

That Strange Love of God

by Lehman Strauss

God's love is a strange and foreign concept that is demonstrated through His chastening of His children, which is a means of training and correcting us for our good.

Scripture: Romans 5:8

Topics: "Gods Love", "Divine Discipline"

Description

Lehman Strauss preaches about the various ways God gets our attention to show His love, emphasizing that His dealings are based on perfect principles. He delves into the concept of God's strange and foreign love, exemplified by the sacrifice of Christ for sinners, a love beyond human comprehension. Strauss explores the principle of discipline as a means to purity and peace, highlighting the importance of understanding and accepting God's chastening as a sign of His love and a path to righteousness.

Transcript

God has various ways of getting our attention in order to show how much He loves us. His dealings with us are based on perfect principles. It may surprise you to discover what wonderful things God will do for us and through us when we allow Him to work unhindered in our lives. His principle of discipline is never pleasant, but it leads to purity and peace.

Many Christians, including preachers, songwriters, poets, and others, have as their favorite subject "the love of God." I doubt if some of them know the meaning of the word love. They use it as sort of a cover-all for ills--physical, spiritual, and moral. Tell people that God loves them and they feel good. They go away cheerful and lighthearted. One preacher closes his service with the following benediction: "God loves you, and so do I." Now there is nothing wrong with that statement, nor would I question the preacher's sincerity and honesty when he tells the people he loves them. But when the Christian is really hurting, it is difficult to reconcile the love of God with human affliction and suffering. Recently a Christian lady said to me, "If God loves me, why does He make me suffer?" Her problem lay with her lack of understanding of God's love.

The Bible tells us it is a strange love. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). Note that word manner. The Greek word is potapos, an adjective that describes something strange or foreign--as from another country. It does not merely convey the idea of greatness as some modern translations have it. When our Lord rebuked the winds and calmed the stormy sea, "The men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the

winds and the sea obey him!" (Matthew 8:27, italics added). They saw something they had never witnessed before. When they saw the miracle, they thought, This man is out of this world. What we saw is strange and foreign.

We see that "out of this world" love in action in Romans 5:8: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It is a strange love that would cause a father to put his only son to death for the sins of wicked people, especially when the Son Himself is righteous and holy. We know nothing of that kind of love. It is foreign to us because it came from another world. It was never a part of human civilization. Never had any person on earth witnessed that kind of love. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). That foreign kind of love boggles our minds. Whether or not we can understand it, the amazing fact remains that it is blessedly real--God sent His sinless Son to die for us sinners. What manner of love!

That brings us to consider seriously this strange love of God at work in the lives of His children. It is explained in one of those passages we prefer to pass by. "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6).

Dear reader, if you are a true child of God, and by true child of God I mean that you have had a genuine born-again experience, then here is a truth you must discover experientially. You and I must learn--and never drift away from--the truth that the strange love of God prompts Him to chasten us. Let us consider this verse in its context.

Consider the Exhortation

The very thought of a God of love chastening His children is not acceptable to most of us. As children growing up we all had the idea in our minds that our parents showed love to us when they gave us those things we wanted and enjoyed. But when they placed restrictions upon us we jumped hastily to the conclusion that they didn't love us. We could understand love that coddled and comforted us, but we could not reconcile love with chastening and correction.

The Christians to whom the epistle of Hebrews was first addressed were Jews. They were a minority group who believed Jesus Christ was their promised Messiah. Their unbelieving Jewish brothers had ostracized them. Unbelieving Gentiles despised them. They could not find employment. The persecution was difficult for them to bear. If they had made the right move by embracing Christianity, why did they suffer those things? If God loved them, should He not deliver them from suffering and persecution? They had been taught that God loved all sinners and that He sent His Son to die for them. They believed the message, but now all they knew was adversity and affliction. Was that the way God showed love to His children? Obviously there was something about the love of God they had not learned.

The Holy Spirit directed His penman to write words that would meet the need of their hearts. He begins by drawing their attention to a portion of their own Old Testament Scriptures that had been forgotten, saying, "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children" (Hebrews 12:5). He brings them back to the written Word of God, the one source of truth for every child of God. He quotes the voice of God speaking directly to them. Notice he says, "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you" (italics added). Some expositors have rendered this statement interrogatively to read, "Have ye forgotten the exhortation?" And what was the important truth they carelessly let slip from them? It was that strange aspect of God's love: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth"

(Hebrews 12:5-6).

Forgetfulness can be a deadly thing. How foolish we are when we forget God's words. And take notice which of His words we are inclined to forget, namely, words of exhortation. The word exhort (Greek: parakaleo,) means to admonish or to urge the pursuit of some course of conduct. It was the word of exhortation those Jewish believers forgot, not the words of God's unconditional covenant, not God's promise of everlasting life. The Scripture to which the writer pointed them is Proverbs 3:11-12: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

Bible study can be attractive and interesting, and even exciting to some Christians as long as it does not make demands on them. They can enjoy long discourses on the love of God as long as the teaching does not cut into their life-style. They may never forget God's words in Jeremiah 31:3: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" or in John 3:16 where our Lord said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Why remember certain verses that speak of God's love, and forget others? It is because we pick and choose. We willfully forget that strange, foreign chastening love of God.

Sit down sometime and read through the book of Deuteronomy. There you will hear God saying repeatedly, "Remember . . . and forget not." Mark each appearance of the words remember and forget. The two hours you will spend in this spiritual exercise will be most rewarding.

Consider the Explanation

In chapter 11 of Hebrews the writer points out the fact that many Old Testament believers have suffered. He takes his illustration from several periods of biblical history and shows how men and women from various walks of life suffered adversity and affliction. They faced incredible odds for the glory of God. And the God of Old Testament history is the same God Christians worship today.

In chapter 12 the Christian is shown how to view the trials and tribulations of life. The key word in verses 5-11 is chastening, appearing in different forms not less than seven times. The Greek word is paideia, which comes from pais, meaning "child." It is a term used broadly for the means parents use to train their children. God too has methods for chastening His children, and whatever method He uses is sent for our good. A life without discipline can have no value.

The chastening of the Lord conveys His love. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). It would not be an indication of a father's love to allow a child to do whatever he pleases. The discipline of God is always motivated by love. It confirms, or proves, God's love for us. There is a tender, parental love behind the disciplines of our heavenly Father. God is not acting here as a judge, but as a father with our well-being in view. Even the most dreadful disappointments, the most terrible trials are appointed by perfect wisdom and sent by pure love. We may think this a strange way to convey love, but then we must keep in mind the fact that the love of God is a strange love, foreign and alien to fallen man. Regardless of how we may feel, chastisement does convey the love of God.

The chastening of the Lord confirms our sonship. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Hebrews 12:7-8). Hebrews is addressed to children of

God, so chastening is actually a mark of sonship. No doubt there were those among the believing Hebrews who were merely professing to have faith and who had not been born again. They would never understand a God who does with His children as He pleases rather than pleasing them. What God wants for us is higher and nobler than what any thoughtful earthly parent wants for his child.

There is no way that one can conceive of sonship without chastisement. Those who are without chastisement and claim to be sons of God are making a false claim. The greatest saints of the past suffered adversity and affliction. They knew they possessed everlasting life because they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior (John 3:16; 5:24); because they experienced God leading them (Romans 8:14); because God's Spirit witnessed to their spirits (Romans 8:15-16); and because they experienced the discipline of God in their lives. If professing Christians are without chastening, they are illegitimate, not true sons. So declares the Word of God.

The chastening of the Lord corrects our faults. "Furthermore 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?" (Hebrews 12:9). Our earthly father is called a "corrector" (Greek: *paideute*,s, meaning a "chastiser." To correct is to restore to a right state. Wrongs must be made right, and the crooked must be made straight. Every Christian has faults and failures that require correcting (James 3:2). Our earthly parents corrected us and rightly so because of our relationship to them. If it was proper for us to submit to their corrections, how much more should we submit to our heavenly Father! When we were born again we received a new nature, the very nature of God, so that we are said to be "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). However, in every Christian the possibility of sinning in thought, word, and deed remains. The sins we commit as Christians must be confessed and forsaken: "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). Paul is saying that if Christians would use discernment, that is, if we would distinguish between what we are and what God requires us to be, we would not need to be chastened of the Lord. If we really knew ourselves as we actually are and judged ourselves accordingly, we would not need the Lord's chastening. The Corinthians were being chastened, not because they were unbelievers, but because they were Christ's own. Beloved, let us test ourselves daily and arrive at a true estimate of ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28). Let us never rest until every known sin is confessed and forsaken.

The chastening of the Lord curbs our temperaments. We do not all have the same dispositions. Personality traits differ. If we will not control our weaknesses, God will use His fatherly method of chastisement. A proverb says, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28 :13). Sometimes God's chastenings, rather than being corrective, are preventive. When God chastens He does not act capriciously but with care and consideration for our well-being and welfare. Again, let us be reminded that the chastening of the Lord is ministered in tender love. And it is His sovereign right to discipline us whenever and however He chooses.

The apostle Paul had a tendency toward pride. It was a sin that had not been eradicated from his life and needed to be curbed. He wrote about it in his second epistle to the Corinthians: "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 Corinthians 12:7). Notice that this verse commences and concludes with the exact same phrase, "lest I should be exalted above measure." We might assume from this that Paul was inclined toward a haughty exaltation of self, the common sin of "being lifted up with pride" (1 Timothy 3:6) or being "highminded" (1 Timothy 6:17).

Through the chastening love of God, Paul learned the lesson so well that he could write, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Romans 12:3).

When we discover a weakness within ourselves, we should act at once to curb it. If we neglect it and allow it to grow, the Lord will step in and chasten us in order to prevent further damage to us and our testimony for Him. Yet we ourselves can prevent His chastening by dealing with that particular sin. An ounce of prevention is worth more than a ton of cure. Chastening is one of God's blessings. Do we thank Him for it?

The chastening of the Lord cleanses our sins. "Furthermore 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" (Hebrews 12:9-10). The word translated "holiness" is *hagiasmos*, which means "sanctification." The idea conveyed here is separation unto God. It is not merely a positional sanctification, but it includes practical sanctification, a behavior befitting those who are separated. Paul used the same word when he wrote, "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7) and "But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

The fruit of holiness should be the course of life befitting all sons of God. Positionally we enter into that separation unto God by faith in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit sanctifies (sets apart) every believer at the time of his salvation (1 Corinthians 6:11), the ground of positional sanctification being the death of Christ (Hebrews 10:10, 29; 13:12). However, God's purpose in saving us through the death of His Son is that we should be separated from evil thoughts, words, and deeds: "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). We all should pursue holiness earnestly and diligently. We learn it as we read, study, and obey the Word of God (Psalm 119:9, 11; John 15:3; 17:17, 19; 1 Peter 2:2).

If, on the other hand, we neglect the pursuit of holiness, then God steps in to chasten us. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19). And when He does, we must accept the discipline as coming from Him, not to harm us but to point us toward our highest and ultimate good. The chastening from God is designed to make us wiser and better Christians. I sincerely doubt the possibility of any Christian becoming spiritually mature and continuing in fellowship with God except through God's chastening.

Consider the Expectation

The verses in the passage we are considering suggest three ways in which we can react to God's discipline.

We can despise it. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord" (Hebrews 12:5). The word *despise* (*exoutheneo*,) means "to make light of, to treat with contempt." We should never consider the chastening of the Lord as a thing of no account or no value. Anything that is "for our profit" (Hebrews 12:10) is a thing not to be despised. When I was a pastor in Detroit, a twenty-one-year-old young man was killed riding his motorcycle on the John Lodge Expressway. Though his mother was a professing Christian, she became bitter and angry with God. She would not accept the trial as from the Lord. I tried to explain to her that she was not expected to take her problem lightly, but neither was she to take the Lord's

chastening through the problem lightly. God is in control, and He always has a good and wise purpose in chastening His children. Christians do suffer. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous" (Psalm 34:19). "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). We expect disciplines in this life, but we must never despise them.

We can faint under it. "Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him" (Hebrews 12:5). The Greek word is *ekluo*, and it means to grow weary, to lose heart. The Christian is a pilgrim, a sojourner who is ever on the move. He is going somewhere. The goal is conformity to the likeness of our Lord Jesus Christ who endured the cross and despised the shame. Christ Himself is our example--He never lost heart. "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (Hebrews 12:3). This is a good verse to read when the trials of life cause us to grow weary. We are told to pause and give serious thought to the sufferings of Christ. Learn with perception what He endured when He was here on earth. When we are spending time daily in the Word of God, the Holy Spirit can take the things of Christ and reveal them plainly to us. This enables us to persevere with patience. "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

We can accept it as coming from a loving Father. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). The disciplines of the Lord are never without plan or purpose. They are never an afterthought on His part. When God chastens us He is seeking to accomplish something in us for our good and His glory. So that with every chastening act of God there is a bright expectation, something good to which we can look forward. The writer calls it God's "afterward." And we may be certain that our Father's discipline will never bring disappointment. Don't neglect God's afterwards and hereafters. Some of them contain promises that light up our future with hope and expectancy.

"Nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." (Hebrews 12:11, italics added)

"What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." (John 13:7, italics added)

"Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." (Psalm 73:24, italics added)

In conclusion, take special notice of the fact that the blessings of chastisement come to them "which are exercised thereby." We are to be exercised by our trials and tribulations. The Greek word is *gumnazo*, which means to train the body or the mind with a view to holiness and righteousness. As we accept chastening and are trained by it, we learn that it is one of God's richest blessings.

We are finding that physical therapy for my wife in her paralyzed condition is difficult and painful. It is never convenient or comfortable to go through treatments, but she endures them with the hope and expectation of improvement.

How much more should we exercise ourselves to be trained by our heavenly Father's chastening. The writer of Hebrews makes this point in chapter 5. He speaks of the failure of believers to study the deeper truths of God's Word. All such remain spiritual infants and thus continue inexperienced and unskillful in handling life's problems: "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14).

Growing spiritually is not merely a matter of time. It is not an experience that comes with the years as does physical growth. A young man invited me to his home for dinner. He said he wanted me to meet his wife and a daughter who was six years old. If the little girl was six and her mother was thirty years old, I had a good idea of what to expect when I saw them just by knowing their ages.

But that is not true in the realm of spiritual experience. It is possible that a person who has been saved six years could be further advanced spiritually than one saved for thirty years. In spiritual matters some Christians are "dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11). They have ceased to be eager hearers and doers of the Word. Thus they are no longer exercised by it and no longer grow spiritually. The adjective used in this verse is the Greek word *nothroi* and suggests sluggishness or laziness. It is a condition one acquires when he loses his eagerness for the Word of God.

Some Christians are exercised by their trials while others are not. Some resent chastening and resent God while others accept God's discipline and advance because of it. The Bible does not require believers to enjoy chastening, but we are expected to regard it rightly and react to it properly. When we come to grips with God's reason for chastening us, it will lead to a profitable afterward. Suffering must be borne in the right spirit if we are to profit from it. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

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