

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 19 June 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Chastening of the Lord

Hebrews 12:4-11

On 18 September 1983, when I was a month short of seven years old, I repented of my sin, and asked Jesus to save me, and to come into my heart. Immediately, I was snatched from Satan's family, and became a child of God, by way of a spiritual new birth. At the time, I knew very little about the biblical doctrines of "the new birth," and "adoption": I knew only that when I believed on Jesus, and asked Him to save me, I became a child of God.

However, as I grew older, and learned more about "the new birth," "adoption," and "the family of God," I had no trouble understanding these Bible teachings. It made total sense to me, because I had *personally* experienced the new birth. I now knew what it was like to be a member of God's family, and to have God as my Father; and I had the Holy Spirit living inside me, to teach me all these truths.

However, as I look back, I realise that there was another factor in my life which made it easy for me to understand my relationship with God: namely, I had a loving earthly father, who brought me up with godly discipline. My relationship with my earthly father helped me to understand my relationship with my heavenly Father. After I became a father myself, my understanding of my relationship with my heavenly Father rose to yet another level—because *I myself* was now in a "father" role. It hurts me to discipline my children. It isn't easy to look into their teary eyes after I've taken away something that they love. However, as I correct them, they learn, slowly but surely, to obey. It's a painful process; but as I remain firm and consistent in disciplining my children, obedience becomes the increasing pattern in their lives. Even more importantly, my children learn to *love* me and *respect* me. They learn to obey not merely out of fear, but out of *love*, because they know that chastisement is for their good.

Now, if *I* am hurt when my children disobey me, how much more deeply must the Lord be hurt when *His* children disobey Him? How much more deeply must it hurt the heavenly Father when He is forced to chastise His children for their sin? And how much more profoundly must He be *pleased* when His children confess their sin, get back into a sweet relationship with Him, and learn to obey Him out of love?

In our Scripture this morning, we will be learning about the Lord's "*chastening*" of His children. Sad to say, we live in a day when discipline in *any* form is not only frowned upon, but is vilified. Yet, anyone who has ever grown up in a loving home, where correction was carried out in the *right* way, knows that parental discipline is a cord of love, which draws children *closer* to their parents. Those of us who know Christ as Saviour need to come to this same realisation concerning our relationship with our heavenly Father. The title of this message is, *The Chastening of the Lord*.

Read Hebrews 12:4-11.

From this passage, I would like to point out four truths about God's chastening. First of all...

I. God's chastening is a proof of His love for you (vv. 4-6).

As we've studied through the book of **Hebrews**, I've pointed out, many times, that it is important to remember *to whom* this book was written, and *why* it was written. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Jewish people who professed to be followers of Jesus Christ. However, among Paul's audience, there were many who were *not* genuinely saved. Many had made a *profession* of Christ, but were still trusting in their keeping of the Law, instead of trusting in Christ; and now that persecution was coming to them, they were abandoning their profession of Christianity. On the other hand, there were many in Paul's audience who *were* genuinely saved. Yet, even among those who were saved, the persecution that they were suffering was wearing them down. To the fake Christians, Paul had strong words of warning, to repent and believe on Jesus; but to the true Christians, he had words of encouragement, to keep running the Christian race with joy and endurance.

Now, the Jews to whom Paul was writing lived mostly in the *western* part of the empire. How do we know this? For one thing, Paul wrote this letter from Rome, while he was under house arrest. This means that his letter would have gone mostly to the Jews who lived near Rome. The other reason we know this is that in **verse 4** Paul said, "***Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.***" Jewish Christians in the *eastern* part of the Roman Empire (especially those who lived in Israel, or in the countries near Israel) had been suffering death for the name of Jesus for 30 years. The slaughter of Christians began in Jerusalem only a few months after Jesus ascended back to Heaven; and the land of Israel was still "ground zero" for the slaughter of Christians. Ever since that time, persecution and slaughter of Christians had been spreading farther westward; but the Christians who lived in or near Rome were not generally being *killed* for their faith—*yet*. However, that was soon going to change. The year was A.D. 64; and the Jewish revolt against Rome was just beginning in the land of Israel. Paul knew about Daniel's prophecy in **Daniel 9**; and he knew that the city of Jerusalem, and the Temple, would soon be destroyed by the Romans, just as Daniel had prophesied. He knew that this Jewish revolt would result in the slaughter not only of *unsaved* Jews, but of *saved* Jews, all over the Roman Empire. Even worse, Rome was only months away from its greatest disaster in centuries—the "Great Fire of Rome." After the fire, Nero would blame the Christians for it; and both Gentile *and* Jewish Christians would be burned at the stake by Nero.

Had God revealed to Paul that this fire was coming? Perhaps. However, Paul did know one thing for sure: "***blood***" was coming! Paul was writing this letter to prepare his brethren for this reality. Paul is saying, "You'd better toughen up, Christians! Death for the name of Jesus is coming. If you are faltering under persecution *now*, and thinking twice about whether to attend your local church, then what will you do when it comes time to *die* for Jesus' name?"

There are many "fair weather" professors of Christ today (especially in our Western world). Because there isn't a very high price to pay for being a Christian, many people "go along for the ride" of Christianity. Many people have made a profession of faith that they don't really mean, or understand. Many come to church every now and then, if family, or business, or personal pleasure, or the slightest difficulties, don't interfere. Many are even baptised members of Bible-preaching churches. Yet, they have no genuine commitment to Christ, because they have never truly become members of His family. When real persecution comes along (and, believe me, it *is* coming), there will be a great falling away. The false Christians will be weeded out from the genuine ones very quickly! True Christians, on the other hand, will continue to stand for His name. If there had been carnality and slothfulness in their lives

when it was *easy* to be a Christian, they will repent of it, and will be purified, just like gold in a furnace is purified; and they will be more effective for Christ than they ever were before.

That brings us to **verse 5. (Read Hebrews 12:5 again.)** Please notice what Paul is saying here. He is telling these Jewish Christians that they had forgotten about a vital part of their relationship with their heavenly Father—namely, chastening. Every true child of God should *expect* God’s chastening in his life, and not despise it. Before I get deeper into this point, let’s look at the Old Testament Scripture that Paul is quoting.

Read Proverbs 3:11-12.

What, exactly, *is* chastening? Is chastening punishment for doing wrong? Is Paul saying that if you are going through any kind of trial or persecution, you are being punished for a sin in your life? To answer that question, let’s take a look at the Greek word for chastening, and see what we can learn. The Greek word that is used here is *paideia*; and *paideia* can refer to discipline, direction, teaching, *and* corrective punishment. “Chastening” doesn’t always mean “punishment”; but punishment *is* employed when the child will not submit to the disciplines that the father has laid down for him.

This is what God does in His children’s lives. He chastens them. When they sin, He punishes them, so that they will learn to obey. However, even when His children are not necessarily sinning, God still often allows trials and persecution in their lives in order to instruct, discipline, and train them, and rid them of worldly things, so that they will be more effective in their service to Him. This is what Jesus called “*purging.*”

Read John 15:1-9.

There are several things that need to be pointed out, here. First, those who are not abiding in the Vine of Jesus Christ (in other words, those who are not saved) do *not* bring forth fruit for God at all, because they do not belong to God. They are “dead” branches; and in time, they are removed and burned. (Yes, this *is* talking about the Lake of Fire!) However, those who are *connected* to the Vine, and who are drawing spiritual life from Him (in other words, those who are saved) are often “purged.” Just as a gardener prunes the branches of a tree in order that it may stay healthy and fruitful, so the Father allows painful trials in His children’s lives, in order that they may bring forth fruit for God. **God does this to His children because He loves them.** Purging (or chastising) is the mark of God’s *love* for His children.

Are you being chastened for sin in your life, Christian? If so, don’t despise it. Don’t harden your heart against it. Just repent of the sin that you are clinging to, and get back into sweet fellowship with the Father. The chastisement may not clear up and go away the moment you repent; but whether it does or not, you will be right with your Father. **Are you going through a trial, yet you cannot think of any particular sin in your life for which God might be punishing you?** If so, don’t despise it. It is part of the training and discipline process. God is pruning you, so that you may bring forth more fruit. By the way, you probably will find, as you go through the pruning process, that there *is*, indeed, a sin in your life that you weren’t even aware of before. Remember Job? Before God allowed Satan to commence his vicious attacks on Job, He Himself called Job a “*perfect and an upright man,*

one that feareth God, and escheweth evil.” Yet, through the course of the trial, God revealed to Job that he had an element of self-righteousness deep down inside, of which he had not been previously aware; and Job repented of it, and drew even closer to God.

Whenever I discipline my kids, I remind them that I am correcting them because I *love* them. And you know what? I have *never yet* heard them tell me that they hate me. In fact, they voluntarily tell me, many times per day, that they *love* me! Folks, don’t buy into the psychologists’ warnings that you will “damage” your children if you discipline them. We have several generations of people today who *hate* their parents specifically *because* their parents did not chasten or restrain them. Whether they realised it or not, that lack of chastisement was actually a sign that their parents *didn’t really care about them!* **Chastening is a distinctive mark of God’s love for His children;** and those who are truly His children will love Him in return.

God’s chastening is a proof of His love. Secondly...

II. God’s chastening is proof that you are God’s child (vv. 6-8).

(Read Hebrews 12:6-8.) Not only is God’s chastening a proof of His *love* for His sons and daughters: it is also an indication that one *is*, indeed, God’s son or daughter. Chastening is simply part of being a child of God. God is not a “deadbeat dad” who lets his children run wild. If you are *His* child, you can expect that He will correct you when you sin. You may also be sure that, even when you are not wilfully sinning against Him, He will still put you through tests and trials, so that you will come to a point of spiritual maturity.

Now, some people are a bit shocked when they read the word “*bastard*” in **verse 8**. Let’s read it again. **(Read verse 8.)** Unfortunately, the word “*bastard*” has come to be used as a curse word in today’s world—a word that is hurled at someone as a cutting insult. Please understand that this is *not* the way that God is using this word. God does not look at someone who was born out of wedlock as “worthless.” Nor does He look at any individual as any worthier than anyone else. We are all dirty, rotten sinners in need of His salvation. God is *no* respecter of persons! The Scriptures tell us this over and over again.

First of all, God is no respecter of people’s race. In **Acts 10**, we read about the time when God sent the Apostle Peter to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius, to tell Cornelius and his family how to be saved. When Peter preached to them, Cornelius and his whole family believed the Gospel, and were gloriously saved; and for the first time in his life, Peter realised just how much God *loved* the Gentiles, and wished to save them. Peter exclaimed, “*Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*” God also does not respect people according to their wealth. In **James 2**, God harshly rebuked the Christians who showed special preference to the rich people in the congregation, and not to the poor. He said, “*Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*” God also does not respect people according to their morality. In God’s eyes, we are *all* wicked sinners in need of His forgiveness. Many of the Christians in the church of Corinth had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, and extortioners before they were saved: yet, God forgave them, and saved them! In **1 Corinthians 6**, Paul reminded these Christians that even

though they had done all these wicked things, they were now *“washed,” “sanctified,”* and *“justified in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

I am going out of my way to make this point, because I want you to understand what God is saying here. God is not saying that people who were born out of wedlock are worthless; nor is He saying that *lost* people are worthless. (If God viewed lost anyone as “worthless,” He wouldn’t have sent His Son to die for the whole human race. We are *all* lost in sin, until Jesus saves us!) So, what *does* God mean, then? By using this word *“bastard,”* God is simply saying that those who do not receive correction from Him are “illegitimate”. They are not true children of His. If you are chastised by the Lord, it is evident that you are His child. If you *don’t* receive chastisement from the Lord, then you are *not* His child.

God is Father to all who place their faith in His Son Jesus; and *because* they are His children, He corrects them. My dad didn’t discipline *other* people’s kids; he disciplined *his* kids. He chastised *me*, and taught *me* discipline, because I belonged to him. It’s the same way with God’s kids. God will chastise His own. He will *not* let His children do whatever they want to do.

Oftentimes, children from good homes, where there is correction and discipline, envy children from homes where there is no discipline. They wonder, “Why do *my friends* get to do whatever they want, but I don’t?” They have no idea of the heartache that is coming to their friends because they were not taught obedience and self-control. In the same way, God’s children often resent God’s correction. They look at the wicked people who are prospering in this world, and wonder why *they* can’t have a little fun now and then. But then, the heavenly Father chastises His children; and when the chastisement is over, His children remember, once again, that the seeming “freedom” of the unsaved people around them is not freedom at all. It is slavery! The unsaved are slaves to their own self-destructive sin; and they are enslaved to their spiritual father, the devil, who is a *cruel* master. God’s children, on the other hand, are *free from sin*, and are now the *servants* of a righteousness, loving God.

Read John 8:34-36.

Read Romans 6:14-22.

If a person claim to have received Christ as Saviour, yet there has never been a *change* in his actions: if a person claim to be saved, yet there has never been a change in his desires: if a person claim to be a child of God, yet he still does whatever he wants to do, and feels no conviction about it: and if, on top of it all, it does not appear that he is receiving any chastisement from God....that’s not a good sign! When Jesus moves into a person’s heart, *He will* bring about change in that person’s life; and He *will* chastise His children when they refuse to let Him do His transforming work. Are *you* chastised by the Lord? I hope so! That is the proof that you belong to Him!

God’s chastening is proof of God’s love; and it is proof that one is God’s child. Thirdly...

III. God’s chastening is a proof that you have eternal life (v. 9).

(Read Hebrews 12:9 again.) Once again, Paul is comparing our relationship to our earthly fathers to our relationship with the heavenly Father; and as he does so, he makes two points.

First, Paul says that we must *revere* (or “respect”) our heavenly Father, and subject ourselves to Him. He says, “Look, we subjected ourselves to our earthly fathers, right? Isn’t it reasonable, then, that we reverence our *heavenly* Father, and submit to *Him*?” Secondly, Paul points out *why* we should submit ourselves to God. He says that we should be in subjection to the Father so that we may “*live*.”

Now, let’s break this down. First of all, what does Paul mean when he calls God “*the Father of spirits*”? Is Paul referring to the fact that God is the *Creator* of all people? No, he is not. God *is* the Creator of all people; but He is *Father* only to those who have received His Son as Saviour. **John 1:12** says, “*But as many as received him [Jesus], to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*” God is *Father* only to those who have *subjected themselves* to Him. Only those who have chosen to entrust their soul to *Jesus’* keeping have “life.” Why? Because eternal life is a gift that only God, the Author of life, can give; and the way to God is through His Son, Jesus Christ!

Read John 1:1-4 / 5:26 / 10:10, 27-28 / 17:1-3.

Why would anyone *not* desire to have the eternal, abundant life that Jesus can give them? You’d think that people would be *flocking* to receive that free gift; yet, they are not. Most people reject Jesus, because they do *not* want to submit themselves to God. They want to live their lives their *own way*. Jesus Himself said to the multitudes, “*And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not.*”

My friend, if you have not submitted yourself to the Father of spirits—if there have never been that time in your life when God became your Father—then please come to the Father today, through His Son Jesus, so that you might have eternal life! And if you *are* saved, don’t ever forget the awesome privilege that you have as a child of God. You have *eternal life*!

God’s chastening is the proof of His love for His children. His chastening is the proof that one *is* a child of God. His chastening is the proof that one has eternal life. Lastly...

IV. God’s chastening produces righteousness in your life (vv. 10-11).

(Read Hebrews 12:10-11 again.) I can personally testify that I received a lot of chastisement when I was growing up. However, I can also testify that the chastisements did the job. It caused me to think twice about doing evil, and taught me habits of restraint and self-discipline. **Those corrections also served as an object lesson, to teach me truths about God.** Early on, I learned that there is a penalty for sin. For that reason, I was easily able to understand the Gospel message. I came to understand that *God* has a penalty for sin, which is death--and that in order for me not to experience that death, I needed to place my trust in the One who died in my place. Furthermore, my chastisements also taught me, *after* I was saved, that there are still consequences for sin, even in the life of a believer.

The bottom line is this: chastisement from earthly fathers helps to produce *moral character*; but God's chastisement produces *true holiness*, and the *peaceable fruit of righteousness*, in the lives of His children. An unsaved person who received discipline in his childhood can have decent character; but he can't produce the kind of righteousness that truly pleases God, because he doesn't even *know* God. In contrast, a Christian *can* produce true righteousness, which pleases God—not because there is any goodness in *himself*, but because the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, lives within him. When God chastises His children (whether in punishment, or in training), it brings His children to the place of *submission*; and when His children submit to Him, He is able to transform them into His own image.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

As a Christian looks into the “mirror” of God's Word with an “*open face*” (in other words, with no “spiritual veil” over his eyes), He is able to see the holy character of God's Son in the pages of Scripture. As he gazes on Christ's image, he begins to be transformed into His likeness, from one level of glory to another; all this is done through the power of the Holy Spirit, who lives inside the believer. Folks, this is reality for *every* believer. If you are a child of God, God not only *can* produce righteousness in your life: He *will* produce righteousness in your life! God saves people, and adopts them into His family, not only so that they will miss hell, and go to Heaven, but so that He may transform them into the kind of people that He wants them to be. He wants to make us holy, righteous, and profitable to His service.

Read Matthew 13:1-23.

Only people who are truly saved bring forth fruit unto God. Spiritual fruit isn't what *saves* a person; it is simply the product of a heart that has truly been transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many people who, at first, seem eager to hear the Word of God, and who even make some big changes in their lives; yet, in time, they turn away from Christ, and never look back. Some don't wish to suffer persecution for the name of Jesus. Others simply don't want to give up the sinful pleasures of this world. Either way, they turn away from Christ; and they never produce any fruit. Why? Because they were never saved in the first place. They were only “interested.” On the other hand, the presence of the “*peaceable fruit of righteousness*” in a person's life is evidence that he is truly saved.

Christian, do you balk when your Father corrects you for your sin? If so, stop fighting Him. You won't win! Repent, submit yourself to your Father, and let Him produce the “*peaceable fruit of righteousness*.” Do you resent the trials that He brings into your life in order to purge you, so that you might bring forth more fruit? If so, stop resenting them, and realise that your Father has a purpose for them. Let Him have His way, and get the glory in your life.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask, “**Are you saved?**” If you are *not* saved, then you probably don't have the foggiest idea of what we've been talking about this morning. *Satan* isn't going to rock your world too much, because he wants you to have a false sense of security. He wants you to think that you'll get to Heaven because you are a good person; and he wants you to think that you manage your own problems. He does *not* want you to come to Jesus. My friend, if this is what you think, I am here to tell you that you don't stand a chance without Jesus Christ. You need *Him* in order to get to Heaven! I plead with you let go of your own righteousness, and place your faith in Christ today! **If you are saved, I**

plead with you to submit to the chastening of the Lord. Your Father loves you more than you can comprehend. The trials that you are experiencing are the proof of His love. Submit yourself wholly to your heavenly Father, and let Him to produce that fruit of holiness in your life.