

Divine Chastisement

by A.W. Pink

A.W. Pink's sermon emphasizes the distinction between Divine punishment and chastisement, highlighting God's loving discipline of His children for their spiritual growth and well-being.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:5

Topics: "God's Love and Discipline", "Divine Chastisement"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the crucial distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement, asserting that believers cannot be punished for their sins since Christ has already borne that penalty. Instead, chastisement is a loving correction from God, aimed at guiding His children towards holiness and spiritual growth. Pink explains that while punishment is retributive and directed at God's enemies, chastisement is parental and intended for the well-being of His children. He encourages believers to view their sufferings not as signs of God's displeasure but as evidence of their sonship and opportunities for growth. The sermon serves as a reminder to interpret God's dealings through the lens of His love and the teachings of Scripture.

Transcript

"Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor

faint when thou are rebuked of him" (HEBREWS 12:5).

It is of first importance that we learn to draw a sharp distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement - important for maintaining the honour and glory of God, and for the peace of mind of the Christian. The distinction is very simple, yet is it often lost sight of. God's people can never by any possibility be punished for their sins, for God has already punished them at the Cross. The Lord Jesus, our Blessed Substitute, suffered the full penalty of all our guilt, hence it is written "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." Neither the justice nor the love of God will permit Him to again exact payment of what Christ discharged to the full. The difference between punishment and chastisement lies not in the nature of the sufferings of the afflicted: it is most important to bear this in mind. There is a threefold distinction between the two. First, the character in which God acts. In the former God acts as Judge, in the latter as Father. Sentence of punishment is the act of a judge, a penal sentence passed on those charged with guilt. Punishment can never fall upon the child of God in this judicial sense because his guilt was all transferred to Christ: "Who his own self bear our sins in his own body on the tree."

But while the believer's sins cannot be punished, while the Christian cannot be condemned (Rom. 8:3), yet he may be chastised. The Christian occupies an entirely different position from the non-Christian: he is a member of the Family of God. The relationship which now exists between him and God is that of parent and child; and as a son he must be disciplined for wrongdoing. Folly is bound up in the hearts of all God's children, and the rod is necessary to rebuke, to subdue, to humble.

The second distinction between Divine punishment and Divine chastisement lies in the recipients of each. The objects of the former are His enemies. The subjects of the latter are His children. As the Judge of all the earth, God will yet take vengeance on all His foes. As the Father of His family, God maintains discipline over all His children. The one is judicial, the other parental.

A third distinction is seen in The design of each: the one is retributive, the other remedial. The one flows from His anger, the other from His love. Divine punishment is never sent for the good of sinners, but for the honouring of God's law and the vindicating of His government. But Divine chastisement is sent for the well-being of His children: "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:9-10).

The above distinction should at once rebuke the thoughts which are so generally entertained among Christians. When the believer is smarting under the rod let him not say, God is now punishing me for my sins. That can never be. That is most dishonouring to the blood of Christ. God is correcting thee in love, not smiting in wrath. Nor should the Christian regard the chastening of the Lord as a sort of necessary evil to which he must bow as submissively as possible. No, it proceeds from God's goodness and faithfulness, and is one of the greatest blessings for which we have to thank Him. Chastisement evidences our Divine son-ship: the father of a family does not concern himself with those on the outside: but those within he guides and disciplines to make them conform to his will. Chastisement is designed for our good, to promote our highest interests. Look beyond the rod to the All-wise hand that wields it!

The Hebrew Christians to whom this Epistle was first addressed were passing through a great fight of afflictions, and miserably were they conducting themselves. They were the little remnant out of the Jewish nation who had believed on their Messiah during the days of His public ministry, plus those Jews who had been converted under the preaching of the apostles. It is highly probable that they had expected the Messianic Kingdom would at once be set up on earth and that they would be allotted the chief places of honour in it. But the Millennium had not begun, and their own lot became increasingly bitter. They were not only hated by the Gentiles, but ostracized by their unbelieving brethren, and it became a hard matter for them to make even a bare living. Providence held a frowning face. Many who had made a profession of Christianity had gone back to Judaism and were prospering temporally. As the afflictions of the believing Jews increased, they too were sorely tempted to turn their back upon the new Faith. Had they been wrong in embracing Christianity? Was high Heaven displeased because they had identified themselves with Jesus of Nazareth? Did not their suffering go to show that God no longer regarded them with favour?

Now it is most instructive and blessed to see how the Apostle met the unbelieving reasoning of their hearts. He appealed to their own Scriptures! He reminded them of an exhortation found in Proverbs 3:11-12, and applied it to their case. Notice, first, the words we place in italics: "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you." This shows that the exhortations of the Old Testament were not restricted to those who lived under the old covenant: they apply with equal force and directness to those of

us living under the new covenant. Let us not forget that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable" (2 Tim. 3:16) The Old Testament equally as much as the New Testament was written for our learning and admonition.

Second, mark the tense of the verb in our opening text: "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh." The Apostle quoted a sentence of the Word written one thousand years previously, yet he does not say "which hath spoken," but "which speaketh." The same principle is illustrated in that sevenfold "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith (not "said") unto the churches" of Rev. 2 and 3. The Holy Scriptures are a living Word in which God is speaking today!

Consider now the words "Ye have forgotten." It was not that these Hebrew Christians were unacquainted with Prov. 3:11 and 12, but they had let them slip. They had forgotten the Fatherhood of God and their relation of Him as His dear children. In consequence they misinterpreted both the manner and design of God's present dealings with them, they viewed His dispensation not in the light of His Love, but regarded them as signs of His displeasure or as proofs of His forgetfulness. Consequently, instead of cheerful submission, there was despondency and despair. Here is a most important lesson for us: we must interpret the mysterious providences of God not by reason or observation, but by the Word. How often we "forget" the exhortation which speaketh unto us as unto children- "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him."

Unhappily there is no word in the English language which is capable of doing justice to the Greek term here. "Paideia" which is rendered "chastening" is only another form of "paidion" which signifies "young children," being the tender word that was employed by the Saviour in John 21:5 and Hebrews 2:13. One can see at a glance the direct connection which exists between the words "disciple" and "discipline": equally close in the Greek is the relation between "children" and "chastening." Son-training would be better. It has reference to God's education, nurture and discipline of His children. It is the Father's wise and loving correction which is in view.

It is true that much chastisement is the rod in the hand of the Father correcting His erring child. But it is a serious mistake to confine our thoughts to this one aspect of the subject. Chastisement is by no means always the scourging of His refractive sons. Some of the saintliest of God's people, some of the most obedient of His children, have been and are the greatest sufferers. Oftentimes God's chastenings instead of being retributive are corrective. They are sent to empty us of self-sufficiency and self-righteousness: they are given to discover to us hidden transgressions, and to teach us the plague of our own hearts. Or again, chastisements are sent to strengthen our faith, to raise us to higher levels of experience, to bring us into a condition of usefulness. Still again, Divine chastisement is sent as a preventative, to keep under pride, to save us from being unduly elated over success in God's service. Let us consider, briefly, four entirely different examples.

DAVID. In his case the rod was laid upon him for grievous sins, for open wickedness. His fall was occasioned by self-confidence and self-righteousness. If the reader will diligently compare the two Songs of David recorded in 2 Samuel 22 and 23, the one written near the beginning of his life, the other near the end, he will be struck by the great difference of spirit manifested by the writer in each. Read 2 Samuel 22:22-25 and you will not be surprised that God suffered him to have such a fall. Then turn to chapter 23, and mark the blessed change. At the beginning of v. 5 there is a heart-broken confession of failure. In vv. 10-12 there is a God-glorifying confession, attributing victory unto the Lord. The severe scourging of David was not in vain.

JOB. Probably he tasted of every kind of suffering which falls to man's lot: family bereavements, loss of property, grievous bodily afflictions came fast, one on top of another. But God's end in it all was that Job should benefit therefrom and be a greater partaker of His holiness. There was not a little of self-satisfaction and self-righteousness in Job at the beginning. But at the end, when He was brought face to face with the thrice Holy One, he "abhorred himself" (42:6). In David's case the chastisement was retributive, in Job's corrective.

ABRAHAM. In him we see an illustration of an entirely different aspect of chastening. Most of the trials to which he was subjected were neither because of open sins nor for the correction of inward faults. Rather were they sent for the development of spiritual graces. Abraham was sorely tried in various ways, but it was in order that faith might be strengthened and that patience might have its perfect work in him. Abraham was weaned from the things of this world, that he might enjoy closer fellowship with Jehovah and become the "friend" of God.

PAUL. "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 (2 Cor. 12:7). This "thorn" was sent not because of failure and sin, but as a preventative against pride. Note the "lest" both at the beginning and end of the verse. The result of this "thorn" was that the beloved apostle was made more conscious of his weakness. Thus, chastisement has for one of its main objects the breaking down of self-sufficiency, the bringing us to the end of our selves.

Now in view of these widely different aspects chastenings which are retributive, corrective, educative, and preventative, how incompetent are we to diagnose, and how great is the folly of pronouncing a judgment concerning others! Let us not conclude when we see a fellow-Christian under the rod of God that he is necessarily being taken to task for his sins. In our next meditation we shall, D.V., consider the spirit in which Divine chastisements are to be received.

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