

We are the clay

The work of your hand



But now, O LORD,
You are our Father;
We are the clay, and You our potter;
And all we are the work of Your hand.

Isaiah 64:8

THE CHASTENING OF GOD

⁵And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; ⁶for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." (c.f. Proverbs 3:11-12)

⁷If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? (Num 16:22) ¹⁰For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Hebrews 12:5-11

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE CHASTENED?

The words 'chasten' and 'chastise' are used interchangeably throughout the New and Old Testaments. The word 'chasten' typically leans more towards "training or teaching" (Titus 2:12) whereas 'chastise' is used more heavily to denote physical rebuke (1 Cor 11:32; 2 Cor 6:9; Rev 3:19) or verbal admonishment (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:25). Either way, both of these words are used to describe the hand of God on our life to bring us to a place of repentance and knowledge of the truth.

WRATH OR LOVE?

We need to be careful not to put ourselves in the judgment seat here, because God's will is Sovereign and we have no place to judge *Him*. However to help us understand what is happening to us when we experience trials, we need to put some things into perspective.

THE WAGES OF OUR SIN

Romans 6:23
For the wages of sin is death;

Thought I'd just throw that one in there to remind us of what we deserve! We deserve death...*eternal death*. Our sins don't deserve us a slap on the backside, or the loss of our prized possessions. That's not what I call punishment for sins...they are perhaps consequences of sin.

Consequence is that which follow something on which it depends

Discipline is training to improve strength or self-control. It sometimes involves punishment in order to enforce obedience

Punishment is the practice of imposing something unpleasant or aversive on a person, usually in response to disobedience, defiance, or behavior deemed morally wrong

Wages are a recompense for worthy acts or retribution for wrongdoing

Things are already making more sense, right? Let put some everyday examples to these definitions to help us distinguish between them...

CONSEQUENCE

1. A young man is at a party and has a few drinks...ok, a few too many. He decides to drive home and on the way he has an accident and writes his car off.
2. A friend of the family is terminally ill and I am asked by God to go and speak to him about eternity. I procrastinate because I have other things that I need to do first, but by the time I get there to talk to him, he has passed away.

Is either of these people being 'punished' for what they did or didn't do? No. These are just the outcomes of decisions that they made.

DISCIPLINE

1. A young child hits his brother with a toy and the toddler runs crying to mummy. The mother brings the young child aside and talks with him about why his actions were wrong and instructs him to apologise to his brother before he is allowed to return to play.
2. I lose my job in the midst of financial strain so that God can teach me the joy of complete contentment in Him.

Neither of these examples uses a form of harsh punishment. The mother in the first scenario could have punished the young child (with a wooden spoon) but instead she felt it more constructive to nurture him through the softness of humility. Some would see the second scenario as a punishment from God for not being good with my finances, but God affords the opportunity to nurture me and bring out of a place of worry and into a place of peace.

PUNISHMENT

1. Over the past week a young child has been disciplined for throwing tantrums by being placed in 'time-out'. This approach doesn't seem to be working and his tantrum throwing is getting worse. The parents decide that he needs to be punished for his behaviour since the 'soft approach' isn't working. They resort to a loving yet firm smack on the bottom to awaken the child to the severity of his actions.
2. When we continuously indulge in sinful behaviour disregarding the prompting of the spirit through softer discipline, God gives us over to the lusts of the flesh that we can see the severity of our actions and our soul may be saved.

Punishment involves pain. If it didn't, we wouldn't pay attention would we? But notice, in both of these examples, how the punishment is for the wellbeing of the recipient. Yes I know, not all punishment that we receive is done with the right attitude, but you get the picture.

WAGES

Wages are virtually something that we deserve or are owed. Wages *must* be given to us. We have done something in advance that entitles us to the repayment of our work.

1. I work 8 hours which is paid at \$20 per hour so I am owed or entitled to \$160.
2. I sin once which is paid to be by death so I am owed or entitled to death

An employer would be seen as 'unjust' if he didn't give us our entitlement...we would even take him to court over it! God is a *just* God, and as much as He would love to '*not pay us*' what we are owed for our sin...He has to.

THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION

Romans 8:1

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

So what this means is that the wages that we were owed for our sins has been paid to Christ on the cross. I see the cross as 2 things:

1. Christ paid the price for our sin...willingly
2. The price of our sin was paid to Him...undeservingly

The second point just give sit a little twist I reckon. Makes you see it in a different light. So, the wages of our sin has been paid, therefore we no longer will have to experience 'eternal death' as a result. *But* I don't want anyone to get confused here; the other 3 still stand (consequence, discipline and punishment). Remember, punishment is for our own good, not for our detriment.

THE LOVE OF OUR FATHER

Hebrews 12:5-6

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

This passage is actually a Greek translation of the original Hebrew passage from the Old Testament seen here in Proverbs 3:11-12

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction; for whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.

We'll just look at them interchangeably. The key point to notice here is that God disciplines us out of *love for us*. I guess this could be a confusing topic for someone who has received hardship or punishment from someone that they love, who, despite what they say, are most definitely not doing it out of selfless love. To the inflictor, it may have seemed like an *act of love* but it was done out of selfish motivation.

But for the most part, as adults, we can understand the idea of 'discipline in love'. If you don't, just bear with us, you never know, maybe you'll discover it here.

LIGITIMATE OR ILLEGITIMATE?

Hebrews 12:8

But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

The word 'illegitimate' means *inauthentic*. It also means that it is not being what it was intended to be. I like the term "of another father"...it's blunt and cuts deep. An illegitimate child, unloved by the father (and usually abandoned), was neglected, particularly in manner of education and discipline.

This is a big deal! If you don't feel like you are being disciplined by your father in heaven then you seriously need to reevaluate your faith. If God truly is your father and He has claimed you to be His child, then you should be expecting some form of chastening. On the other hand, if you are simply in church, claiming to be a Christian but not being a disciple then you have been told that you are 'of another father'...not of God. Could you have been abandoned? I hope that ruffles your feathers, because I'm definitely feeling a draft!

Yes, I know that God says the he will never leave us nor forsake us, but He is talking to His legitimate children here, those that are 'of Christ'. If your looking smugly around the Church, thinking to yourself that those people who are facing trials in their life aren't 'proper Christians', then you need to think twice. Perhaps you should be wondering why your not!

John 15:2

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

I've read this verse a million times but I never noticed this; if you feel like you're being 'pruned' then maybe your bearing fruit that you can't see, or perhaps haven't noticed. Ok, I know pruning hurts, but that's actually encouraging!! There have been so many times where I feel like I've been through a furnace and back yet can't seem to 'produce' anything godly in my life, no matter how hard I try. Then one day you turn around and you're showing solid signs of your deep roots in Christ! That is really cool. You may not see the fruit at first because it is so clouded by the rest of your life, but if it hurts then it's likely that God can see it and He's on your case, to make sure you keep producing it! Talk about hidden gems!

Just one quick thing before we move on....

Hebrews 12:7

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons

The word 'deals' in the Greek means '*to bear toward*'. That means that when God is chastening us He is getting closer! I know it doesn't feel like it, but when you are being chastened by God, He is leaning in a little closer to you. Very cool!

OUR RESPONSE TO THE LOVE OF THE FATHER

SUBMISSION

Hebrews 12:9

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in submission to the Father of spirits and live?

The word 'respect; in the Greek means a few things:

- ✳ To shame (dishonour) oneself before someone
- ✳ Withdraw, invert, turn about
- ✳ Bring reflection and affect

For discipline to be fruitful in our lives, we need to understand why it is happening. Nearly ever time that I was correctly disciplined as a child (at least those that I can remember, or want to remember) I understood why. Yes, I was a smart kid. But that understanding of why I was being disciplined gave me a greater respect for my parents. I had developed a healthy fear, of not only their judgment or discipline, but of their wisdom and love. Fits of rage and reaction to circumstances does not develop a healthy fear. Fear of wrath perhaps, but not respect for person.

shame

So once we understand the error of our ways we are now in a position to be ashamed of them. To 'shame' yourself, doesn't mean to carry the burden of shame for ever. It means to recognise the reverence that God deserves and how lowly and unrighteous you are compared to Him. This is humility.

withdrawal

From my understanding, the term 'withdraw' is an act of humility (as opposed to an act of seclusion). The action of turning about (withdrawal) is in contrast to 'turn and face'. We all know at least one child (or adult) who doesn't know how to take correction or criticism. The most common response is to rebut. I've been told that if I come across a feisty or territorial dog, I shouldn't look it straight in the eyes. Dog's see your eye contact and your 'turn and face' stance as a challenge. We are supposed to turn away from the dog, almost in submission.

This is exactly what God (and our parents) expect from us. They don't want us to challenge them they want us to submit.

reflection and affect

Reflection involves contemplation – calm, lengthy and intent consideration

Affect is the response that the outcome of your reflection has on your attitude and feelings.

God is not disciplining or punishing us just for the sake of it. He wants us to think about His chastening and change the way we think and feel about our actions.

REPENTANCE

Following our change in thoughts, attitude and feelings, we are expected to learn from our experience and change our actions. That, my friend, is repentance; which we will not cover in depth in this study.

PROFIT OR LOSS?

THE PROFIT OF DISCIPLINE

If chastening is done out of love then it must be good for us right? Let's see what good things we can expect for our suffering.

RIGHTEOUSNESS & PEACE

Hebrews 12:11

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Isaiah 32:17

The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.

Isaiah 57:2

He shall enter into peace; they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness.

We can see here that righteousness and peace go together. Our trials and our responses to them develop righteousness as we conform our hearts to God's guidance and truth.

Peace means to have 'harmonious relationships' but it also means to 'be whole'. We shouldn't expect our earth relationships to be all roses because we know that we will suffer persecutions from men, but as for our relationship with God; that we can have peace in.

WISDOM & UNDERSTANDING

Look up Proverbs 3:11-26. This a very long passage describing the beautiful promises to those who gain wisdom and understanding from God's Devine Chastening.

¹⁴For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold.

PERSERVERANCE & PATIENCE

Romans 5:3

And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;

1 Thessalonians 1:3

remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

The words 'perseverance and patience' have the same meaning in the Greek. *Hupomone*^{NT:5281} is associated with hope. We are able to continue on and bear beneath our trials because we hold onto the hope that we have in Christ.

THE GLORY OF GOD

Don't forget, this live is not all about us; in fact it isn't about us *at all*. The fact that we get anything out of our struggles is an act of grace. Everything is for the glory of God.

Philippians 1:11

being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

I like this explanation, from Barnes' Notes, of our growth in God

It is a tree that bears good fruit, and we do not expect the fruit to form and ripen at once. It may be long maturing, but it will be rich and mellow when it is ripe. It frequently requires a long time before all the results of affliction appear-as it requires months to form and ripen fruit. Like fruit it may appear at first sour, crabbed, and unpalatable; but it will be at last like the ruddy peach or the golden orange.

RECOGNISING THE HAND OF GOD

Hebrews 12:5

And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons:

Have we utterly forgotten God's word? Have we even read it? Do we understand it? If we aren't aware of the fact that we should expect trials as Disciples of Christ then that means that you mustn't haven't read this verse...

Proverbs 6:23

reproofs of instruction are the way of life,

Or, perhaps you have forgotten. What about this one...

Proverbs 10:17

He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray.

Well, if you didn't know those ones, now you do. But why can't we see God's hand *during* the time of chastening?

AN UNFAMILIAR WAY

Isaiah 42:16

*I will bring the blind by a way they did not know;
I will lead them in paths they have not known.
I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight.
These things I will do for them, and not forsake them.*

It's most likely, in fact, it's certain, that your walk through trials will be as a blind man. If God took you through a path that you were familiar with and comfortable in then it would most likely be the path through sin and flesh. Besides the old saying is true...

*If you always do what you've always done,
then you'll always get what you've always got*

God wants to take us out of this worldly mindset and into the deepest parts of his mind and heart. We know that His ways and thoughts are completely different to our so what makes us think that His discipline isn't going to be different to what we originally expected?

Isaiah 55:8-9

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

The thing is, we will be hard pressed, most of the time, trying to decipher whether our trials are a consequence of our life, or direct discipline from God. And really, what does it matter. The fact is that God is in control anyway. If it is the consequence of something we've done or neglected, then we still need to go through it right? So I think we need to *discipline ourselves* (if God's not already going it) to look to the greener pastures. It would be silly to complain and turn back from a stony road if it was taking me to a better place!

Just be confident that God has His hand in everything!

CONSEQUENCE OF REJECTING DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:5

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

The word 'despise' means to 'care little about', and 'discouraged' means to 'grow weary from'. These are the two things that we are most likely to do. Those that don't take the saving faith of Christ seriously will be most likely to care little about gaining wisdom through their trials. On the other hand the one who values his sonship in Christ will probably suffer many trials and will be hard pressed to stand beneath them. But there is a harsh reality for those who rebel or despise the chastening of God.

THE PRICE OF REBELLION

Deuteronomy 21:18-21

¹⁸"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, ¹⁹then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. ²⁰And they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' ²¹Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you and all Israel shall hear and fear.

That is the very first time that I had ever read that scripture. I didn't know such a thing happened. That is old fashioned discipline (well actually that's punishment). But look at us now; we can't even give our kid a smack on the bum!

This passage is descriptive of our spiritual discipline as well. Paul speaks about how he gave Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan so that they could learn!!

1Timothy 1:20

of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

But hang on; I thought God was the one that taught us? Yep, He is, but if we don't listen to His advice and refuse to change under His discipline, then He will take you out of the gates of His city and give you over the authority of this world, which is Satan. That's not to say that He won't accept you back when you've learned your lesson (if you do). You may think that's a little harsh, but the reality is, that if you don't repent from your sin and *follow the example of Christ* then you *will* go to hell. God knows that He doesn't want that for you, so He is doing what any loving father would do...let you learn for yourself!

THE WAY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Acts 9:31

Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.

Philippians 2:12

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

If we put these two verses together we discover that to walk in the fear of the Lord is to walk in *obedience*.

The word fear used here means 'a deep sense of accountability towards God'. But what's the deal with the trembling? Trembling means 'a shaky motion'; so why would we get that?

Matthew 10:28

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Well if God stood before me having the ability to end my life into Heaven or Hell, I would definitely be shaken in my boots!

From the book of Proverbs we learn:

The "fear of the Lord" is the beginning of knowledge and wisdom, and it comes through instruction.

Proverbs 1:7

*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
But fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

And from this study we learn:

Accepting correction from Lord develops wisdom.

Proverbs 3:11-14

¹¹ *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction;*

¹² *For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.* ¹³ *Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding;* ¹⁴ *for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold.*

The process of accepting the discipline of the Lord involves obedience to repentance. Therefore...

Wisdom is found in obedience.

DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED

ALL ARE PARTAKERS

Hebrews 12:1

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by **so great a cloud of witnesses**, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us*

We are not the only ones in this race! All true and born again Christians are being chastened by God. We have a cloud of witnesses watching as we stand strong beneath the burden. This is why it is so important to be fellowshiping in the family of God. Not just going to church and listening to the sermon but to be in close relationship with our brothers and sister. We are told to carry each others burdens (Gal 6:2). When we set our eyes on others afflictions, not only do we see that we are not alone in this race, but we will also realise that our afflictions are mild compared to some.

2 Peter 1:4

by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Being partakes in Christ's suffering also makes us partakers of His glory. The fact is that the 'way of the cross' means that suffering must precede glory.

Romans 8:16-18

- ¹⁶ *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*
¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*
¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

EVEN CHRIST...

learned through suffering

Hebrews 5:8

though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

must suffer before glory

Luke 17:24-25

For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

was persecuted

John 15:20

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

ENDURE

Hebrews 12:7

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

Endure means to 'remain under'. If we remain under the discipline and love of God, He will treat us as sons. I most certainly do not want to be called, illegitimate.

IT IS ONLY FOR A FEW DAYS

Hebrews 12:10

For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

This verse is used to contrast the time of chastening for our earthly parent as opposed to that of our Heavenly Father. Our earthly discipline lasts only as long as our bodies do on the earth, yet the effects of our spiritual discipline last for eternity. Not only this, but our life on earth is but a vapour compared to eternity in heaven.

James 4:14

For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

Proverbs 3

- ¹My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands;
²For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.
- ³Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart,
⁴And so find favor and high esteem in the sight of God and man.
- ⁵Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.
- ⁷Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil.
⁸It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones.
- ⁹Honor the LORD with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase;
¹⁰So your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.
- ¹¹My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor detest His correction;
¹²For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.
- ¹³Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding;
¹⁴For her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold.
- ¹⁵She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her.
¹⁶Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand riches and honor.
¹⁷Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
- ¹⁸She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who retain her.
- ¹⁹The LORD by wisdom founded the earth; by understanding He established the heavens;
²⁰By His knowledge the depths were broken up, and clouds drop down the dew.
- ²¹My son, let them not depart from your eyes — keep sound wisdom and discretion;
²²So they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck.
²³Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble.
- ²⁴When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.
²⁵Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes;
²⁶For the LORD will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.
- ²⁷Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do so.
²⁸Do not say to your neighbor, "Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,"
When you have it with you.
- ²⁹Do not devise evil against your neighbor, for he dwells by you for safety's sake.
³⁰Do not strive with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm.
³¹Do not envy the oppressor, and choose none of his ways;
- ³²For the perverse person is an abomination to the LORD, but His secret counsel is with the upright.
³³The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just.
³⁴Surely He scorns the scornful, but gives grace to the humble.
³⁵The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the legacy of fools.

