

Bryan Station Baptist Church

INDEPENDENT

ORGANIZED 1786

MISSIONARY

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"

Vol. 7

Lexington, Kentucky

July 1976

No. 10

The Father's Discipline

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"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10).

On the surface, the experiences of the saved and the lost seem to be much the same. There are certain painful experiences common to all men - to the saved and lost alike. Trouble is a word in every man's language. Sorrow knocks at every man's door.

But the same experiences do not have the same meaning. To the child of God, pain and sorrow have a message that cannot be heard by the man of the world. The Father's hand is seen only in dealing with a son. And none but a son can see the hand of the Father. But the son ought always to see his Father's hand in all his experiences. Paul is writing to saints in sorrow, and he writes to comfort and strengthen. And in doing this, he shows them the Father's hand-and the Father's heart.

He shows them that by trials and difficulties of life, God trains or disciplines His children. We must not view our sufferings apart from God and His design in them. We must not think of them as senseless accidents. Trials are tokens of His love, and the discipline to which every son must be subjected. Those whom God takes to His heart and cherishes, He also disciplines. And to be without this discipline marks one as an illegitimate, and not a real son.

Here is a truth that may go unnoticed on the page of Scripture, like a lighthouse when the sun is shining, but when the stormy night falls, then this truth flashes out and is welcome.

Our Scripture goes deep into the meaning of life-life is discipline. Our Scripture tells us that God's discipline of His children is more loving and wise than that of earthly parents.

The earthly and heavenly disciplines are described in four contrasted clauses. And they are arranged in what students call inverted parallelism. The first clause, "for a few days," corresponds to the fourth, "that we might be partakers of His holiness." Dr. McLaren says the clause, "for a few days," does not refer to the duration of discipline, but to the direction or purpose of it. He says Paul is not speaking of how long earthly parents discipline, but the purpose is to prepare the child for a short career. The earthly parent trains for circumstances, position, occupations, professions, all of which terminate with the brief span of life. The earthly parent is interested in preparing his child for this life, and that is the purpose of discipline. He sends him to school for this purpose. He wants to make of him a good citizen of this world. But in contrast, God's discipline is to make His child a partaker of His holiness. His training is for an eternal day.

The other contrast-"after their own pleasure" or as it seemed good to them-"but He for our profit." Earthly parents often make mistakes and do harm when they think they are doing good. Their

training is not perfect, for they may have false conceptions of what is best for their children. Then personal whims and passion often enter into their discipline. But God's discipline is from a simple and unerring regard for the benefit of His child.

Now, in amplification of these general truths, we shall try to lay some things on your hearts.

1. Life is intelligible only as we regard it as education or discipline. God is a Father who looks after His children. He does not leave them to roam at will to their eternal ruin. He rebukes, corrects, trains and educates. Everything that befalls us is for training in holiness.

Life is not a heap of unconnected incidents, like a number of links flung down on the ground, but the links are a chain, and the chain has a staple and a stake. A heavenly Father presides over our lives. We are not at the mercy of blind fate or impersonal chance. All things work together for our good because a loving and wise Father is in control. Brethren, this is something more than a creed to recite; it is a truth to grip us and bless us.

The word for "chastisement" or "discipline" literally means "child-training," and implies the child is small. The oldest of us in years and in experience of childhood are still God's little children. All of our days here we are in a state of pupilage. This world is God's nursery. There are many mansions in His big house—the universe—and this earth is where He keeps His little ones. Life is given us that we may learn to talk and walk with the Father. We are here to acquire qualities for service in glory. We are here to be fashioned for eternity. God is more interested in our character than in our comfort.

Like our shining ranges and refrigerators that came from rough ore, we are turned into spiritual steel by being

"Plunged in baths of hissing tears,
And heated hot with hopes and fears,
And battered with the shock of doom."

Life here is training for glorious service yonder. We are to serve here, yes, but in heaven the saints serve day and night without fatigue or rest.

We hear a great deal about the mystery of suffering the saints endure here. And that is because we think life here is meant mainly for enjoyment and for material good. If we thought more of life as discipline, as acquiring of character, we would have less difficulty in interpreting our experiences and understanding what people call the mysteries of Providence. We sing "Sometime We'll Understand" as though we were without any present light on God's providential dealings with us. Our Scripture tells us that the Father is training us and all that befalls us is a part of His discipline.

2. The guiding principle of this discipline. They—our earthly parents—discipline as seemed good to them. The guiding principle for earthly parents is what they think will be good for the child. But mistakes enter into their training. With them there may be fits of passion, impatience, and ignorance. But He—our heavenly Father—for our profit—and He makes no mistakes.

The child of God may see good in his most painful trials. There is no such thing as evil except the evil of sin. Affliction is not an evil. The Psalmist said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Ps. 119:67). And again, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71).

The flood comes, the water covers the fields, and men are in despair. The waters recede; and then like the slime left from the Nile in flood, there is a better, richer soil in which to grow crops. Storms are dreaded, but they keep sea and air from stagnating.

This should be a gracious word for some of us today in our perplexities and pains and disappointments—"He for our profit." This word "profit" has been terribly abused. Bankers and merchants—business men in general—have about monopolized the use of this word "profit." Everywhere it takes the shape of the dollar mark. We can hardly think of profit without thinking of money or material substance. The greatest profit might be the loss of money.

This does not deny that pain and sorrow are real. We are not to act as if there is no trouble when there is. Troubles would not help us if they did not trouble us. The good we get from sorrow would not be realized unless we did sorrow. It is right for us to writhe in pain; for without pain there is no profit. It is proper for us to be impressed with calamities when they befall us. But it is not right for us to fail to discern in them the gracious truth that they are for our profit. The Father knows what will be for our good, and this is what He sends.

3. The great aim of all discipline. "That we should be partakers of His holiness." God trains us for an eternal end. Earthly parents train for earthly occupation—for the work of a few days. Man was made in the image of God—he lost that image through sin, and the only adequate end in life is to be restored to the likeness of God. If I fail to ever become like God, I have failed, whatever else I have accomplished. Just to live for earthly riches and pleasure and fame is to miserably fail.

And to become like God is the purpose of our sorrows. They will wean us; they will refine us; and they will blow us to His breast, just as a

strong wind might sweep a man into some refuge from itself. What child of God cannot testify that he has been brought nearer to God by some short, sharp sorrow than by many long days of prosperity.

What Absalom, in his wayward way, did with Joab is like what God does with His sons. Joab would not come to Absalom's palace, so Absalom set his corn field on fire; and then Joab came. So God sometimes burns our harvests—stops our income—that we may go to Him.

But sorrow may have the opposite effect. It may make a man hard, sullen, and bitter. The effect trouble and sorrow has on a person is a pretty good barometer of whether the person is a child of God.



OUR PRINTING MINISTRY

The printing ministry of the Bryan Station Baptist Church has been blessed of the Lord in a wonderful way. The "Definitions of Doctrine" books by Brother C. D. Cole and some of the other writings we have printed are being used in churches, Sunday Schools, Bible classes and colleges. We get many reports of the blessings of Brother Cole's writings almost every day. Preachers and churches are being blessed by these great doctrinal books, and also by Brother Boyce Taylor's books, as well as the others.

We have requests for books to be used in different places nearly every week. Some of the pastors who request these books cannot afford to pay for them. We have been giving books away for the past five years. Over \$400.00 worth of books have been shipped to the Philippines, many to South America, the Hawaiian Islands, etc. We give books to pastors every week.

The financial load is increasing. The price of these books only covers the cost of the printing of them. This does not include the salary of a full-time printer, hired by the church, to do the work (member of the Bryan Station Baptist Church.) Maybe you would like to help. If any of our readers want to share in the cost of printing these books, please send your offering to the Bryan Station Baptist Church and designate it to the "Printing Ministry". No one will ever know the great way these writings are being used.

Al Gormley
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