

## CHAPTER 88

### DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

(~~8816~~ HEBREWS 12:6)

The problem of suffering is a very real one in this world, and to not a few of our readers a personal and acute one. While some of us are freely supplied with comforts, others are constantly exercised over procuring the bare necessities of life. While some of us have long been favored with good health, others know not what it is to go through a day without sickness and pain. While some homes have not been visited by death for many years, others are called upon again and again to pass through the deep waters of family bereavement. Yes, dear friend; the problem of suffering, the encountering of severe trials, is a very personal thing for not a few of the members of the household of faith. Nor is it the *external* afflictions which occasion the most anguish: it is the questionings they raise, the doubts they stimulate, the dark clouds of unbelief which they so often bring over the heart.

Very often it is in seasons of trial and trouble that Satan is most successful in getting in his evil work. When he perceives the uselessness of attempting to bring believers under the bondage in which he keeps unbelievers, he bides his time for the shooting at them of other arrows which he has in his quiver. Though he is unable to drag them down to the commission of the grosser outward forms of sin, he waits his opportunity for tempting them to be guilty of inward sins. Though he cannot infect them with the poison of evolutionism and higher criticism, he despairs not of seducing them with questions of God's goodness. It is when adversity comes the Christian's way, when sore trials multiply, when the soul is oppressed and the mind distressed, that the Devil seeks to instill and strengthen doubtings of God's love, and to call into question the faithfulness of His promises.

Moreover, there come seasons in the lives of many saints when to sight and sense it *seems* as though God Himself had ceased to care for His needy and afflicted child. Earnest prayer is made for the mitigation of the sufferings, but relief is not granted. Grace is sought to meekly bear the burden which

has been laid upon the suffering one; yet, so far from any sensible answer being received, self-will, impatience, unbelief, are more active than ever. Instead of the peace of God ruling the heart, unrest and enmity occupy its throne. Instead of quietness within, there is turmoil and resentment. Instead of “giving thanks always for all things unto God” (<sup><del>4160</del></sup>Ephesians 5:20), the soul is filled with unkind thoughts and feelings against Him. This is cause for anguish unto the renewed heart; yet, at times, struggle against the evil as the Christian may, he is overcome by it.

Then it is that the afflicted one cries out,

“Why standest Thou *afar off*, O Lord, why *hidest* Thou Thyself in times of trouble?” (<sup><del>1900</del></sup>Psalm 10:1).

To the distressed saint, the Lord seems to *stand* still, as if He coldly looked on from a distance, and did not sympathize with the afflicted one. Nay, worse, the Lord appears to be *afar off*, and no longer “a very present help in trouble,” but rather an inaccessible mountain, which it is impossible to reach. The felt presence of the Lord is the stay, the strength, the consolation of the believer; the lifting up of the light of His countenance upon us, is what sustains and cheers us in this dark world. But when *that* is withheld, when we no longer have the joy of His presence with us, drab indeed is the prospect, sad the heart. It is the *hiding* of our Father’s face which cuts to the quick. When trouble *and desertion* come together, it is unbearable.

Then it is that the word comes to us,

“My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him” (<sup><del>5125</del></sup>Hebrews 12:5).

Ah, it is easy for us to perceive the meetness of such an admonition as this while things are going smoothly and pleasantly for us. While our lot is congenial, or at least bearable, we have little difficulty in discerning what a sin it is for any Christian to either “despise” God’s chastenings or to “faint” beneath them. But when tribulation comes upon us, when distress and anguish fill our hearts, it is quite another matter. Not only do we become guilty of one of the very evils here dehorted from, but we are very apt to excuse and extenuate our peevishness or faintness. There is a tendency in all of us to pity ourselves, to take sides with ourselves against God, and even to justify the uprisings of our hearts against Him.

Have we never, in self-vindication, said, “Well, after all we are *human*; it is *natural* that we should chafe against the rod or give way to despondency when we are afflicted. It is all very well to tell us that we *should not*, but how can we help ourselves? we cannot change our natures; we are frail men and women, and not angels.” And what has been the issue from the fruit of this self-pity and self-vindication? Review the past, dear friend, and recall how you felt and acted inwardly when God was tearing up your cozy nest, overturning your cherished plans, dashing to pieces your fondest hopes, afflicting you painfully in your affairs, your body, or your family circle. Did it not issue in calling into question the wisdom of God’s ways, the justice of His dealings with you, His kindness towards you? Did it not result in your having still stronger doubts of His very goodness?

In <sup><812></sup>Hebrews 12:5 the Christian is cautioned against either despising the Lord’s chastenings or fainting beneath them. Yet, notwithstanding this plain warning, there remains a tendency in all of us not only to disregard the same, but to act contrary thereto. The apostle anticipates this evil, and points out the remedy. The mind of the Christian must be fortified against it. But how? By calling to remembrance *the source* from which all his testings, trials, tribulations and troubles proceed, namely, the blessed, wondrous, unchanging love of God. “My son, despise not thou the chastenings of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him. FOR whom the Lord *loveth*, He chasteneth.” Here a reason is advanced why we *should not* despise God’s chastening nor faint beneath it — all proceeds from His *love*. Yes, even the bitter disappointments, the sore trials, the things which occasion an aching heart, are not only appointed by unerring wisdom, but are sent by infinite Love! It is the apprehension and appropriation of this glorious fact, and that alone, which will preserve us from both the evils forbidden in 5:5.

The way to victory over suffering is to keep sorrow from filling the soul: “Let not your *heart* be troubled” (<sup><814></sup>John 14:1). So long as the waves wash only the deck of the ship, there is no danger of its foundering; but when the tempest breaks through the hatches and submerges the hold, then disaster is nigh. No matter what floods of tribulation break over us, it is our duty and our privilege to have peace within: “keep thy *heart* with all diligence” (<sup><102></sup>Proverbs 4:23); suffer no doubtings of God’s wisdom, faithfulness, goodness, to take root there. But how am I to prevent their so doing? “*Keep yourselves in the love of God*” (Jude 21), is the inspired answer, the sure remedy, the way to victory. There, in one word, we have

made known to us the secret of how to overcome all questionings of God's providential ways, all murmurings against His dealings with us.

“Keep yourselves in the love of God.” It is as though a parent said to his child, “Keep yourself in the sunshine:” the sun shines whether he enjoys it or not, but he is responsible not to walk in the shade and thus lose its genial glow. So God's love for His people abides unchanging, but how few of them keep themselves in the warmth of it. The saint is to be “rooted and grounded in love” (Ephesians 3:17); “rooted” like a tree in rich and fertile soil; “grounded” like a house built upon a rock. Observe that both of these figures speak of *hidden* processes: the root-life of a tree is concealed from human eyes, and the foundations of a house are laid deep in the ground. Thus it should be with each child of God: the heart is to be fixed, nourished by the love of God.

It is one thing to believe intellectually that “God is love” and that He loves His people, but it is quite another to enjoy and live in that love in the soul. To be “rooted and grounded in love” means to have a settled assurance of God's love for us, such an assurance as nothing can shake. This is the deep need of every Christian, and no pains are to be spared in the obtaining thereof. Those passages in Scripture which speak of the wondrous love of God, should be read frequently and meditated upon daily. There should be a diligent striving to apprehend God's love more fully and richly. Dwell upon the many unmistakable proofs which God has made of His love to you: the gift of His Word, the gift of His Son, the gift of His Spirit. What greater, what clearer proofs do we require! Steadfastly resist every temptation to question His love: “keep yourselves *in* the love of God.” Let *that* be the realm in which you live, the atmosphere you breathe, the warmth in which you thrive.

This life is but a schooling. In saying this we are uttering a platitude, yet it is a truth of which all Christians need to be constantly reminded. This is the period of our childhood and minority. Now in childhood everything has, or should have, the character of education and discipline. Dear parents and teachers are constantly directing, warning, rebuking; the whole of the child-life is under rule, restraint and guidance. But the only object is the child him-self — his good, his character, his future; and the only motive is love. Now as childhood is to the rest of our life, so is the whole of our earthly sojourn to our future and heavenly life. Therefore let us seek to cultivate the spirit of childhood. Let us regard it as natural that we *should*

*be* daily rebuked and corrected. Let us behave with the docility and meekness of children, with their trustful and sweet assurance that *love* is behind all our chastenings, that we are in the tender hands of our Father.

But if this attitude is to be maintained, *faith* must be kept in steady exercise: only thus shall we judge aright of afflictions. Sense is ever ready to slander and belie the Divine perfections. Sense beclouds the understanding and causes us to wrongly interpret God's dispensations with us. Why so? Because sense estimates things from their outside and by their present feeling.

“No chastening *for the present* seemeth to be joyous, but grievous”  
(~~S821E~~ Hebrews 12:11),

and therefore if when under the rod we judge of God's love and care for us by our *sense of* His present dealings, we are likely to conclude that He has but little regard for us. Herein lies the urgent need for the putting forth of faith, for “faith is the evidence of things not seen.” *Faith* is the only remedy for this double evil. Faith interprets things not according to the outside or visible, but according to the promise. Faith looks upon providences not as a present disconnected piece, but in its entirety to the end of things.

Sense perceives in our trials naught but expressions of God's disregard or anger, but faith can discern Divine wisdom and love in the sorest troubles. Faith is able to unfold the fiddles and solve the mysteries of providence. Faith can extract honey and sweetness out of gall and wormwood. Faith discerns that God's heart is filled with love toward us, even when His hand is heavy and smarts upon us. The bucket goes down into the well the deeper, that it may come up the fuller. Faith perceives God's design in the chastening is our good. It is through faith

“that He would show thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are  
double to that which is” (~~S810E~~ Job 11:6).

By the “secrets of wisdom” is meant the *hidden* ways of God's providence. Divine providence has two faces: the one of rigor, the other of clemency; sense looks upon the former only, faith enjoys the latter.

Faith not only looks beneath the surface of things and sees the sweet orange beneath the bitter rind, but it looks beyond the present and anticipates the blessed sequel. Of the Psalmist it is recorded,

“I said *in my haste*, I am cut off from before Thine eyes”  
 (<1912>Psalm 31:22).

The fumes of passion dim our vision when we look only at what is present. Asaph declared,

“My feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped; for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (<1971>Psalm 73:2, 3);

but when he went into the sanctuary of God he said, “Then understood I *their end*” (verse 17), and that quieted him. Faith is occupied not with the scaffolding, but with the completed building; not with the medicine, but with the healthful effects it produces; not with the painful rod, but with the peaceable fruit of righteousness in which it issues.

Suffering, then, is a test of the heart; chastisement is a challenge to faith — our faith in His wisdom, His faithfulness, His love. As we have sought to show above the great need of the Christian is to keep himself in the love of God, for the soul to have an unshaken assurance of His tender care for us: “casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you” (<1017>1 Peter 5:7). But the knowledge of that “care” can only be experimentally maintained by the exercise of faith — especially is this the case in times of trouble. A preacher once asked a despondent friend, “Why is that cow looking over the wall?” And the answer was, “Because she cannot look through it.” The illustration may be crude, yet it gives point to an important truth. Discouraged reader, look over the things which so much distress you, and behold the Father’s smiling face; look above the frowning clouds of His providence, and see the sunshine of His never changing love.

“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth” (verse 6).

There is something very striking and unusual about this verse, for it is found, in slightly varied form, in no less than five different books of the Bible: —

“Happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty” (<18517>Job 5:17);

“Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of Thy law” (<19412>Psalm 94:12);

“Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (~~1812~~ Proverbs 3:12);

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (~~1819~~ Revelation 3:19).

Probably there is a twofold reason for this reiteration.

**First**, it hints at the importance and blessedness of this truth. God repeats it so frequently lest we should forget, and thus lose the comfort and cheer of realizing that Divine chastisement proceeds from *love*. This must be a precious word if God thought it well to say it five times over!

**Second**, such repetition also implies our slowness to believe it; by nature our evil hearts are inclined in the opposite direction. Though our text affirms so emphatically that the Christian’s chastisements proceed from God’s love, we are ever ready to attribute them to His harshness. It is really very humbling that the Holy Spirit should deem it necessary to repeat this statement so often.

“For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” Four things are to be noted.

**First**, the best of God’s children *need* chastisement — “every son.” There is no Christian but what has faults and follies which require correcting: “in many things we all offend” (~~1812~~ James 3:2).

**Second**, God *will correct* all whom He adopts into His family. However He may now let the reprobate alone in their sins, He will not ignore the failings of His people — to be suffered to go on unrebuked in wickedness is a sure sign of alienation from God.

**Third**, in this God acts as a *Father*: no wise and good parent will wink at the faults of his own children: his very relation and affection to them oblige him to take notice of the same.

**Fourth**, God’s disciplinary dealings with His sons proceed from and make manifest His *love* to them: it is this fact we would now particularly concentrate upon.

**1.** The Christian’s chastisements *flow from* God’s love. Not from His anger or hardness, nor from arbitrary dealings, but from God’s heart do our afflictions proceed. It is love which regulates all the ways of God in dealing with His own. It was love which *elects* them. The heart is not warmed

when our election is traced back merely to God's sovereign will, but our affections are stirred when we read "in *love* having predestinated us" (~~4004~~ Ephesians 1:4, 5). It was love which *redeemed* us. We do not reach the center of the atonement when we see nothing more in the Cross than a vindication of the law and a satisfaction of justice: "God so *loved the world* that He gave His only begotten Son" (~~4016~~ John 3:16). It is love which regenerates or *effectually calls* us: "with loving kindness have I drawn thee" (~~2816~~ Jeremiah 31:3). The new birth is not only a marvel of Divine wisdom and a miracle of Divine power, but it is also and superlatively a product of God's affection.

In like manner it is *love* which ordained our trials and orders our chastisements. O Christian, never doubt the love of God. A quaint old Quaker, who was a farmer, had a weather-vane on the roof of his barn, from which stood out in clear-cut letters "God is love." One day a preacher was being driven to the Quaker's home; his host called attention to the vane and its text. The preacher turned and *said*, "I don't like that at all: it misrepresents the Divine character — God's love is not variable like the weather." Said the Quaker, "Friend you have misinterpreted its significance; that text on the weather-vane is to remind me that, no matter which way the wind is blowing, no matter from which direction the storm may come, still, "God is love."

**2.** The Christian's chastisements *express* God's love. Oftentimes we do not think so. As God's children we think and act very much as we did when children naturally. When we were little and our parents insisted that we should perform a certain duty we failed to appreciate the love which had respect unto our future well-being. Or, when our parents denied us something on which we had set our hearts, we felt we were very hardly dealt with. Yet was it *love* which said "No" to us. So it is spiritually. The love of God not only gives, but also *withholds*. No doubt this is the explanation for some of our unanswered prayers: God loves us too much to give what would not really be for our profit. The duties insisted upon, the rebukes given, the things withheld, are all *expressions of His faithful love*.

Chastisements manifest God's care of us. He does not regard us with unconcern and neglect, as men usually do their illegitimate children, but He has a true parent's solicitation for us:

“Like as a father pitieth his children so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him” (<sup><1943B></sup>Psalm 103:13).

“And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live” (<sup><888B></sup>Deuteronomy 8:3).

There are several important sermons wrapped up in that verse, but we have not the space here to even outline them. God brings into the wilderness that we may be drawn nearer Himself. He dries up cisterns that we may seek and enjoy the Fountain. He destroys our nest down here that our affection may be set upon things above.

**3.** The Christian’s chastisements *magnify* God’s love. Our very trials make manifest the fullness and reveal the perfections of God’s love. What a word is that in <sup><288B></sup>Lamentations 3:33; “He doth not afflict willingly”! If God consulted only His own pleasure, He would not afflict us at all: it is for our profit that He “scourges.” Ever remember that the great High Priest Himself is “*touched with the feeling of our infirmities*”; yet, notwithstanding, He employs the rod! God is love, and nothing is so sensitive as love. Concerning the trials and tribulations of Israel of old, it is written, “In all their affliction *He* was afflicted” (<sup><230D></sup>Isaiah 63:9); yet out of love He chastens. How this manifests and magnifies the unselfishness of God’s love!

Here, then is the Christian supplied with an effectual shield to turn aside the fiery darts of the wicked one. As we said at the beginning, Satan ever seeks to take advantage of our trials: like the fiend that he is, he makes his fiercest assaults when we are most cast down. Thus it was that he attacked Job — “Curse God and die.” And thus some of us have found it. Did he not, in the hour of suffering and sorrow, seek to remind you that when you had become increasingly diligent in seeking to please and glorify God, the darkest clouds of adversity followed; and say, How unjust God is; what a miserable reward for your devotion and zeal! Here is your recourse, fellow-Christian: say to the Devil, “It is written, ‘Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.’ “

Again; if Satan cannot succeed in traducing the character of God and cause us to doubt His goodness and question His love, then he will assail our

assurance. The Devil is most persevering: if a frontal attack falls, then he will make one from the rear. He will assault your assurance of sonship: he will whisper “*You* are no child of His: look at your condition, consider your circumstances, contrast those of other Christians. *You* cannot be an object of God’s favor; you are deceiving yourself; your profession is an empty one. If you *were* God’s child, He would treat you very differently. Such privations, such losses, such pains, show that you cannot be one of His.” But say to him, “It is written, ‘Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.’”

Let our final thought be upon the last word of our text: “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He *receiveth*.” The one whom God scourges is not rejected, but “received” — received up into glory, welcomed in His House above. First the cross, then the crown, is God’s unchanging order. This was vividly illustrated in the history of the children of Israel: God “chose them in the furnace of affliction,” and many and bitter were their trials ere they reached the promised land. So it is with us. First the wilderness, then Canaan; first the scourging, and then the “receiving.” May we keep ourselves more and more in the love of God.