do it.

This leads us to several very important but often neglected truths concerning degrees of chastening, and that chastening is progressive in the lives of those who refuse to be "**exercised**"

thereby."

GOD has to send different types of suffering to different Christians to accomplish His purpose in training us. What would be a trial to me might not bother you at all. A trial the Lord sends to you might be a blessing to me. We have to always remember that GOD is all love, wisdom, and power. He is the only One who can choose just what chastisement is just right for each of us.

There are some who will be corrected or will learn quickly with only a light touch of affliction. There are others who either do not recognize His hand on them or refuse to be corrected. They stubbornly go on in their own way thinking that they are just victims of fate. Even after they have suffered enough to know that they must obey GOD. Sometimes they are so set in their ways that they do not respond to GOD's chastening.

When our two daughters were little and had to be trained and disciplined a lot, I soon found out that each child was very different, each had to be corrected in a different way. Our older girl usually obeyed when I only frowned and shook my head. If that didn't check her, a light spank was usually sufficient. I never remember having to take away anything that she enjoyed or sending her to her room for punishment.

The younger daughter is the opposite. She wants her own way no matter what it costs. Many, many spankings have done little good. I have even caught her in an act of disobedience and heard her tell a playmate that she knew she would be spanked for doing it. Having her own way is so important she will have it knowing that it is going to hurt. What kind of a child of GOD are you? Does just a frown of disapproval bring an instant correction in your life or does it take much suffering to bring you back into GOD's ways? You are the only one who can answer that question.

We see the progression of GOD's dealing with the children of Israel (Hosea 5:12-15). This is speaking of GOD's judgment on Ephraim.

- First, GOD came to them as the touch of a "**moth**." You know how light the feel of a moth is on your skin. This was GOD's first warning that they were getting out of His will. This might be compared to the look of disapproval on my face to correct my daughter. It doesn't hurt, it just shows that I want a change.

- Second, GOD says He would come as a "**lion**." When the first chastisement didn't work something more severe had to be sent. This might correspond to a spanking that I give my daughters. A lion "**will tear and... take away, and none shall rescue him**." If this suffering doesn't bring about GOD's purpose, then,

- Third, He said, "**I will... go away**" and not return "**Till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early**." We know from Old Testament and secular history that none of GOD's chastening turned the Jewish people to GOD permanently and they were finally scattered to the four corners of the world.

From Hebrews twelve, we see that GOD also deals with people in degrees of chastisement. We have two words that are interesting in this connection. These are "**chasteneth**" and "**scourgeth**."

Chastening may be anything from a light touch to severe affliction. It is anything that teaches, trains, or corrects sin in our lives. "**Scourging**" is a more severe form of chastening. It brings more distress and suffering. There are some Bible teachers who believe that scourging is always some kind of physical suffering.

It is possible to continue so long refusing GOD's correction that He finds it imperative to remove us from this earthly scene. This does not mean that we lose our salvation, only that we lose our earthly lives. All Christians are fit for Heaven, through what CHRIST has done for them, but not all are fit to live on this earth.

It is possible to continue sinning and spurning GOD's correction until He sees fit to take that one to Heaven to be with Himself. It is the only place that such an one can be trusted.

We see this truth taught in I John 5:16, 17, "**If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.**" Many people believe that they have sinned the sin unto death no matter what they have done. Numbers of them have told my husband that they have sinned beyond the point of forgiveness. In each case, a different sin was mentioned. To begin with, it is impossible for anyone of them to have sinned the "**sin unto death**" because all of them were still alive.

This brings us to ask whether this is spiritual or physical death. A reading of I John shows that these words are written to Christians.

Such words as "**beloved**", "**brethren**", "**children of God**", "**whosoever is born of God**" show that these people were saved. Even these verses start with, "**If any man see his brother** [Christian] **sin**," making it definite that this message is to those who are born again into GOD's family.

Once we have been given GOD's divine life within us, we cannot be lost. Spiritual death is impossible for those who are "**in Christ Jesus**." Since it is impossible for a Christian to lose his salvation, it follows that these verses can only mean physical death.

Some speak of the "**sin unto death**" as the refusal of the unsaved to accept CHRIST as Saviour. But the unsaved are already spiritually dead; they have never had life (everlasting) and until they come to CHRIST they never will.

A man who will not abide in CHRIST, or who lives in sin continually and will not be trained or corrected by GOD's chastening hand may be taken from this world's scene (John 15:6). He is no better than a useless withered branch that is gathered by men and burned. John 15 shows the importance of remaining in fellowship with GOD and that can only be maintained as we keep sin out of our lives. It also gives the wonderful blessings of that fellowship after the warning that those who stubbornly stay in rebellion against GOD's will must be dealt with by physical death, removed from this earthly scene.

If we add to these two passages the references in I Corinthians 11:30 and I Corinthians 5:5, we get further light on GOD's dealings with His children who continue in sin. The first reference

says, "**For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep** [have died]."

This is in the chapter in which Paul is having to deal with the sins connected with the wrong use of the Lord's Supper and the lack of judging sins before GOD Himself has to step in and judge them. The second reference is dealing with the sin of fornication.

A member of the Corinthian church was living immorally. Paul rebuked not only the man who was sinning but also the church people for overlooking it. They should have put the man out of their fellowship until the sin was confessed and forsaken. Paul, speaking with the authority that only an apostle had, told them to gather together in the name and power of CHRIST and deliver this man unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

This does not mean annihilation, but the destroying of the physical body. CHRIST said that we are not to fear those who can destroy the body but fear him who can destroy the soul (Matthew 10:28). GOD has to deliver us "**for the destruction of the flesh**" when we make it necessary, for He has our spiritual interest at heart.

Needless to say we believe there is a point beyond which GOD will not allow one of His children to go on in sin. No man can say where that point is. We have no right to try to figure that out and we have no right to judge another Christian. Above all, we must be very careful not to assume that all who are sickly or suffer bodily afflictions are being chastened because of continual sin. We have no way of knowing, let us leave it to GOD. Remember, too, that judging wrongly is sin. One might be putting himself in the place of chastening by judgment (Matthew 7:1, 2).

Turn again to I John 5:16, 17. John is telling us to pray for other Christians concerning the matter of sin. The two verses just previous are the greatest prayer promises that we have in the Bible. We are to pray for others when we see them sin.

This leads naturally to the question of how we are to know whether we are praying for one who has sinned "**unto death.**" Since there is no list of the type of sins which lead to an early physical death, we must pray about all sins and trust GOD to work out His will. GOD has not seen fit to give us knowledge of these things. We can only be led according to His directions in prayer and leave the results to Him.

A little boy was sitting beside his mother in church one warm, sunny day. The sermon seemed long, and very dull to him. He began to squirm and demand to go home. Begging and correcting him did no good. Even threats of all the mother could think to do in church did no good. His mother had no choice but to take him firmly by the hand and nearly drag him out of church. All the way, he cried that he didn't want to go home that way. He wanted to go home because he was bored. He didn't want to be taken out of church in disgrace.

As Christians we want to go to our heavenly home to be forever with the Lord. We don't want to be made to go because GOD can't trust us to be left here on earth because of sin and disgrace. If we continue in sin in spite of His correction, ruin our testimony before others, and stubbornly refuse to walk in GOD's will, He might find it necessary to remove us from this earth.

Chastisement is necessary for every Christian just as schooling is important for our children. GOD's training is preparing us not only for more joy, peace and fellowship in this life, but for more glory and fellowship with Him throughout all eternity. There are so many things that we must learn in a short life-span that GOD sometimes hastens the process often by sending suffering to teach and train us.

New Christians should never be surprised when afflictions and trials are sent, for this is GOD's method of fitting you for your new walk in CHRIST.

The more possibilities GOD sees in you, the heavier His hand of training will be. Take heart and be thankful that GOD can prepare you for His use. Remember that all He sends comes in His love and wisdom for your profit; it is never sent for punishment or revenge.

Chastisement is **proof that we are the children of GOD** and that we are the special objects of His love. It might come in any form that GOD sees will work best. Chastening is anything that corrects sin or teaches us. If we continually refuse to be trained or corrected by GOD's methods, it is possible for us to make it necessary for Him to take us to Heaven before our normal life span is run.

"Is there no other way, O GOD,
Except through sorrow, pain and loss,
To stamp CHRIST's image on my soul?
No other way except the cross?"
And then a voice stills all my soul,
As stilled the waves of Galilee:
"Canst thou not bear the furnace heat,
If midst the flame I walk with thee?
I bore the cross, I know its weight,
I drank the cup I hold for thee,
Canst thou not follow where I lead?
I'll give the strength - lean thou on Me."

~ end of chapter 12 ~
