

# The Family Discipline

by Horatius Bonar

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*Horatius Bonar's sermon emphasizes the vital role of God's loving and wise discipline in training His children for eternal life.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 22:6, Hebrews 12:5

**Topics:** "Discipline", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the significance of family discipline as a divine process of training God's children for eternity. He explains that this discipline, characterized by love, wisdom, faithfulness, and power, begins at conversion and continues throughout life, shaping the mind, will, heart, and conscience. Bonar encourages believers to embrace their trials as necessary for spiritual growth, reminding them that God's chastening is a sign of His love and commitment to their sanctification. He illustrates how afflictions, such as sickness, bereavement, and adversity, serve to awaken and refine the soul, ultimately preparing it for the heavenly kingdom. The sermon concludes with a call to remain vigilant and prayerful, recognizing that through suffering, believers are drawn closer to God.

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## Transcript

"Train up a child in the way he should go" is the injunction God lays on us. But it is, moreover, the principle on which He Himself is acting with His Church. He is training up His children here. This is the true character of His dealings with them. The education of His saints is the object He has in view. It is training for the kingdom; it is education for eternity. How momentous, then, is the training! It is God who is carrying it on by the Holy Spirit. It is the Church, which is the Body of Christ, that is the subject of it.

And it is to prepare her for an everlasting kingdom! In bringing many sons unto glory, it was needful that even the Captain of their salvation should be made perfect through suffering. Surely, then, God lays vast stress upon this discipline. In His estimation it is no unimportant nor unmeaning exercise. Knowing this, the apostle exhorts us on this very point, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord." It is too solemn to be despised, too momentous to be overlooked. The education of God's family is concerned with it.

The preparation of an heir of glory depends on it. This discipline begins at our conversion. The moment we are taken into the family it commences. "He scourges every son whom he receives." It is not always visible; neither are we at all times conscious of its operation. Nevertheless, from the very day that "we are begotten again to a lively hope" it begins. It ends only with life, or in the case of the last generation of the Church, with their being "caught up to meet the Lord in the air."

It is a whole lifetime's process. It is a daily, an hourly discipline which admits of no cessation. The rod may not always be applied, but still the discipline goes on. 1. It is the discipline of love. Every step of it is kindness. There is no wrath or vengeance in any part of the process. The discipline of the school may be harsh and stern, but that of the family is love. We are sure of this; and the consolation which it affords is unutterable. Love will not wrong us. There will be no needless suffering.

Were this but kept in mind there would be fewer hard thoughts of God among men, even when His strokes are most severe. I know not a better illustration of what the feelings of a saint should be, in the hour of bitterness, than the case of Richard Cameron's father. The aged saint was in prison "for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." The bleeding head of his martyred son was brought to him by his unfeeling persecutors, and he was asked derisively if he knew it.

"I know it, I know it," said the father, as he kissed the mangled forehead of his fair-haired son, "it is my son's; my own dear son's! It is the Lord! good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me or mine, but who has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days." 2. It is the discipline of wisdom. He who administers it is the "God only wise." What deep wisdom then must there be in all His dealings! He knows exactly what we need and how to supply it. He knows what evils are to be found in us, and how these may be best removed.

His training is no random work. It is carried on with exquisite skill. The time and the way and the instrument are all according to the perfect wisdom of God. The fittest time is chosen, just the very moment when discipline is called for, and when it would be most profitable. The surest, most direct, and at the same time gentlest method is devised. The instrument which will be surest yet safest, most effectual yet least painful, is brought into operation. For all is wisdom in the discipline of God. 3.

It is the discipline of faithfulness. "In faithfulness you have afflicted me," said David. All is the doing of a faithful God- a God who is faithful to us as well as faithful to Himself. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend," says Solomon; and the believer finds in trouble the faithfulness of the truest of friends. He is so faithful that He will not pass by a single fault that He sees in us, but will forthwith make it known that it may be removed. He gave this command to Israel, "You shall in any wise rebuke your neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him," (Lev 19:17) and He Himself acts upon the command He gave.

He is too faithful a Father to suffer sin upon His children unreprieved. He is true to us, whether in sending the evil or the good; shall we not say, truer and more faithful when He inflicts the evil than when He bestows the good? It almost at times seems to break the heart of a loving friend to be obliged to say or do anything severe toward the friend he loves. Yet for love's sake he will do it. In faithfulness he will not shrink from it. And in doing so, is he not true to his friend?

So with a chastening God. He is faithful when He blesses- more faithful when He chastens. This surely is consolation. It may well allay all murmuring and establish our hearts in peace. 4. It is the discipline of power. He who is carrying it on is not one who can be baffled and forced to give up His design. He is able to carry it out in the unlikeliest circumstances and against the most resolute resistance. Everything must give way before Him. This thought is, I confess, to me one of the most comforting connected with the discipline.

If it could fail! If God could be frustrated in His designs after we have suffered so much, it would be awful! To be scourged and suffer pain by one who is not able to make good to us the profit of this would add inconceivable bitterness to the trial. And then our hearts are so hard, our wills so stubborn, that nothing

save an Almighty pressure applied to them can work the desired change. Oh, when the soul is at strife within itself, battling in desperate conflict with its stormy lusts, when the flesh rises up in its strength and refuses to yield, when the whole heart appears like iron or is adamant, it is most blessed to think upon God's chastisements as the discipline of power!

It is this that assures us that all shall yet be well. And it is in the strength of this assurance that we gird ourselves for the battle, knowing that we must be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. There might be love in the dealing- love to the uttermost- and yet all be in vain. For love is oftentimes helpless, unable to do anything for the beloved object. There might be wisdom, too, and yet it might prove wholly ineffectual. There might also be untiring faithfulness, yet no results.

It might be altogether impotent even in its fondest vigilance. It might be baffled in its most earnest attempts to bless. But when it is infinite power that is at work, we are sure of every obstacle being surmounted, and everything that is blessed coming most surely to pass. My sickbed may be most lovingly tended, most skillfully provided for, most faithfully watched, and I may be most sweetly soothed by this fond and unwearied care; yet, if there be no power to heal, no resistless energy such as sweeps all hindrances before it, then I may still lie hopeless there; but, if the power to heal be present, the power that makes all diseases flee its touch, the power that, if need be, can raise the dead, then I know of a truth that all is well.

Oh, it is blessed and comforting to remember that it is the discipline of power that is at work upon us! God's treatment must succeed. It cannot miscarry or be frustrated even in its most arduous efforts, even in reference to its minutest objects. It is the mighty power of God that is at work within us and upon us, and this is our consolation. It is the grasp of an infinite hand that is upon us, and nothing can resist its pressure. All is love, all is wisdom, and all is faithfulness, yet all is also power.

The very possibility of failure is thus taken away. Were it not for this power there could be no certainty of blessing, and were it not for this certainty, how poor and partial would our comfort be! He, yes, He who chastises us is "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph 3:20). Hence to a soul, conscious of utter helplessness and weary of the struggle within, between the spirit and the flesh, there is "strong consolation" in remembering the power of Him whose hand is now grasping him so firmly on every side.

His sorely tossed spirit finds peace in calling to mind "the years of the right hand of the Most High"- all the "works of the Lord and his wonders of old." The "strength of Israel" is the name he delights in, as the name of his Chastener. He thus bethinks himself, "The God who made these heavens and stretched them out in their vastness and majesty, who moves these stars in their courses and arrests them at a word, is the God who is chastening me. He who raises and stills the mighty deep and all the multitude of its waves, the God of the tempest and of the earthquake, the framer of light and dark, the wielder of the lightning and the builder of the everlasting hills, is the God who is now laying His rod so heavily upon me."

Thus each new proof or aspect of Jehovah's power becomes a new source of consolation in the day of chastisement and sorrow. Such, then, is the nature of the family discipline when viewed in reference to God. Love, wisdom, faithfulness, and power unite to devise and carry it out. It must, then, be perfect discipline, the completest and most successful that can be thought of or desired. It is well to look at it in this light, for it is thus that we become entirely satisfied with all that comes to pass and feel that "it is well." But let us consider it in another aspect. We have seen what it is when flowing out of God; let us see what it is when operating upon man.

As we observed before, God's object in chastisement is the education of His children, the training up of the saints. It is their imperfect spiritual condition that makes this so necessary. And now we proceed to inquire in what way it works, and toward what regions of the soul it is specially directed. For while, doubtless, it embraces the whole soul in all its parts and powers, it may be well to consider it as more especially set to work upon its mind, its will, its heart, and its conscience. 1.

It is the training of the mind. We are naturally most unteachable as well as most ignorant, neither knowing anything nor willing to know. The ease of prosperous days augments the evil. God at length interposes and compels us to learn. "The rod and reproof give wisdom" (Prov 29:15). He sends trial and that makes us willing to learn. Our unteachableness gives way. We become aware of our ignorance. We seek teaching from on high. God begins his work of instruction. Light pours in on every side.

We grow amazingly in knowledge. We learn the meaning of words now which we had hitherto used but as familiar sounds. Scripture shines out before us in new effulgence; it flashes into us; every verse seems to contain a sunbeam; dark places become light; every promise stands out in illuminated splendor; things hard to be understood become in a moment plain. How fast we learn in a day of sorrow! It is as if affliction awoke our powers and lent them new quickness of perception. We advance more in the knowledge of Scripture in a single day than in years before.

We learn "songs in the night," though such music was unknown before. A deeper experience has taken us down into the depths of Scripture and shown us its hidden wonders. Luther used to say, "Were it not for tribulation I should not understand Scripture." And every sorrowing saint responds to this, as having felt its truth- felt it as did David, when he said, "Blessed is the man whom you chastenest, . . . and teach him out of your law"(Psalm 94:12). "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes" (Psalm 119:71).

What teaching, what training of the mind goes on upon a sickbed, or under the pressure of grief! And, oh, what great and wondrous things will even some little trial whisper in the ear of a soul that is "learning of the Father"! In some cases this profit is almost unfelt, at least during the continuance of the process. We think that we are learning nothing. Sorrow overwhelms us. Disaster stuns us. We become confused, nervous, agitated, or perhaps insensible. We seem to derive no profit.

Yet before long we begin to feel the blessed results. Maturity of judgment, patience in listening to the voice of God, a keener appetite for His Word, a quicker discernment of its meaning- these are soon realized as the gracious results of chastisement. The mind has undergone a most thorough discipline, and has, moreover, made wondrous progress in the knowledge of divine truth through the teaching of the Holy Spirit. 2. It is the training of the will. The will is the seat of rebelliousness.

Here the warfare is carried on. "The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh." At conversion the will is bent in the right direction, but it is still crooked and rigid. Rebelliousness is still there. Prosperous days may sometimes conceal it so that we are almost unconscious of its strength. But it still exists. Furnace heat is needed for softening and strengthening it. No milder remedy will do. "It requires," says a suffering saint, "all the energy of God to bend my will to His."

Yet it must be done. The will is the soul's citadel. Hence, it is the will that God seems so specially to aim at in chastisement. Fire after fire does He kindle in order to soften it; and blow after blow does He fetch down on it to straighten it. Nor does He rest until He has made it thoroughly flexible and hammered out of it the many relics of self which it contains. He will not stop His hand until He has thoroughly marred our

self-formed plans and shown us the folly of our self-chosen ways.

This is specially the case in long-continued trials; either when these come stroke after stroke in sad succession, or when one fearful stroke at the outset has left behind it consequences which years perhaps will not fully unfold. The bending and straightening of the will is often a long process, during which the soul has to pass through waters deep and many, through fires hot and ever kindling up anew. Protracted trials seem specially aimed at the will. Its perversity and stiffness can only be wrought out of it by a long succession of trials.

It is only by degrees that it becomes truly pliable and is brought into harmony with the will of God. We can at a stroke lop off the unseemly branch; but to give a proper bent to the tree itself, we require time and assiduous appliances for months or years. Yet the will must give way. However proud, however forward, it must bend. God will not leave it until He has made it one with His own. 3. It is the training of the heart. Man's heart beats false to God. It is true to many things but false to Him.

When first the Holy Spirit touches it, and shows it "the exceeding riches of the grace of God," then it becomes in some measure true. Yet it is only in part. Much falseheartedness still remains. It clings too fondly to the creature. It cleaves to the dust. It is not wholly God's. But this cannot be. God must have the heart; no, and He must have it beating truly toward Him. He is jealous of our love, and grieves over its feebleness or its falling away. It is love that He wants, and with nothing but truehearted love will He be satisfied.

For this it is that He chastises. These false throbbings of the heart; these goings out after other objects than Himself He cannot allow, but must correct or else forego His claim. Hence, He smites and spares not until He has made us sensible of our guilt in this respect. He strips off the leaves whose beauty attracted us; He cuts down the flowers whose fragrance fascinated us; He tears off one string after another from the lyre whose music charmed us. Then when He has showed us each object of earth in its nakedness or deformity, then He presents Himself to us in the brightness of His own surpassing glory.

And thus He wins the heart. Thus He makes it true to Him. Thus He makes us ashamed of our falseheartedness to Himself and to the Son of His love. Yet this is no easy process. This training is hard and sore. The heart bleeds under it. Yet it must go on. No part of it can be spared. Nor will it cease until the heart is won! If the Chastener should stop His hand before this is effected, where would be His love? What poor, what foolish affection! He knew this when He said, "Let them alone"; and it was the last thing that His love consented to do, after all else had failed.

One of the sharpest, sorest words He ever spoke to Israel was, "Why should you be stricken any more?" Let us remember this, and not faint, even though the heart has been long bleeding. Let us remember it, and seek to make the sorrow shorter by gladly joining with Him in His plan for getting possession of our whole heart. We need not grudge it. He has "good measure" to give us in return. His love will taste the sweeter, and it will abide and satisfy us forever. It is well for us to be thus trained to love Him here, with whom, in love and fellowship unbroken, we are to spend the everlasting day. 4.

It is the training of the conscience. A seared conscience is the sinner's heritage. It is upon this that the Holy Spirit first lays His hand when He awakens the soul from its sleep of death. He touches the conscience, and then the struggles of conviction come. He then pacifies it by the sprinkling of the blood, showing it Jesus and His cross. Then giving it to taste forgiveness, it rests from all its tumults and fears. Thoughts of peace are ever breathed into it from the sight of the bleeding sacrifice.

It trembles no more, for it sees that that which made it tremble is the very thing concerning which the blood of Christ speaks peace. "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Thus it is softened. Its first terrors upon awakening could not be called a softening. But now conscious forgiveness and realized peace with God have been to it like the mild breath of spring to the ice of winter. It has become soft and tender. Yet only so in part. God's desire, however, is to make it altogether tender.

He wishes it to be sensitive in regard to the very touch of sin, and earnest in its pantings after perfect holiness. To effect this, He afflicts; and affliction goes directly home to the conscience. The death of the widow's son at Sarepta immediately awakened her conscience, and she cried to the prophet, "O man of God, are you come to call my sin to remembrance?" (I Kings 17:18). So God by chastisement lays His finger upon the conscience, and forthwith it springs up into new life.

We are made to feel as if God had now come down to us, as if He were now looking into our hearts and commencing a narrow search. Moreover, we see in this affliction God's estimate of sin. Not, indeed, the full estimate. No, that we only learn from the sufferings of Jesus. But still we gather from this new specimen of sin's bitter fruits somewhat of His mind regarding sin. This teaches the conscience by making the knowledge of sin a thing of experience- an experience that is deepening with every new trial.

"If they be bound in fetters, and be holden in cords of affliction; then he shows them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He opens also their ear to discipline, and commands that they return from iniquity" (Job 36:8-10). In these last days how little is there of tenderness of conscience! The world seems to know nothing of it save the name. It is a world without a conscience! And how much do we find the Church of Christ a partaker in the world's sins!

"Evil communications corrupt good manners." It is sad to observe in many saints, amid much zeal and energy and love, the lack of a tender conscience. For this God is smiting us, and will smite us yet more heavily until He has made it thoroughly tender and sensitive all over, "hating even the garments spotted by the flesh." This training of the conscience is a thing of far greater moment than many deem it. God will not rest until He has wrought it. And if the saints still continue to overlook it, if they will not set themselves in good earnest to ask for it, and to strive against everything that would tend to produce searedness and insensibility, they may yet expect some of the sharpest strokes that the hand of God has ever yet administered.

Such, then, is the family discipline! We have seen it as it comes forth from God, and we have seen it as it operates upon man. And is it not all well? What is there about it that should disquiet us, or call forth one murmur either of the lip or heart? That which opens up to us so much more of God and lets us more fully into the secrets of His heart must be blessed, however hard to bear. That which discovers to us the evils within ourselves, which makes us teachable and wise, which gives to the stiff will, flexibility and obedience, which teaches the cold heart to love and expands each narrowed affection, which melts the callous conscience into tender sensitiveness, which trains up the whole soul for the glorious kingdom- that must be precious indeed.

Besides, it is the Father's will; and is not this enough for the trustful child? Is not chastisement just one of the methods by which He intimates to us what He would have us to be? Is not His way of leading us to the kingdom the safest, surest, shortest way? It is still the fatherly hand that is guiding us. What though in seeking to lift us up to a higher level, it has to lay hold of us with a firmer, or it may be a rougher grasp? It is still the paternal voice "that speaks unto us as unto children"- dear children- only in a louder, sharper

tone to constrain the obedience of His too reluctant sons.

One remark more would I add to these concerning this family discipline. It is not designed even for a moment to separate them and their God, or to overshadow their souls with one suspicion of their Father's heart. That it has done so at times, I know; but that it ought never to do so I am most firmly persuaded. Is it not one of the tests of sonship, and shall that, without which we are not accounted sons, make us doubt our sonship, or suspect the love of our God? That love claims at all times, whether in sorrow or in joy, our simple, fullhearted, peaceful confidence.

It is at all times the same, and chastisement is but a more earnest expression of its infinite sincerity and depth. Let us do justice to it, and to Him out of whom it flows. Let us not give it the unworthy treatment which it too often receives at our thankless hands. Let us beware of "falling from grace" at the very time when God is coming down to us to spread out before us more largely than before all the treasures of His grace. "We have known and believed the love that God has to us," is to be our song.

It ought always to be the family song! And shall it cease or sink low at the very time when it ought to be loudest and strongest? Should not trial just draw from us the apostle's triumphant boast: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us; for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:35-39).

For is it not just when we are brought under chastening that we enter upon the realities of consolation, the certainties of love, and the joys of heavenly fellowship in ways unknown and unimagined before?

### The Family Rods

God's rods may seem to speak in frowns and anger, but it is not so; there is not a glance of vengeance in the Chastener's eye. It is a correcting rod, but not a destroying one. Its object is not to punish but to chasten; not to injure but to bless. God has, however, not one rod for His children, but many. For each child He has a peculiar rod, and at different times He uses different rods. It will be profitable for us to consider what those are, and how they are applied. 1. Bodily sickness.

The body operates very powerfully upon the soul both for good and for evil. In what way or to what extent we cannot tell. Nor do I wish to discuss this question at all. But, knowing how the soul is acted on by the body, I cannot help think that one of God's designs in sickness is to operate upon the soul through the body. We are not conscious of this; we cannot analyze the process; the effects are hidden from view. Yet it does seem as if sickness of body were made to contribute directly to the health of the soul in some way or other known only to God.

Hence, the apostle speaks of delivering "such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (I Cor 5:5). On this point, however, I do not dwell; only it would be well for us to consider whether God is not by this intimating to us the exceeding danger of pampering the flesh: for the weakening of the flesh does help forward the strengthening of the spirit; and the mortifying of our members which are upon the earth- the crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts- does tend to quicken and invigorate the soul.

Apart from this, however, there are other things to be kept in view. Sickness prostrates us. It cuts into the very center of our carnal nature; it exposes in all their deformity "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life." What vanity is seen in these upon a sickbed! These are our three idols; and these, sickness dashes down into the dust. Sickness takes us aside and sets us alone with God. We are taken into His private chamber, and there He converses with us face to face.

The world is far off, our relish for it is gone, and we are alone with God. Many are the words of grace and truth which He then speaks to us. All our former props are struck away, and we must now lean on God alone. The things of earth are felt to be vanity; man's help useless. Man's praise and man's sympathy desert us; we are cast wholly upon God that we may learn that His praise and His sympathy are enough. "If it were not for pain," says one, "I should spend less time with God."

If I had not been kept awake with pain, I should have lost one of the sweetest experiences I ever had in my life. The disorder of my body is the very help I want from God; and if it does its work before it lays me in the dust, it will raise me up to Heaven." It was thus that Job was "chastened upon his bed with pain, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain," that after being tried he might "come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Sickness teaches that activity of service is not the only way in which God is glorified.

"They also serve who only stand and wait." Active duty is that which man judges most acceptable; but God shows us that in patience and suffering He is also glorified. Perhaps we were pursuing a path of our own and required to be arrested. Perhaps we were too much harassed by a bustling world and needed retirement, yet could find no way of obtaining it until God laid us down, and drew us aside into a desert place, because of the multitude pressing upon us. No one of the family rods is more in use than this, sometimes falling lightly on us, at other times more heavily.

Let us kiss the rod. Let us open our mouth wide to the blessing, seeking so to profit by each bodily ailment, slight or severe, that it may bring forth in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. "I know," says one, "of no greater blessing than health, except pain and sickness." 2. Bereavement. This is the bitterest of all earthly sorrows. It is the sharpest arrow in the quiver of God. To love tenderly and deeply and then to part; to meet together for the last time on earth; to bid farewell for time; to have all past remembrances of home and kindred broken up- this is the reality of sorrow.

To look upon that face that shall smile on us no more; to close those eyes that shall see us no more; to press those lips that shall speak to us no more; to stand by the cold side of father, mother, brother, sister, friend, yet hear no sound and receive no greeting; to carry to the tomb the beloved of our hearts, and then to return to a desolate home with a blank in one region of our souls, which shall never again be filled until Jesus come with all His saints; this is the bitterness of grief; this is the wormwood and the gall!

It is this rod which ever and anon God is laying upon us. Nor is there any that we need more than this. By it He is making room for Himself in hearts that had been filled with other objects and engrossed with other loves. He is jealous of our affection, for He claims it all as His own; and every idol He will utterly abolish. For our sakes as well as for His own He can allow no rival in the heart. Perhaps the joys of an earthly home are stealing away our hearts from the many mansions above.

God breaks in upon us in mercy and turns that home into a wilderness. Our sin finds us out; we mourn over it and seek anew to realize our heavenly citizenship and set out anew upon our pilgrim way, alone and yet not alone, for the Father is with us. Perhaps we are sitting "at ease in Zion," comfortable and contented, amid the afflictions of a suffering Church and the miseries of a world that owns no Savior and

fears no God. Jehovah speaks and we awake. He takes to Himself some happy saint, or smites to the dust some wretched sinner.

We are troubled at the stroke. We mourn our lethargy. While we slept, a fellow-saint has gone up to be with Christ, and a fellow-sinner has gone down to be with the devil and his angels. The death of the one stirs us up; the death of the other solemnizes and overawes us. Thus as saint after saint ascends to God, we begin to feel that Heaven is far more truly the family home than earth. We have far more brethren above than we have below. And each bereavement reminds us of this.

It reminds us, too, that the coming of the Lord draws near, and makes us look out more wistfully from our earthly home for the first streaks of the rising dawn. It kindles in us strong desires for the day of happy meeting in our Father's house, when we shall clasp inseparable hands and climb in company the everlasting hills. Meanwhile it bids us give our hearts to Jesus only. It does for us what the departure of the two strangers from Heaven did to the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration- it leaves us alone with Jesus.

It turns into deep experience that longing for home contained in the apostle's words, "having a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better." The more that bereavement transforms earth into a desert, the more are our desires drawn up to Heaven. Our treasures having been transferred to Heaven, our hearts must follow them. Earth's hopes are smitten, and we are taught to look for "that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ."

The night is falling and the flowers are folding up; but as they do so they bid us look upward and see star after star appearing upon the darkening sky. 3. Adversity. This may be the loss of substance, or it may be the loss of our good name, or it may be the falling away of friends, or it may be the wrath of enemies, or it may be the disappointment of our hopes- these are what is meant by adversity. But let Job tell us what it means. "Behold, he breaks down, and it cannot be built again, he shuts up a man, and there can be no opening" (Job 12:14).

"He has made me weary: you have made desolate all my company.... I was at ease, but he has broken me asunder: he has also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark; his archers compass me round about, he cleaves my reins asunder, and does not spare; . . . he breaks me with breach upon breach, he runs upon me like a giant.... My face is foul with weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death" (Job 16:7,12,13,14,16). "My days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart" (Job 17:11).

"He has fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness in my paths; he has stripped me of my glory and taken the crown from my head; he has destroyed me on every side, and I am gone: and my hope has he removed like a tree . . . He has put my brethren far from me, and my acquaintance are verily estranged from me" (Job 19:8-10,13). These are some of the drops in the bitter cup of adversity that was given to that patient saint to drink. And they are recorded for our use, on whom the ends of the world have come, and to whom these last days may perhaps fill a cup as bitter and protracted as his.

Yet let us count it all joy when we fall into diverse tribulations, knowing this, that the testing of our faith works patience: but "let patience have her perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4). We are cast into poverty, but how can we be poor so long as Christ is rich; and is not this poverty sent to make us prize His unsearchable riches and to buy of Him the gold tried in the fire that we may be rich? Our good name is lost through slander and false accusation.

The finger of public scorn is perhaps pointed at us, and wicked men are exalted over us triumphing in our reproach. Yet have we not the approving eye of God, and is it not enough if He still honors us and knows our innocence? Let our good name go if God sees fit thus to humble us. We have the "white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knows but he that receives it" (Rev 2:17). Friends fall off and enemies arise: false brethren turn against us, and we are doomed to bear the revilings and persecutions of those whom we have never wronged but ever loved.

But the friendship of Jesus is still ours. No earthly disaster or persecutor can ever rob us of that. No, the coldness of those we counted on as tried and true only draws us the closer to Him, the warmth of whose love knows no abatement nor end. Joseph passed thoroughly this trial, and the Lord set him upon Pharaoh's throne. Moses passed through it and became "king in Jeshurun." Job passed through it and was blessed a thousandfold. Daniel passed through it and was exalted with double honor.

Let us "take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy who endure. You have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:10,11). Oftentimes nothing but adversity will do for us. "I spoke unto you in your prosperity; but you said, I will not hear. This has been your manner from your youth, that you obey not my voice" (Jer 22:21).

We need to be stripped of every earthly portion that we may seek entirely our portion in Jehovah Himself. We need to be turned out of a home on earth that we may seek a home in Heaven. Earth's music is too seducing and takes away our relish for the new song. God must either hush it or take us apart into a desert place that we may no longer be led captive by it but may have our ear open only to the heavenly melody. We cannot be trusted with too full a cup, or too pleasant a resting-place.

We abuse everything that God has given us, and prove ourselves not trustworthy as to any one of them. Some God cannot trust with health; they need sickness to keep them low and make them walk softly all their days. They need spare diet, lest the flesh should get the mastery. Others He cannot trust with prosperity; they need adversity to humble them, lest, like Jeshurun, they should wax "fat and kick." Others He cannot trust with riches; they must be kept poor, lest covetousness should spring up and pierce them through with many sorrows.

Others He cannot trust with friends; they make idols of them, they give their hearts to them; and this interferes with the claims of Jehovah to have us altogether as His own. But still in all this God deals with us as with the members of His own family. Never for a moment does He lose sight of this. Neither should we. So that when these things overtake us, when we are thus "judged," we should feel that we are "chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world"; we should learn not merely to submit to the rod, but to kiss and welcome it, not merely to acquiesce in chastisement, but to "rejoice in tribulation, knowing that tribulation works patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope makes not ashamed."

We should learn not merely to praise God in affliction, but to praise Him for it. We should see that the lot of the afflicted is far more enviable than that of him who is "let alone"; and, instead of trembling when we see the dark cloud of sorrow coming over us, we should tremble far more when we see it passing off, lest, perchance, that which came charged with blessing to us, should, through our stoutheartedness and unteachableness, leave us callous and unblessed.

Christians are "living stones," placed one by one, upon the great foundation stone laid in Zion for the heavenly temple. These stones must first be quarried out of the mass. This the Holy Spirit does at conversion. Then, when cut out, the hewing and squaring begin. And God uses affliction as His hammer and chisel for accomplishing this. Many a stroke is needed; and after being thus hewn into shape, the polishing goes on. All roughness must be smoothed away. The stone must be turned around and around on every side that no part of it may be left unpolished.

As the stones of Solomon's temple were all to be prepared at a distance and then brought to Jerusalem, there to be built together; so the living stones of the heavenly temple are all made ready here on earth, to be fitted in without the noise of an axe or hammer into the glorious building in heaven made without hands. Every Christian then must be polished here on earth; and while there are many ways of doing this, the most effectual is suffering. And this is God's design in chastisement.

This is what the Holy Spirit effects: as like a workman He stands over each stone, touching and retouching it, turning it on every side, marking its blemishes and roughness, and then applying His tools to effect the desired shape and polish. Some parts of the stone are so rugged and hard that nothing except heavy and repeated strokes and touches will smooth them down. They resist every milder treatment. And yet, in patient love, this heavenly Workman carries on the Father's purpose concerning us.

He labors until every part is polished and shaped according to His likeness. No pains are spared, no watchfulness relaxed, until we are made entirely like Him, being changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord. To make us "partakers of his holiness" is God's great design in chastisement. Come, then, let us question ourselves and endeavor to ascertain what affliction has been doing for us and what progress we are making in putting off the old man and in putting on the new.

Am I getting rid of my worldliness, and becoming heavenly minded? Am I getting rid of my pride, my passion, my stubbornness, and becoming humble, mild, and teachable? Are all my idols displaced and broken, and my creature comforts do I use as though I used them not? Am I caring less for the honors of time, for man's love, man's smile, man's applause? Am I crucified to the world and is the world crucified to me by the cross of Christ; or am I still ashamed of His reproach, and am I half-reluctant to follow Him through bad report and through good, through honor and through shame?

Do I count it my glory and my joy to walk where He has led the way, to suffer wherein He suffered, to drink of the cup of which He drank? Do I shrink back from the crown of thorns? Am I every day becoming more and more unlike the children of earth, more and more fashioned after the likeness, and bearing the special characteristics of Jesus. Do I realize this earth as neither my portion nor my rest, and, knowing that one chain may bind me as fast to the world as a thousand, am I careful to shake off every fetter that may bind me to the vanities of a world like this? Is chastisement really purifying me? Am I conscious of its blessed effects upon my soul?

The Arousing It may have been long since the Holy Spirit awoke us from our sleep of death. Into that same deep sleep we know that we shall never fall again. He who awoke us will keep us awake until Jesus come. In that sense we shall sleep no more. But still much of our drowsiness remains. We are not wholly awake, and oftentimes much of our former sleep returns. Dwelling on the world's enchanted ground, our eyes close, our senses are bewildered, our conscience loses its sensitiveness, and our faculties their energy; we fall asleep even upon our watchtower, forgetful that the night is far spent, and the day is at hand.

While thus asleep, or half-asleep, all goes wrong. Our movements are sluggish and lifeless. Our faith waxes feeble; our love is chilled; our zeal cools down. The freshness of other years is gone. Our boldness has forsaken us. Our schemes are carelessly devised and drowsily executed. The work of God is hindered by us instead of being helped forward. We are a drag upon it. We mar it. But God will not have it so. Neither for His work's sake nor for His saints' sake can He allow this to continue.

We must be aroused at whatever cost. We are not to be allowed to sleep as do others. We must watch and be sober, for we are children of the light and of the day, not of the night nor of darkness. God cannot permit us thus to waste life, as if its only use were to be sported with or trifled away. Duties lazily and lifelessly performed; halfhearted prayers; a deportment, blameless enough perhaps, but tame and unexpressive, and, therefore uninfluential; words well and wisely spoken perhaps but without weight - these are not things which God can tolerate in a saint.

It is either the coldness of Sardis to which He says, "If you shall not watch, I will come on you as a thief, and you shall not know what hour I will come upon you." Or it is the lukewarmness of Laodicea to which He says, "Because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth." In arousing us God proceeds at first most gently. He touches us slightly, as the angel did Elijah under the juniper tree, that He may awaken us. He sends some slight visitation to shake us out of our security.

He causes us to hear some distant noise: it may be the tumults of the nations, or it may be the tidings of famine, or war, or pestilence afar off. Perhaps this entirely fails; we slumber on as securely as ever. Our life is as listless and as useless as ever. Then He comes nearer, and makes His voice to be heard in our own neighborhood or within the circle of our kindred. This also fails. Then He comes nearer still, for the time is hurrying on and the saint is still asleep. He speaks into our very ears.

He smites upon some tender part until every fiber of our frame quivers and every pulse throbs quicker. Our very soul is stricken through as with a thousand arrows. Then we start up like one awakening out of a long sleep, and, looking round us, wonder how we could have slept so long. But oh, how difficult it is to awaken us thoroughly! It needs stroke upon stroke in long succession to do this. For after every waking up there is the continual tendency to fall back again into slumber.

So that we need both to be made awake and to be kept awake. What sorrows does our drowsiness cost us- what bleeding, broken hearts! The luxury of "ease in Zion" indulged in perhaps for years has been dearly bought. "Think of living," was the pregnant maxim of the thoughtful German. "Your life," says another, quoting the above, "were you the pitifulest of all the sons of earth is no idle dream, but a solemn reality. It is your own. It is all you have to confront eternity with.

Work then, like a star, unhasting yet unresting." There are some Christians who work, but they do not work like men awake. They move forward in a certain track of duty, but it is with weary footstep. Their motions are constrained and cold. They do many good things, devise many good schemes, say excellent things, but the vigorous pulse of warm life is lacking. Zeal, glowing zeal- elastic and untiring- is not theirs. They neither burn themselves, no do they kindle others. There is nothing of the star about them save its coldness.

They may expect some sharp stroke of chastisement, for they need it. There are others who are only wakeful by fits and starts. They cannot be safely counted on, for their fervor depends upon the humor of the moment. A naturally impulsive temperament, of which, perhaps, they are not sufficiently aware, and which they have not sought either to crucify or to regulate, renders them uncertain in all their movements.

This intermittent wakefulness effects but little. They do and they undo.

They build up and they pull down. They kindle and quench the flame alternately. There is nothing of the "star" about them. They stand in need of some sore and long continued pressure to equalize the variable, fitful movements of their spirit. There are others who seem to be always wakeful, but then it is the wakefulness of bustle and restlessness. They cannot live but in the midst of stirring, and scheming, and moving to and fro. Their temperament is that nervous tremulous, impatient kind that makes rest or retirement to be felt as restraint and pain.

These seldom effect much themselves, but they are often useful by their perpetual stir and friction for setting or keeping others in motion and preventing stagnation around them. But their incessant motion prevents their being filled with the needed grace. Their continual contact with the outward things of religion hinders their inward growth and damages their spirituality. These are certainly in one sense like the star wakeful and unresting, but they move forward with such haste that instead of gathering light or giving it forth, they are losing every day the little that they possessed.

A deep sharp stroke will be needed for shaking off this false fervor and imparting the true calm wakefulness of spirit, to which, as saints, they are called. It is the deepening of spiritual feeling that is needed in their case, and it takes much chastening to accomplish this. There are others who are always steadily at work and apparently with fervor too. Yet too little communion with God shows that they are not truly awake. They work so much more than they pray that they soon become like vessels without oil.

They are farther on than the last class, yet still they need arousing. They are like the star, both "unresting and unceasing, yet their light is dim. Its reflection upon a dark world is faint and pale. It is a deeper spiritual life and experience that they need; and for this, it may be there is some sore visitation in store for them. The true wakeful life is different from all these. It is a thing of intensity and depth. It carries ever about with it the air of calm and restful dignity, of inward power and greatness.

It is fervent, but not feverish; energetic, but not excited; speedy in its doings, but not hasty; prudent, but not timid or selfish; resolute and fearless, but not rash; unobtrusive and sometimes, it may be silent, yet making all around to feel its influence; full of joy and peace, yet without parade or noise; overflowing in tenderness and love, yet at the same time, faithful and true. This is the wakeful life! But oh, before it is thoroughly attained, how much are we sometimes called upon to suffer through the rebelliousness of a carnal nature that will not let us surrender ourselves up wholly to God, and present ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service!

In thus arousing us from our slumber, chastisement not merely makes us more energetic, more laborious, but it makes us far more prayerful. Perhaps it is here that the waking up is most sensibly felt. Nothing so quickens prayer as trial. It sends us at once to our knees and shuts the door of our closet behind us. In the day of prosperity we have many comforts, many refuges to resort to; in the day of sorrow we have only one, and that is God. Our grief is too deep to tell to any other; it is too heavy for any other to soothe.

Now we awake to prayer. It was something to us before, but now it is all. Man's arm fails, and there is none but God to lean upon. Our closets, in truth, are the only places of light in a world which has now become doubly dark to us. All without and around is gloom. Clouds overshadow the whole region. Only the closet is bright and calm. How eagerly, how thankfully we betake ourselves to it now! We could spend our whole time in this happy island of light which God has provided for us in the midst of a stormy ocean.

When compelled at times to leave it, how gladly do we return to it! What peaceful hours of solitude we have there with God for our one companion! We can almost forget that the clouds of earth are still above us and its tempest still rioting around us. Prayer becomes a far more real thing than ever. It is prized now as it was never prized before. We cannot do without it. Of necessity, as well as of choice, we must pray, sending up our cries from the depths. It becomes a real asking, a real pleading.

It is no form now. What new life, new energy, new earnestness are poured into each petition! It is the heart that is now speaking, and the lips cannot find words with which to give utterance to its desires. The groanings that "cannot be uttered" are all that now burst forth and ascend up into the ear of God. Formerly, there was often the lip without the heart; now it is far oftener the heart without the lip. Now we know how "the Spirit helps our infirmities." We begin to feel what it is to "pray in the Holy Spirit."

"There is a new nearness to God. Communion with Him is far more of a conscious reality now. It is close dealing with a living, personal Jehovah. New arguments suggest themselves; new desires spring up; new needs disclose themselves. Our own emptiness and God's manifold fullness are brought before us so vividly that the longings of our inmost souls are kindled, and our heart cries out for God, for the living God. It was David's sorrows that quickened prayer in him. It was in the belly of the whale that Jonah was taught to cry aloud.

And it was among the thorns of the wilderness and the fetters of Babylon that Manasseh learned to pray. Church of Christ- chosen heritage of the Lord- awake! Children of the light and of the day, arise! The long winter night is nearly over. The day-star is preparing to ascend. "The end of all things is at hand: be therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (I Pet 4:7). "Why do you sleep? rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation!" (Luke 2:46).

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