

## Whom The Lord Loves He Chastens (Part 1)

### Why God Disciplines His Children

Martin G. Collins

Given 30-Aug-08; Sermon #898

You have noticed, as I have, the way that this society handles problems. Whatever it is, if it is child behavior problems they say, "Here's a drug." If a person is discouraged, they say, "Here's a drug." If a person is depressed they say, "Take this drug." Amazingly there are thousands of drugs out there for any number of things. Marriage problems? Take Viagra. The world's way of handling problems and depression is totally different, as we would expect, from how God handles it. This is what we are interested in today.

One of the most prolific causes of the condition of spiritual depression in the church is the failure to realize that God uses various methods in the process of our sanctification. He is our God, who has "loved us with an everlasting love."

His great purpose for us is our sanctification, and 'that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.'

**I Thessalonians 4:3-4** For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.

God's great primary concern for us is not our happiness, but our holiness. In His great love, He is determined to bring us to that condition, and He uses many differing means to that end.

Our failure to realize God's concern often causes us to stumble and even to misunderstand completely some of God's dealings with us. Like foolish children we feel that our heavenly Father treats us unkindly, or harshly, at times. Then, we begin to feel sorry for ourselves, and discouragement sets in. That, of course, often leads to depression. And it is due to our failure to realize God's wonderful purposes concerning us, and why He must discipline us to accomplish His will.

This is the matter that is dealt with, in such an effective and inspiring way, in Hebrews 12, where we see that sometimes God promotes sanctification in His children by chastening us, and especially by enabling us to understand the meaning of chastisement.

**Hebrews 12:5-11** And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Perhaps nowhere do we see more clearly the fact that sanctification is God's work than in connection with this subject of chastisement. We suffer rebuke because we are children of God. Paul tells us that God is doing these things to us for our own good—'Whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives.' Of course, we realize here that the word son also applies to the daughters.

And then we notice that for emphasis he also puts it negatively. He says, 'If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.'

Without discipline it is as if we are not truly children in the family, we are not treated as sons.

In today's society, being called a bastard may not mean very much. To people on the street, it does not matter because they just do not care. They have no knowledge of any worthwhile standard to uphold. But for the church, it is a very significant statement to be called a bastard. It literally means that he will inherit nothing, that he is entitled to nothing. But in terms of the Kingdom of God, that is everything!

Let us put it in the form of a principle. In other words, Paul is saying that the whole of salvation is God's work from beginning to end, and that God has His ways of producing it. Once God starts working He goes on with that work to completion. Paul wrote to the church members, in Philippians 1:6, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." That leaves no doubt that God will finish whatever He started in us, and that is one of the most encouraging things that we could be told.

God does not start a work and then give up or leave it incomplete—when God starts His work on His people, He completes that work. He has an ultimate objective and purpose for us, so that we can spend eternity with Him. Following God's example, we should complete what we begin. People often bow out when something is not going their way. God does not do that. So the question remains: Are you a quitter? God is not. It is a good thing that He is not as our sanctification relies on Him not quitting on us.

Much of what happens to us in this world should be understood and explained in the light of God's will. According to Paul's emphasis, it is definite—God **will** prepare us and bring us into eternal life, and nothing can stop Him.

God has several ways of doing this. One is to give us instruction, through the wonderful doctrines and principles that are taught in His inspired written Word. He has given us His Word for our instruction, through inspiring men with His Holy Spirit, so that we will be prepared and completed for His Kingdom.

But if we become unmanageable and disobedient, or if we have faults (which every human being does), we do not learn the lessons that are presented to us positively in His Word. Then God, as our Father—with the goal and objective of perfecting us and preparing us for glory—will adopt other methods. And one of the other major methods He uses is this method of chastisement.

In this time of political correctness and wimpy diplomacy, we can scarcely use the effective approach as Paul did of upholding moral and ethical standards in our children. Today, the world's childrearing advice of time-outs and child reasoning, rather than common sense, high expectations, and corporal punishment, develops children into liars and extortionists before they reach the age of six.

But God's system of childrearing is one in which parents lovingly chastise their children for their own good. If the child is not behaving properly as the result of positive instruction, then discipline must be carried out, discipline must be exercised. It may be painful but it is necessary, and the good parent does not neglect his responsibility in this. The apostle Paul says that God is like that, and infinitely more so.

So, if we will not be obedient to the positive lessons and instructions of God's Word, we should not be surprised if we have to endure certain things that are fairly painful. Some of these things are done deliberately by God, and some are things that we bring on ourselves by way of bad diet and other character flaws which God uses. His work in us in this way is part of the process of sanctification.

Remember how strongly Paul puts it. He says that we have to examine ourselves and find out whether we are experiencing any of this, because he says that if we are having no experiences of discipline, then it is very doubtful that we are truly God's sons. If we have no knowledge of this process, we are not legitimate children, we are illegitimate. It means we do not belong to God. Remember what Paul said in Hebrews 12:

**Hebrews 12:6-8** For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

In a sense, we can say that the person who should be most unhappy about himself or herself is the professing Christian who is not aware of this kind of dealing in his life.

If we are not receiving God's chastisement from time to time and in varying degrees, we definitely should be alarmed. And, if we are receiving God's correction, far from being annoyed by the process, we should be thankful to God for it, and for working so intimately in our personal lives. This is something that is constantly taking place in the life and experience of the children of God. It is also something that is taught everywhere in the Scriptures. There are endless examples and illustrations that can be quoted.

We see God's chastisement in the amazing message in the book of Job. We find Job's attitude and perspective being totally corrected by God's personal disciplining of him. I am sure that Job did not expect such a thing to come upon him. There is no doubt that he was so thankful that God had worked with him. Through God's disciplining and chastising of him, Job could see God, which he could not earlier in his life.

**Job 40:1-5** Moreover the LORD answered Job, and said: "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it." Then Job answered the LORD and said: "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further."

**Job 42:1-6** Then Job answered the LORD and said: "I know that You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, 'Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. Listen, please, and let me speak; You said, 'I will question you, and you shall answer Me.' "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

We find at least five major lessons that Job learned during his personal training and correction by God, lessons that he would not have learned if God had not chastised him.

1. Job learned submission and acquiescence as he ended his debate with God. He submitted to God's superior wisdom and power.
2. Job learned humility, the natural effect of listening to God's speeches, as he acknowledges that God can do all things and that he himself is "of small account."
3. Job learned to be silent, and to listen. Job laid his hand on his mouth and resolved to not speak any more.
4. Job learned repentance, as he confessed that he had "uttered what he did not understand" and repented "in dust and ashes".
5. Job learned that he had not really seen the omnipotence of God. He had not known Him for the truly awesome God that He is. "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You."

So we see these important principles running all the way through the Bible. In fact, all of God's treatment of the children of Israel is an extended example of this. It was because they were His people that He did those things to them.

Amos, like Hosea, rebuked Israel directly, and Judah indirectly. He had warned each nation separately. Now, here in Amos he concentrates on Israel, he sums up the same thing he had said earlier to Judah, as inspired by God and in God's voice. 'You have been the same in My gifts to you, the same in your waste of them and your sins; therefore, you shall be the same in your punishment.'

What was said to Israel was said also to Judah: what was directed first to the Israelites, including the Jews, is also meant for us, the descendants of the children of Israel. What Jesus said to the apostles, He said also to the church, and to each of us individually.

**Amos 3:1-2** Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."

It was because they were His children that He dealt with them in this way. We do not see Him dealing with the Gentile nations in this intimate way. In Genesis 12:3, God had said to Abraham, "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So now, in withdrawing that blessing from them, He takes it away from them, family by family. He includes them, one and all, and Judah also, since all had been "brought out of Egypt."

**Zechariah 12:12-14** "And the land shall mourn, every family by itself: the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves; "the family of the house of Levi by itself, and their wives by themselves; the family of Shimei by itself, and their wives by themselves; "all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves.

He is speaking about national chastisement, and the national chastisement that is coming on the descendants of the children of Israel will affect every level of leadership from the top down, and every individual citizen on a personal basis. We will all suffer from the sins of a society, just as we do in the United States, where we, as God's people, trying hard to overcome sins, receive part of that penalty. For example, homosexuality that is so blatantly in front of us, so we suffer having our children having a distorted viewpoint of what a true family is like. We have to try all the harder to train them up in the way that they should go. The point is that we are individually held accountable for these things, and therefore God chastises us on an individual basis as well, in His loving kindness.

So, what is chastisement? What is its purpose? The fundamental meaning of the word 'chastise' is to train. It is the training through which a child is put; it is the method of training a child. We tend to confuse it with the word punishment. Chastisement can include punishment, but that is only a small part of it. It includes correction, but it also includes instruction; it includes rebuke, but it also may include a lot of punishment. It does not have to, but it may. The essential thing is to train and to develop a child so as to produce a mature person. A mature person is an adult who has self-control, who properly handles situations that arise.

Let us consider the ways that God does chastise. How does God chastise His children? He does it largely through circumstances, all sorts and kinds of circumstances. It is especially important that we realize that in the Christian's life, everything that happens to us is of significance. Nothing happens to us accidentally. Nothing can happen to us apart from our eternal Father causing or allowing it. He is that intricately involved in our discipline and in raising His children.

Circumstances are constantly affecting us and their purpose is to produce our sanctification. Both pleasant circumstances and unpleasant circumstances work to teach us through experience. It makes sense then that we should be observant—always watching for lessons—seeking and asking questions when something arises in our lives.

Scripture teaches us very clearly that one circumstance that God often uses in this way is financial loss, and we are seeing this massively in this country today, also a change in one's material position, or the loss of possessions or the loss of money.

When Job was defending his own righteousness, he showed that he recognized that putting faith in material possessions makes us deserving of judgment.

**Job 31:23-28** For destruction from God is a terror to me, and because of His magnificence I cannot endure. "If I have made gold my hope, or said to fine gold, 'You are my confidence'; if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gained much; if I have observed the sun when it shines, or the moon moving in brightness, so that my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my

hand; this also would be an iniquity deserving of judgment, for I would have denied God who is above.

He is basically talking about things that could be made idols, and putting those before God, and putting our trust in such things. These things are often used by God to teach and train us. We see descriptions of it in the Old Testament, in the lives of many faithful and righteous men, like Joseph, Moses, Job, David, and many others.

It has also often happened in the subsequent history of God's people in the church. By means of some loss in a temporal and material sense, God teaches us lessons that apparently we could not have learned in any other way. Look at the issue of health for a moment. Generally in Scripture, good health and healing are seen as marks of the blessing of God, and illness as an indication of His disapproval.

**Psalms 38:3-5** There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness.

So God should always be consulted when someone becomes ill, because it may be that He has not caused the sickness, but that He is very well using it.

In several of the psalms a number of symptoms are set out and then clearly related to the guilt of the suffering individual (Psalms 32; 38; 41; 107). All four of those chapters deal with that type of thing. Throughout biblical history God is seen as actively involved in sending illness as a means of discipline, or judgment.

Miriam's foolishness, in Numbers 12, is a case in point. When she and Aaron spoke out against their brother Moses, the leader of Israel, God's response was to afflict her with leprosy. Then following Moses' intercession on her behalf, her punishment was commuted to a seven-day period of isolation outside the camp.

So this is a method that God has often used, so that those who say that it is never God's will that any of us should be sick or weak are simply denying the Scriptures. Let me qualify this by saying that I am not saying that every sickness is a punishment sent by God. I am simply saying that God sometimes uses that method in order to chastise His children.

If it is for this cause that many are weak and sickly, it is God's action. God allows that to happen to us, for our own good. His will is more important than the physical health of a person's body. So the healing that we experience is not necessarily a physical healing, but God always heals us. That healing is always in the spiritual sense, and sometimes accompanied by the physical healing. In a sense that is what our sanctification is, a spiritual healing.

The apostle Paul deals negatively with suffering in I Corinthians 11, in the section that deals with the Passover service. He teaches that there were members of the church who were both physically and spiritually sick and as a result died prematurely, because they were not living and thinking as a Christian should, and in this case they were not taking the Passover in a worthy manner. That

sleeping that they were going through could be taken either as a physical or a spiritual sleeping. Remember chastening and discipline is not always about punishment, it just may be a tweaking here or there, of our character.

Another important aspect of this teaching is found in II Corinthians 12, where Paul talks about 'the thorn in the flesh' that was given to him, and his whole reasoning regarding it. He says that the purpose of it was to keep him in the right spiritual attitude and perspective, so that he would not become a victim of pride or be over-exalted.

God did not remove Paul's figurative thorn, even after he prayed and asked God three times to remove it, because He wanted to teach Paul to realize constantly that when he is physically weak, then he is spiritually strong. God also wanted him to rejoice in infirmity rather than in health so that God's glory could be promoted. And there is a lesson in that too, that we had better be in a good attitude toward God's chastisement.

There is no doubt that God allowed this thing, maybe He produced it in order to discipline and train His servant in that way. He ultimately learned his lesson, so it promoted his sanctification.

If we will not submit ourselves and subject ourselves to the positive teaching of the Word, then God will chastise us appropriately. God always uses something to fit the crime, if there is a crime, or He always perfectly fits the tweaking to fit the needed adjustment.

Another way in which God chastens us is that God undoubtedly at times seems to withdraw His presence and to hide His face from us for this precise purpose. God allows us to feel alone and forgotten. This is one of the ways God disciplined Job.

**Job 13:24-27** Why do You hide Your face, and regard me as Your enemy? Will You frighten a leaf driven to and fro? And will You pursue dry stubble? For You write bitter things against me, and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth. You put my feet in the stocks, and watch closely all my paths. You set a limit for the soles of my feet.

Job misunderstood God. He had not yet seen God, although he had heard Him.

David was also very familiar with this method of discipline from God.

**Psalms 10:1** Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide in times of trouble?

**Psalms 13:1-2** How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily?

**Psalms 27:9-10** Do not hide Your face from me; do not turn Your servant away in anger; You have been my help; do not leave me nor forsake me, O God of my salvation. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me.

We see there, that David, many times felt that God had abandoned him. God *seems* to have abandoned him, but God does not abandon His children, just like we do not abandon our children.

Sin separates us from God, and brings on sickness. Sickness may come in either physical or psychological form, or both. But the sickness that always accompanies sin is spiritual, because sin disintegrates our relationship with God. If we are in the church, we are not flagrantly sinning, but we occasionally sin. That means that each time we sin, we are just a little bit farther away from God. But He is not the one leaving us, we are the one leaving Him.

We find this form of discipline again in the book of Hosea, chapters 5 and 6. In chapter 5, God explains how we are to react to this form of God's discipline. He says that we must admit what we have done wrong, and then earnestly seek Him and return to His way of life.

**Hosea 5:15** I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."

**Hosea 6:1** Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up.

**Hosea 6:6** For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

God withdrew His presence and His blessing in order to bring them to the place of repentance, and renewal of heart. He only withdrew His presence in the sense that they did not feel close to Him, and were not close to Him any longer. But God is omnipotent, and although He may be far from us in our own mind, He is always there ready to aid us, when we repent and ask for His assistance and His help in overcoming.

We find in the Christian life, that there are variations in emotions and in attitudes. That is a condition that often disturbs and confuses God's people. We have all experienced something of this. We find that for some reason or another, the experience that we have been enjoying suddenly comes to an end, and we say something similar to Job's remark:

**Job 23:3-5** Oh, that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat! I would present my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would say to me.

Often, we are not conscious of having done anything wrong, but God seems to have withdrawn Himself, and we feel like we have been deserted. But this is just another way that God disciplines His children. It is sometimes necessary to let people feel what it is like to be without Him by disfellowshipping a member who is flagrantly immoral, so that they can come to their senses and repent. Paul corrected the Corinthian brethren for allowing a man who was sexually immoral with his stepmother to continue to worship God with them. Paul told them, 'You members should have known better than to allow such blatant sin to continue in your midst.'

**I Corinthians 5:4-5** In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.



Being removed from God's fellowship is sometimes the only thing that will cause a person to repent. This is God's chastisement, done in Christ's name, of a blatantly sinning member .

We have seen what chastising is, we have seen a little bit of how God chastises. So, why does He do this?

Hebrews 12:5-15, which we read earlier, give several answers to this question, but the essence of the answer is, that He chastens us because He loves us. That may seem like a simple statement, but it is so deep.

**Hebrews 12:6** "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

It is because God loves us that He appears at times 'cruel to be kind.' It is all done for our good; that is the thing that we have to hang on to; it is *always* for our good.

Now look at the statement in Hebrews 12:7, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons." This is an interesting mistranslation in the King James Version (and the New King James Version). It says, "If ye [you] endure chastening, God deals with ye [you] as with sons."

But in the Revised Version, and various other versions, it is translated much better. It is not so much: 'If we endure chastening;' it is better put like this: 'It is for your chastening you endure.'

The English Standard Version also translates Hebrews 12:7, more accurately: 'It is for your discipline that you have to endure.' We could also put it this way: 'You endure so that you may receive discipline, correction, and admonishment.'

This puts a whole new *positive* light on the chastisement of the Lord. We live to be corrected and converted from our old rebellious ways, so that we may become a new righteous person prepared beforehand for the Kingdom of God.

Why are we enduring? That is the question that the Hebrew Christians were asking. If we are Christians, why do we have to endure? The answer is simple: we are enduring because we are Christians, we are enduring for our chastening, we are enduring for our spiritual training.

All the suffering and the enduring and all the unhappiness is with this important purpose in mind—our preparation and our training.

Notice in Hebrews 12:10, that Paul repeats himself—"For they [earthly parents] indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness."

For a short time our physical parents discipline us in the best way that they know how, but God does it for our spiritual benefit so that we will be able to share, become partakers, in His holiness. That is very clear. He trains us to conform in all things to His will. It is a work of gradual development. Since it is carried out under a lot of difficulties, we receive frequent admonitions to be watchful, constant in prayer, and persevering. All three of those terms indicate that we do not get a break. It is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and every minute of every day, that we need to be aware.

When we go to bed at night, we should pray that God will protect our minds, and help it to rest.

God sanctifies us through the truth by doing these things to us and then, by means of His Word, expounding to us what He is doing.

So, since that is the general goal that God has in mind in chastening us in this way, let us also look at some of the specific reasons that He has for doing this. There are certain faults in all of us that need to be corrected.

There are certain dangers confronting all of us against which we need to be protected. The fact that a person is a Christian does not mean he is perfect, of course. It is obvious that we do not just immediately upon believing in God arrive at a state of complete perfection. In fact, we do not arrive at that state at all in this physical life; there is imperfection remaining, some of the 'old man' remains. As long as we are human, we have human nature that must be eventually replaced totally by God's nature.

The result is that there are certain things that always need to be dealt with, and in the Scriptures we are told very clearly that God uses chastisement in order to deal with some of these specific problems.

So, what are the dangers, and what are the threats? Let us look at four:

1. Spiritual pride—that is, spiritual elation in a dangerous and wrong sense. We touched on it earlier; the apostle Paul put this perfectly in II Corinthians 12:

**II Corinthians 12:1-7** It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me. And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

Apparently, Paul was given some rare, exceptional, unusual experience, he was lifted up into the third heaven where God's throne is, he saw, heard, and felt wonderful things, but the danger in this is that it could encourage him to become spiritually proud, and for others to overly exalt him. And he tells us that the thorn in the flesh was sent to him, and was given to him deliberately in order to safeguard him. Spiritual pride is an ever-present terrible danger—it is a persistent threat.

If God does grant us, in His mercy and love, some unusual experience or spiritual gift, we are placed in a position where Satan may exploit it to our harm; and often people who have had such rare and unique experiences have needed chastisement in order to produce the humility needed to have the right attitude so God can work with them.

Although the apostle Paul speaks of a healthy pride we should have in ourselves and others, the word pride in Scripture is mostly used to refer to a very negative character trait that can be described as arrogant, conceited, and haughty. Pride keeps some very bad company. It is associated with such varied vices as perverted speech, boastfulness, defiance of God, indifference to the poor and needy, self-deceit, the lust of the flesh and of the eyes, and false trust in riches.

Spiritually its root sin is disregard for God, defiance of Him, enmity against Him. The leading self-delusion of proud people is their false security in themselves and their resources. The most important thing about proud people is that God opposes them, and the most predictable thing we know about pride is that God will bring it down. With regard to the mention of pride in the Bible, it is usually in reference to proud people on the verge of being humbled.

**Isaiah 2:12-17** For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up—and it shall be brought low—upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, and upon all the oaks of Bashan; upon all the high mountains, and upon all the hills that are lifted up; upon every high tower, and upon every fortified wall; upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all the beautiful sloops. The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.

This is in reference to the Day of the Lord, but in principle it means everyone and everything prideful will be brought low, humiliated eventually—if not sooner, then later.

2. The danger of self-confidence. God has given us gifts, and the danger is for us to rely on ourselves and our gifts and to feel that we do not need God.

Pride and self-assurance are similar constant dangers. These are more dangerous and subtle than other sins, because the self-confident attitude leads to other sins. It is relying on one's own opinion or powers, without other aid. It is the go-it-alone attitude. Helel was the ultimate example of self-confidence.

**Isaiah 14:12-14** How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [Helel], son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

You do not get more confident in yourself than that. The five 'I's' contained in these three verses is the essence of the story.

3. The danger of being attracted by the world and its outlook and its way. The point that is made in the Scriptures is that these things are so subtle.

Attraction is the enticement or allure of something fascinating. Today, we see a society that is driven by this very thing. Even the recent political convention in Denver put more effort and spent more money on being attractive and fascinating, than it did on substance of governmental policy.

It is not that we deliberately sit down and decide that we are going back into the world. It is something that happens almost imperceptibly. The world, and its attractions, are always there and we slip into them almost without knowing it. So we need to be chastised so we do not come to love the things of the world.

4. The danger of self-satisfaction—smugness. This is the danger of being satisfied with the condition we have reached in the Christian life.

Since we do not believe the heresy that so many people believe today, and we have ceased to do certain things that we know are obviously wrong, we may come to believe that we are perfect in our belief, and that our lives are beyond reproach, and so we become smug and self-satisfied.

If we rest on our laurels in this way, we will not grow. Our faith has become without works, it has become dead—that is the essence of the danger. If we compare ourselves with what we were ten years ago, it may be that there is really no spiritual difference. Hopefully, that is not the case in your life. This person, who has become self-satisfied with himself, may not know God any more intimately; he may not have developed spiritually at all; he may not have grown in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord. He has been resting in a state of self-satisfaction.

We can sum up this danger by saying that it is the terrible danger of forgetting God and not seeking Him and His fellowship. It is the awful danger of thinking of oneself in terms of experience. We sit week after week in Sabbath services, and absorb knowledge, but do we react to it or do anything about it?

We have to be constantly active in our right use of the wisdom that God provides through His inspired written Word, and the ministry that He has provided. As we go on year by year, we should be able to say we know God better than we used to, we should be able to say that we love Him more than we used to, and we should be showing it by the way we live.

God knows the danger is to forget Him because we are interested in ourselves and in our own experience. And so God, in His infinite love, chastises us in order to make us realize these things, in order to bring us back to Him, in order to safeguard us against these terrible dangers that are constantly threatening us and surrounding us.

Let us look at it from a more positive angle. To be sanctified means we display certain positive spiritual qualities. It is to be the kind of person who is exemplifying the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount in his life; it is to be a person who is producing the fruit of the Spirit.

In sanctifying us, God is bringing us more and more into conformity with Himself. And, in order to bring us there, it is not enough just for us to be given the positive teaching of the Word; the element of chastisement is also necessary. God has a whole package in the way that He works with each and every one of us.

Sanctification involves more than a mere moral improvement of character, brought about by the power of the truth. There are many good people out there who have tried to follow the Ten Commandments and they have, by the letter of the law, followed them very well. But in the spirit of the law they have just not been given God's Holy Spirit, and do not know how to properly and thoroughly apply them. In other words, sanctification is God's carrying on to perfection (or

completion) the work begun by Him in us through His Holy Spirit, and it extends to the whole person. Perfect sanctification is not attainable in this physical life.

**I Corinthians 15:50** "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption."

**I John 1:8-9** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Ultimately cleansing is done by the sacrifice and blood of Jesus Christ. When we come up out of the water at baptism, we are completely clean of sin. Sanctification is the process that follows and the chastening of the Lord is a major part of that sanctification. It is necessary in everyone's life.

In the apostle Paul's account of himself in Romans 7, he very clearly expresses both his own frustration in trying to overcome, and his disappointment in himself at the slowness of the process.

**Romans 7:14-25** For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

The more righteous the person, the more humble and self-disgusted he is with his own progress in overcoming. He becomes more sensitive to every sin which he laments and strives to overcome. Our lives are a constant warfare as Paul described, and we are always subject to the constant chastisement of our Father's loving hand, which corrects our imperfections and confirms our progress.

So when we are chastised by God, it is not only a tweaking or adjusting of our own character, but it also helps us to understand and see the progress that we make in our lives. We always come out of a severe trial or a sickness knowing that we have learned lessons.

There are many commands in Scripture that tell us that we also have a responsibility in the process of sanctification. We are commanded to "be perfect" and to "be holy" and to present ourselves as "slaves of righteousness for holiness."

**Matthew 5:48** Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Peter shows that perfection and holiness are close to the same thing; both have something to do with our conduct.

**I Peter 1:15-16** But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

These commands require effort on our part, but ultimately it is God who makes us perfect and holy.

We must believe in Jesus Christ, because we are 'sanctified by faith in Him.' We are exhorted to 'look to Jesus.' Paul states this just before the section on the chastening of the Lord.

**Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

So Paul tells us here what we must always be doing—we must be overcoming and persevering—for all to be well. But we do not do this perfectly, and so chastisement becomes necessary. It is necessary in order to produce many righteous qualities in us. But what are some of those qualities?

*Humility*—for one. Next to love, in many ways it is the crowning virtue. Humility is a most priceless quality, and it requires the manifestation of all of the fruit of the Spirit. It was a defining characteristic of Jesus Christ. He was meek and lowly in heart. That is exactly what Isaiah was inspired to prophesy.

**Isaiah 53:5-7** But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.

I do not know if we have really considered that Jesus did not open His mouth, that is complain about God's chastisement either. Of course Christ was perfect, so He did not require any correcting or punishment to receive, but He did receive it for us. The chastisement that we receive He also in a sense felt or received from God. I speak of that as a father to a son. As a father, I do not always discipline or chastise my son harshly, sometimes my chastisement or my discipline of him is positive reinforcement of something that he has done.

That is the way that God works with Jesus Christ, who is perfect. That is the way that God knows we all have to be humbled in order to arrive at humility. Failure can be very good for us there. It is very difficult to be humbled if we are usually successful, so God chastises us with failure at times in order to humble us, to keep us in a state of humility. With success comes the tremendous battle against pride. So God does, quite often, keep people in the church from receiving financial success, for our own good, and we thank Him for that.

People so cling to the world that God has to do something that shows us very clearly the things that bind us to this world. And so, God's discipline often suddenly awakens us to the fact that we are only sojourners in this world, and that our loyalties and treasures should be in heaven.

Another good quality produced by God's chastisement is *meekness*. It is very difficult to be 'meek' in our attitudes towards others and in our relationships with them because humans are self-serving and want their own way. Being in God's church hopefully we have come a long way from that, and are developing meekness with God's help. The key to understanding the quality of meekness is that it is not a quality of weakness but rather of strength. Meekness is not cowardice, timidity, or lack of confidence. The word also implies self-control. Meekness can be regarded as strength under control.

Meekness is a commanded behavior and rewards are promised by God to people who display this quality. In many of the passages that command meekness, it is easy to get the impression that this virtue is displayed especially in speech. So we see in Christ not opening His mouth there when He received the lashings and the crucifixion that He received that there is an element of meekness in Him doing that, as well as humility.

Jesus, of course, is the supreme example of meekness. Peter writes that, "When he was abused, he didn't return abuse; when he suffered, he didn't threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly." Jesus was bold toward the religious establishment in defending the helpless and diseased, as well as opposing evil, and He was unpretentious in regard to His own interests.

*Patience* is another good quality that God disciplines us in. Sometimes God has to thwart our efforts in order to remind us of our need for patience. He says in effect: 'You know I am patient with you, go and be patient with that other person.' Patience usually refers to a calm, long-lasting endurance, sometimes associated with wisdom or humility.

*Sympathy* and *compassion* for others, in a sense, is almost impossible to truly have and understand unless we know something of the same experience. That is why Jesus Christ went through suffering Himself, so that He could relate and understand, and truly have compassion on us. So we suffer with Christ in training for such patient continuance and understanding of the plight of others. Patience involves perseverance and waiting but is active in that it produces fruit.

These, then, are just some of the things that show us clearly the need and necessity for chastisement. Because God loves us, because we are His children, He chastises us so we will eventually acquire these peaceable qualities and many others.

The great principle regarding the chastisement of the Lord is that God trains us because we are His children. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Praise goes to God who has the responsibility for our salvation and our perfection and who, having started the good work will go on with it to completion and perfection. He so loves us that He chastises us in order to bring us into conformity with the image of His perfect Son, Jesus Christ, so we may be unified with our heavenly Father, and our Savior, in the peaceable Family of God.