

Divine Chastening

by James Smith

The sermon emphasizes that God's chastening is a loving correction intended to guide His children towards holiness and deeper relationship with Him.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:5, Job 5:17, Psalm 94:12, Psalm 119:67, Proverbs 3:11, Proverbs 13:24, 1 Corinthians 11:32, Hebrews 12:6, Hebrews 12:10, Revelation 3:19

Topics: "Divine Discipline", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

James Smith preaches on the loving discipline of God towards His children, emphasizing that believers are chastened out of love, not punishment, as they are under grace, not the law. God corrects His children for their willfulness, negligence, inattention, rebellions, and worldliness, all to form their character and draw them closer to Him. The Lord chastens His children through various means, such as frowning upon the soul, refusing to answer prayer, leaving them to themselves in ordinances, and through the dispensations of Providence, always with the intention of benefiting them and leading them to holiness.

Transcript

"You shall also consider in your heart, that, as a man chastens his son--so the Lord your God chastens you." Deuteronomy 8:5

Punishment flows from justice--chastening flows from love. The former is inflicted by the judge, the latter is administered by the parent. Believers in Jesus are often chastened--but they are never punished; because they are not under the law--but under grace. Being united to Jesus, being justified by faith, to them there is no condemnation; for God no longer treats them as criminals--but deals with them as sons. From His infinite wisdom, from His tender love, and from His inviolable faithfulness, all their corrections flow. He rests in His love to them, and His love regulates all His dealings with them.

The words of Moses to Israel are sweet words, and they are equally applicable to us, "Consider in your heart, that, as a man chastens his son--so the Lord your God chastens you." God is the Father, you are the child, and but a child; therefore, to form your character, to correct your errors, and to show His love--He corrects you.

For WHAT does the Lord correct you?

God corrects you for your willfulness. He wishes you to let Him rule you, arrange your affairs for you, and make all His goodness pass before you. But you want your own way, to indulge your own fancies, and to gratify your own passions and lusts. You will not submit. You will not leave yourself and your affairs in His hands, and cast all your burdens, and all your cares on Him. This folly calls for strokes, and our Heavenly Father never spares the rod, to the spoiling of the child.

God corrects you for your negligence. How many privileges you slight, and how many duties you neglect. While you attend to the trifling things--you neglect the important matters. While you give the heart to the temporal--you pay little attention to the spiritual and eternal. You neglect the end of your election, the design of God in your salvation, even the glorifying of His great name. Your high calling is--to honor Jesus, to do His will, to magnify His grace, to spread abroad His glorious truth. You neglect your own heart, which should be kept with all diligence. You neglect your closet, where God waits to meet you and bless you. You neglect your Bible, in which God speaks to you. You neglect, at times, the Lord's ordinances, through which He communicates strength, comfort, and grace to you. For these things your Father corrects you--nor will His soul spare for your crying!

God corrects you for your inattention. You are inattentive to your books! He bids you read His wonders in His works of nature, His operations in the dispensations of His providence, and the clear revelation of His will, in the Holy Bible. The book of conscience should be daily attended to and balanced, and the book of remembrance should be looked over and improved. How inattentive we are to the monitions, promptings, and whispers of the Holy Spirit, and to the voice of God speaking by His servants and His Son.

For this inattention, in order to make us scholars, and to teach us to profit--He corrects us; not for His pleasure--but to make us partakers of His holiness.

For your rebellions. "You have been," said Moses, "a rebellious people, since the day I knew you;" and this testimony is as true of us, as of them. We have rebelled and vexed His Holy Spirit. We have manifested our rebellion by hard thoughts, perverse words, and ungodly acts. We have obstinately refused, at times, to bow to His authority, to do His will, or walk in His ways. We have tried to slip the yoke from our shoulders, our hearts have been wayward, and our tongues have muttered perverseness. We have wanted licentiousness, instead of liberty-- lawlessness, instead of freedom, and our own way in preference to God's. This folly is bound up in the heart of the child--but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him!

God corrects you for your worldliness.

Duty said, "Be not conformed to this world."

Privilege said, "Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth."

Profession said, "I am a stranger, and a pilgrim on the earth, as all my fathers were."

But conduct said, "The world is good, I admire it, I must be like it, I will enjoy it."

Thus God's Word was rejected, God's honor was disregarded, and the Savior was wounded in the house of His friends. Judgments are prepared for such scorers, and stripes for the back of such fools. For God has said, "I will visit their transgressions with the rod, and their iniquities with stripes."

Then, "love not the world, nor the things that are in the world, for if any man loves the world--the love of the Father is not in Him." Seek not the smile, the favor, or the friendship of the world; for if any man will be the friend of the world--he is the enemy of God.

In one word, for your sins. Nothing grieves God--but our sins. Nothing brings down the rod of God upon us--but our sins; for He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Either to correct for sin, or to prevent our falling into sin--God uses His rod. Our secrets sins, which only God knows, those heart sins; or our open sins, which others witness, and from which others suffer--causes God to chasten us.

Did He not love us--He would allow us to go on in sin. If we were not His children--He would let us go on, and so be punished at the final judgment. But, because He has loved us with an everlasting love, because we are His dear children, therefore as a man chastens His son, so the Lord our God, chastens us!

HOW does the Lord chasten us?

Sometimes by frowning upon the soul, which produces darkness, perplexity, and distress. Then we cannot read our evidences, we cannot claim or appropriate the promises, we cannot enjoy the public ordinances, we have no access with confidence to God in private. Then our graces wither, our comforts die, and our hopes decline. There is no peace of conscience, no joy in God, no rejoicing in salvation. We cannot see our way, trace out the work of God in our souls, or anticipate the coming of Jesus with any pleasure. We feel shut up, straitened, and filled with confusion, Then there is no life in prayer, no zeal for God--but the mind dwells on gloomy, sad, and depressing subjects.

Sometimes by refusing to answer prayer; then the duty becomes wearisome, the heart hardens, and we draw rash and wrong conclusions, "When I cry and shout--He shuts out my prayer!"

Now--but for conscience, or the fear of the Lord, which is deeply imbedded in the soul, prayer would be quite given up, and the form of religion thrown off. But, as we dare not do this, we go to duty as the criminal to the correction of the stocks, or the idle schoolboy to his difficult task. The heart has little sympathy with the lip--but is cold, hard, and gloomy. Now, we write bitter things against ourselves, listen to the suggestions of Satan, and full of self-love, grieve over our hard lot.

Sometimes by leaving us to ourselves in ordinances. Then they become tedious, unsavory, and unprofitable. We attend them--but not meeting with God in them--we soon weary of them, and perhaps begin to neglect them. Ordinances without God, are like: wells without water, tables without food, and bodies without life. If we come to them hungry, we go away dissatisfied; or if we come expecting comfort, we depart disappointed. Ordinances without God, can never satisfy a living soul.

Sometimes by the dispensations of Providence. Then we have losses, crosses, and afflictions. Everything seems to go wrong with us. Everybody appears to succeed better than we do. Sickness, perhaps, seizes on the body, and we have strong pains, or great weakness, or nervous depression. Or trade declines, business falls off, bad debts are made, unexpected demands are made upon us, or the fluctuations of the markets try us. By various means, and in various ways, the Lord chastens His children; for, when He intends to correct, He is never at a loss for a rod; and the rod He selects, always appears to pain us most; for when God strikes--He intends that we should feel.

The Lord Himself chastens His children. He never allows His children to be flogged by others, nor keeps a drill-sergeant to do it. He Himself chastens every son. He selects the instrument. He does not take up a

rod that may 'by chance' lay before Him--just because it comes first to hand. No, no! He goes to the forest--and chooses the most suitable rod to correct us! Proud man always imagines that God has chosen the wrong rod, or strikes on the wrong place, or corrects at the wrong time. But depend upon it--it is all right. If He strikes the body, or seizes the property, or removes the relative, or alienates the friend, or afflicts the soul--it is in infinite wisdom, and perfect love.

He numbers His strokes. Not one too many, nor one too few--but just the right number is appointed. LESS would not humble the proud heart, bend the stubborn will, or turn back the wandering feet. MORE would unduly depress, give Satan an occasion against us, or harden our hearts from His fear. Believer, you shall never have one more stroke than your Heavenly Father has appointed; nor will He appoint one more than is necessary.

He marks the effects of the rod. He watches to see the effect produced by every stroke. If we fall at His feet, humble ourselves before Him, confess our sins, and appeal to His mercy--we take hold of His strength, and the chastisement soon ceases. When the tear of penitence is seen in our eye--the rod soon drops from His hand. Or, if the discipline is continued, such comfort, peace, and meekness, flow into the soul, that we call it sweet affliction, and bless His dear name for it.

Nor can we then pray for the removal of the rod--but only for its deeper sanctification. We creep close to His feet, look up in His paternal face, catch His loving eye, and almost swoon with pleasure, humility, and love.

He makes the rod beneficial to us. He corrects us, not for His pleasure--but for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. He uses the rod to convince us of our folly, to keep us sensible of His authority, to make us smart for our inconsistencies, to bring us to repentance, and to make us cautious, tender, and humble. Whatever end He fixes upon--is beneficial; and whatever end He fixes upon--He will bring to pass. So that we may well say, even when smarting under the rod, "we know that all things work together for good, to those who love God; to those who are the called, according to His purpose."

WHY does the Lord chasten His children?

Because He is our Father. He has adopted us, and placed us among His children. He has begotten us again to a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He has provided all things necessary for us on earth--and laid up an inheritance for us in heaven. He has given us His promises to trust, and His precepts to obey. When therefore we forget our obligations to His grace, disbelieve His precious promises, or neglect to walk by His holy precepts--we grieve His loving heart, and, Father-like, He comes forth to correct us. "He chastens every son," just because every son needs chastening, and because His paternal heart yearns over every son.

But He has no pleasure in correcting us, He does not use the rod, as an act of divine sovereignty, for He has assured us, that "He does not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men." We have had fathers of our flesh who corrected us for their pleasure; but our heavenly Father only corrects us for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

He loves us too well, to give us any unnecessary pain; and He is too wise to allow our follies to go uncorrected.

Correction is intended also to exercise our graces. We are required to believe that our heavenly Father loves us just as much when He frowns--as when He smiles. That His promises remain true, and are not affected by the dispensations of His providence. We are also meekly to submit to the discipline, saying, with one of old, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seems Him good unto Him." Or, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away--blessed be the name of the Lord."

The rod is intended also to awaken sorrow for sin, so that while we believe in the immutability of His love, meekly bow to His painful dispensations, we must weep and mourn over our sins, which have called forth the painful strokes. Nor only so, we are to turn to Him who smites us, confessing our faults, deploring our follies, craving his forgiveness, and seeking grace--that we may live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world.

Sanctified correction always embitters sin, brings us nearer to God, softens our spirits, humbles our hearts, produces penitence, and leads us to admire the wisdom and love of God. Chastisement is designed to improve our characters. These, at best, are very imperfect; in order therefore to make us more watchful, prayerful, diligent, and devout--our heavenly Father uses the rod. And, if at any time we are left long without it, we become lukewarm, careless, indifferent, conformed to the world, and carnally minded. Prayer is neglected, or becomes formal, we are off our guard, and Satan takes advantage of us, and many of our most valuable privileges are slighted.

Then comes some trial, for as Solomon says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom;" and when soundly chastened, we walk softly before the Lord, endeavor to keep a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man; we fear to tamper with temptation, and afresh fix the eye on the glorious coming of the Master, and prepare ourselves for that encouraging event.

Once more, chastisement is to wean us from earth, and lead us to fix our affections on things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. The trials of time, if sanctified, endear to us the rest, peace, holiness, and happiness of eternity. A sick bed--often gives us vivid views of the vanity of earth, and the solid glories of heaven.

A stripping providence--renders Jesus and a place in His Father's house most precious!

The wickedness of man in robbing, or cheating, or deceiving us--makes us sigh for that place where the wicked cease from troubling, and God's weary children enjoy perfect rest.

If earth was more pleasant--heaven would be less desirable. If all was agreeable in the wilderness; we should want to build our home and have our portion, on this side of the Jordan. But the thorns and briars, the fiery flying serpents, and scorpions, the Amalekites, and other sources of annoyance and discomfort, direct our thoughts, our hopes, and affections across the flood--and we begin to desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Oh the privilege, while in a world like this, and suffering as many of the Lord's people do, to know that we have a home in the better country, a place in the many mansions, and a portion in the glory that shines in Immanuel's land!

Blessed, forever blessed, be the Lord, who chastens us for our profit, who corrects us in infinite love, and who, using the rod, deals with us as with sons! No doubt--but we shall, when we get home, and see the need--be there was for every trial, every trouble, and every difficulty--praise and bless His great and

glorious name for every stroke of His rod! There is not one in heaven--who wishes that he had been led in a smoother path, or by an easier road. Nor will there be, when we are there; for all will see, and rejoice in the fact, that "He led us forth by the right way--to a city where we could settle."

Gracious, gracious God, teach us to bear the rod, approve the discipline, and acquiesce in Your corrections! May we never wish You to change the rod, or to smite us in some other part--but rather, give us grace, that seeing, that "whom the Lord loves-He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives;" we may lie down to be scourged, be still while we are corrected, and bless the hand that smites us!

Reader, are you suffering under the rod of God? Remember it is an evidence of sonship, and a proof of divine love. Your heavenly Father will chasten you--but He will not disinherit you. He will correct you--but He will not destroy you. He will chasten you as His son now, and He will make you full of joy with in His presence by and by. Receive His correction with meekness, bow before Him in humility, confess your sins with sorrow, seek the sanctification of your troubles--and so return unto the Lord, from whom you have so deeply revolted.

Lost sinner--God does not chasten you. Perhaps your health is good, your circumstances easy, your trade prosperous, and your soul at ease--you imagine all is well. But in truth--all is very bad. For without faith in Jesus, without repentance towards God--you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity. Like the dumb ox, fattening in the good pasture, or silly sheep feeding in the fold--you are preparing for the day of visitation, and the righteous judgment of God. Faith in Jesus is the great thing you need, for we are the children of God--only by faith in Christ Jesus.

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