

A WORD IN ITS SEASON

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CHASTENING

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AEM I wondered if we could look into the matter of chastening. The scripture in Hebrews presents it very clearly, that it is God who chastens. He does it in a particular way and He has a particular end in mind. I wondered if it is that which we could look into in these scriptures.

Chastening may include a wide spectrum of things and we may touch upon some aspects. I read the verse in Job as it is presented there as correction or adjustment. We have the thought in Scripture of chastising too, which according to the dictionary is a more punitive thought. I do not want to limit how God can chasten or how He can chastise in any way. The thought in mind is primarily as to correction and adjustment. God uses chastening as a means of doing that.

In Hebrews we have things that have to be set aside. It says, "laying aside every weight, and sin which so easily entangles us". The weights and sin are things that we allow and we get caught up with. We allow our attention and our energy to be caught up and entangled in these things, and we are to lay them aside. In comparison, further down we find that chastening is something to be borne. Chastening is something that we are to bear and we are to learn from it. God is using things at the present time in a particular way to chasten His people in a positive way. Chastening has a positive end in view. It may colour our reading that it says here "whom the Lord loves he chastens" - *whom He loves*.

In the book of Job, we find something additional brought in by Eliphaz. I wanted to just touch on this; we will have to be sensitive to the Spirit as to how much time we spend on it. There is an echo here of the proverb quoted in Hebrews, that says we are not to despise the chastening. Eliphaz says, "happy is the man whom God correcteth". That is not a natural thing. If you are corrected or chastened it can generally be a bit irksome. It says here, "happy is the man whom God correcteth". That is a result of God's chastening; that there is happiness in a man. I read in Acts because of the word in Job as to correcting. We find that Apollos is corrected by a brother and sister,

who are able to do it with a very positive outcome. We will touch on the detail. The brethren know the scripture well but we find at the beginning that he was teaching accurately: he “taught **exactly** the things concerning Jesus, knowing only the baptism of John”, and by the end of the section having received adjustment and correction from Aquila and Priscilla he is convincing “the Jews publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ”. What an adjustment! He needed correction and the way in which it is done there seems to me to be very beautiful. We need to see the outcome God had in mind, that Christ is magnified by what He has done and the way the brethren act accordingly.

Finally, I trust this is a right application of the scripture in Numbers. It appeals to me that we have the children of Israel seen here through a variety of movements. Assembling, setting forward, in conflict, in a day of gladness; and it is all directed by priests blowing these trumpets. What has arrested my attention is the fact that these are “trumpets of silver; of **beaten** work”. These trumpets have been worked on and they have been adjusted and shaped until the sound is clear and they can be used by priests to indicate how the children of Israel are to proceed. I am applying the fact that it is beaten work in the sense of what is corrective and what is adjusting. There comes a point when these trumpets are clear and they are able to be used to direct the people.

DBB At the end of the section in Hebrews it says, “afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness”. Would that link with “happy is the man”, in Job? As we get the gain of discipline and chastening then there is happiness towards God.

AEM I think that is one of the key things we are to learn from God's chastening. He does not always have just one end in view. Here there is what is yielded, what is fruitful from it. It is the “fruit of righteousness”. What is according to God is upheld. It is peaceful and it brings about a circumstance which we might think almost impossible, when we are passing through the chastening. God will bring about His end in a peaceful way and the happiness that is referred to in Job will be the portion of someone who has learned God through chastening.

DBB Apollos would be like that.

AEM It does not appear that he ever found it irksome.

MJW I suppose it is not too obvious to say that the word chastening comes from the word 'chaste'. You get the idea of the "chaste virgin" (2 Cor 11: 2); so you can see here what direction it is in. It is a process that results in a chaste condition.

AEM I was thinking of that. God does not do this needlessly -

Our Father's hand will never cause
His child a needless tear.

(Hymn 210)

Chastening can be very difficult and can feel very onerous but I think what you point out is very important. We have to see where it is heading. Where and what is God moving towards as He chastens? He has a right to do it to. He has a right to test and to prove and to correct and adjust; not just for the sake of it, but with an end in view that there is that which is according to His righteousness.

DBB We can then enjoy the presence of God in greater liberty.

AEM Yes; there would be the two sides. He brings us into accord with what is for God. As we are in accord with it, the peaceful fruit that you have referred to becomes our portion.

RDP The subject here is the race, and running with endurance. The note to entanglement is "besets". It is something that will not go away. Every time you move it is in front of you. Every time you try to do something it stops you. Every time you think it intrudes; it besets. These are particularly testing things. They take you out of the race.

AEM I think we see the two things that he introduces at the beginning, the "weight" and the "sin", everywhere. Every way we look we see these things and it says they easily entangle us. The writer's answer is that we are to lay them aside. We might think that if they usually entangle us we have really got to work to shake them off or unpick them or whatever; but he says here to lay them aside. Just deliberately take these things and lay them aside; this would be in contrast to the chastening. We do not have the ability or the right to lay that aside.

RDP I think that is right. Sometimes we have to stand back from the detail and lay aside every weight and sin. It is a deliberate action. These things are very real. It is in Scripture; it does not say it might happen, but it does happen. Sometimes every thought you have, everything is beset by something; there is something dignified about "laying aside". There is something almost like the anointing in that

really. You lay aside the thing.

AEM It is an example of the way that we can be dignified in these things. We are not to be agitated or worked up about the way that God passes us. As you say, if we can take a step back (and the Lord would help us to do that), we can lay aside the things that we know ensnare us. We know individually the things that entangle us. We all know; what entangles me may not entangle you. We know what they are and sometimes we still head straight towards them, and then we are surprised that they entangle us again. The writer here says, 'Just lay those aside' because God has something maybe just to chasten and correct with and we need to learn the lesson of that.

JAT I wonder if it is His ownership that gives God the right to speak. If we know the one to whom we belong that is a great help in the whole process.

AEM You mean we are His? I think so, and He has a right. I cannot opt out of it; I cannot sneak away somewhere and not allow God to chasten me. I cannot physically do it and I do not have the right to do it. When it comes, what am I going to learn?

JAT Love lies behind it if we have to chasten. We might feel that we are not loved but the more you go into it, the more you realise that actually our love is because we are loved. We need to accept it as a blessed thing.

AEM The flesh reacts to chastening in a certain way. Naturally we do not like it. We fight against it, we push back against correction, adjustment and chastening. We push back and we may apportion blame, but when God chastens I believe those who are His creatures, those who are His children, have to listen and to learn from it.

ADP The word "weight" gives the impression that it could be some large thing. It could be a state of mind, it could be an attitude, jealousy, and or any of these things. It is still a weight and it is entangling us. You cannot necessarily see these things.

AEM That is helpful. I thought about that just as we got here this morning. I thought that, if I walk into the room and hold something against a brother or sister, that is a weight and it will entangle me. If I held something against you, for example, and you were to contribute in this reading, that would colour my view of the contribution, and that is wrong. It is to be set aside. All these things are to be laid aside and no

one else can do that for me; I have to do it for myself.

BCB I can choose how I respond to chastening. It seems from this scripture that there are three responses; I can despise it, or faint under it, or I can be exercised by it. The chastening comes: how am I going to respond?

AEM That is good. The word here to the Hebrews was, "ye have quite forgotten the exhortation". He says you have forgotten it, but you are not to despise it. That is our first reaction; as you say we can choose but I think our primary reaction is not to like it. You think, 'Why can my life not be more plain and straightforward because I could have more time to praise God if I did not have to deal with the chastening'. The colour of the praise may be the more glorious as a result of the chastening.

RDP-r I wonder if we need to see that there are two things within us. One is the work of God and the other is self will. The will is really what causes the need for chastening. That needs to be dealt with. God would free us from will in order to be available for Him. He may have to do it through the spirit of chastening.

AEM I think so. My impression is that this whole area is so wide. God's ways and His government, and the way He works, are so wide. I think it may be that if I pursue a line of self will and I do not listen to what God is saying, He may have to chastise me, and the definition of that word is punitive, it may be punishment. Doing that is His strange work. As far as chastening is concerned, God chastens; that is He just adjusts and corrects and moves all the time because we have need of it. He may just be adjusting His work in us as well as addressing what is of the flesh, do you think?

RDP-r Apollos clearly was seeking to go on in a right way but he needed greater light in relation to the truth and that may be how the chastening comes in.

AEM It may be how God works in me; I may just need to see things from a different stand point and God needs to chasten me just to bring me to that view.

GJR Partly linking with what has just been suggested, you are helpfully presenting this as the discipline of God. Discipline can actually be traced to each of the divine Persons and perhaps this is particularly the Father's discipline. In 1 Corinthians 11 we read of the

Lord's discipline but I think in my experience I would say there is such a thing as the Spirit's discipline.

AEM That is helpful. I would not want to limit this in any way at all. You would understand that. I think we have to submit ourselves to the fact that we are to be disciplined; we are to be chastened because we will never arrive at this through our own efforts. God has to do that.

DBB It says, "speaks to you as to sons"; what God has in mind is one of the highest thoughts of sonship.

AEM There is a very useful illustration here for us. Some of us were occupied recently speaking about the actions of the Father, and how we are to learn from them, and how they are in love. This is from the Father and it is with a view to us entering into something that is not obtainable any other way. God has these great thoughts for us and in affection, in His great love, He gently moves us towards entering into these blessed things. The thought of sonship is the highest honour He bestows on us.

DJW Is the Father's chastening connected with the family? If I am a prince I am expected to act like one. It is not a legal thing. Love wants to be represented. A family man would act like the Father would act despite the circumstances.

AEM I think so; we are in God's house. We find our part within God's house. God may have to chasten us as to our behaviour. This is not legal in any sense; this is done in love. The scripture here is very clear about that and God continues to do it in love. He will continue to do it until the Lord comes.

JB Is it part of the Father's reception process, receiving us as sons? He wants us to come nearer to Him. There is a verse in Proverbs that speaks of "the son in whom he delighteth", Pro 3: 12. It is in view of coming to know God in nearness to Him.

AEM That is helpful. To do that - to refer again to the two types of things we have here - there are those things we lay aside, and then there is something God is still going to have to do, just to bring me into full conformity with His presence.

JAT There was so much that was commendable about Job. God would not hear him spoken against in front of Satan by any means. The matter of holiness is such an important matter in our lives because to

enter into divine things that must be with us.

AEM The words here are very encouraging to our hearts. He speaks of the fathers we have had in the flesh, chastening for a few days as seemed good to them. God chastens that we might be “partaking of his holiness”. What a portion that we have to enter into. I might have to endure some adjustment, some chastening to be a partaker of that. Surely that is as nothing compared with the prize.

SJH I was just going to ask if you could say something as to what is involved in enduring. It would seem from this passage that the way that we are to progress through chastening is enduring. The scripture in Romans says, “tribulation works endurance; and endurance, experience; and experience, hope”, Rom 5: 3, 4. Just help us as to what is actually involved in taking this on.

AEM I do not have much experience of it. We can do no better than to look at the one who is described here as the “leader and completer of faith”. Mr Darby comments as to the Lord Jesus in this section. He says, 'He who has Himself run the whole career of faith', Synopsis-Colossians to Revelation p253. That is quite an arresting expression. That meant He had to endure. One reason He had to endure was because what was due to me was laid upon Him. The word is used there in Isaiah “the chastisement of our peace”, Isa 53: 5. The Lord Jesus had that laid upon Him; do you think to look at endurance we have to have our eyes firmly on Him, One who endured? He endured everything; He had in Himself no need to, but He did.

SJH I think that is good and as we set our eyes on Christ there is an assurance that we can rest in.

AEM That shows us the end. As we look on Him we then see the end. A Man who is living and glorified comes into view, not the only One who endured and suffered but One who is living and glorified, and I think if we endure chastening in the light of One who is glorified, that will help us to come through it, because then chastening does not become an end in itself.

PWB What does it mean to be exercised by it?

AEM Say what you have been thinking about.

PWB I would like some help because it seems that it is an additional thought to enduring it. We have to accept God's ways; they are

sovereign and we can accept them. Perhaps to be exercised by them is a little further on again. Would you accept that when Paul spoke about “a thorn for the flesh” (2 Cor 12: 7), there was an element of chastisement there? Paul had quite a conversation with the Lord about it. He was exercised by it. It is good that we are exercised. We can just say that is our lot in life and we will just carry on with it, but if we are to get what the Lord means by the chastisement or what the Father means by it we have to be exercised. We have to go to Him about it.

AEM I think so. The example you raise is very interesting. God did at least two things with the thorn for the flesh that Paul had. One is that He reminded him that he was still in the flesh; the thorn for the flesh. The other thing that He did was prove his faith by it. Chastening is to do that. Chastening reminds us that naturally left to ourselves we will take the wrong routes and make the wrong choices. If we are to prove our faith in it we become exercised as to what it is God is doing.

PWB Paul is absolutely definite as to why he was given it; “that I might not be exalted”, v 7. He got the reason, not naturally. The thorn for the flesh remained with him but he knew why it was there, and it really helps us if we can get to that point because it stops us being disappointed, and annoyed, and even angry at God, when we realise why He has put it there in the divine wisdom that is involved in it.

AEM “Despise not the chastening of the Lord”. I think if we despise it, even if we pray for it to be removed, that is almost erring in going against God. Paul asked for it to be removed three times and it was not. What I would suggest to the brethren is that we pray that we get the gain of what God is doing in each one of us, not in my brother or my brethren, but in me.

RDP On the same subject, he says “we have had the fathers of our flesh as chasteners ... shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits”. That seems to be a remarkable expression. It is a small 's' so it must refer to our spirits; “the Father of spirits, and live?”, a lovely expression.

AEM That takes us immediately to the word in Job: “happy is the man whom God correcteth”. Here is the challenge to our spirits: while we are enduring chastening most of us become a little grumpy and a little downcast. The chastening may involve these matters of sorrow. I am not setting that aside, and I think the brethren know that at the present time. It may involve deep matters of sorrow that go right to the heart of

your Christianity and your faith. It says here “happy is the man whom God correcteth”.

RDP Clearly there was an external manifestation of the chastening in Israel's day but it seems now as if there is an inward working. I was thinking about what was said about exercise. There is a working and we can get very angry sometimes about situations. He says to Jonah, “Doest thou well to be angry?”, Jonah 4: 4. We need to give time to allow the Father of spirits to work in relation to these inward things, not so much outward utterances but inward turmoil.

AEM Our spirits become agitated very quickly. One thing about chastening is - and we see it with Peter, and we see it in others too - that sometimes God allows Satan to do the chastening. It is very exercising when that happens. The Lord said to Peter, “behold Satan has demanded to have you, to sift you as wheat; but I have besought for thee that thy faith fail not”, Luke 22: 31, 32. God had allowed him to do it. God is in control. You think of Job here. Job lost all his family, he lost his health, everything that he had and still he would not accuse God. His friends tried to persuade him one way or the other but still he would not accuse God, and then God brings him right through to see that He can be hindered in no thought of His. What exercise Job went through! Just right here at the beginning of the book the word comes that the man whom God correcteth is happy.

AMcK Does it help us to get to the Person who does the chastening? You have been emphasising that this is something that God does. We often speak of what God might allow but this is intensely positive for us because it brings us closer to the One who is doing these things, do you think? On Thursday we were speaking locally as to Jacob, in Genesis. He was directed to go to the land of Padan-Aram, Gen 28. That was in view that he might learn God. Is that the result here?

AEM I was thinking of that, and I was confirmed on Thursday as to it. As he started moving, it appears he just started walking and when he came to the place that he would name Bethel there was not a fixed place, but he just happened to be there when it got dark, and he lay down and God says, 'I am going to have to do with you. You will not learn the entire lesson the first time, I am going to bring you back here', as is pointed out five chapters later. 'I will bring you back here and it will become an altar but I am going to have to do with you and I need to start moulding you in that sense.' I think the chastening of the Almighty is to

that end. That God might mould us for *His* pleasure and how *He* wants us.

AMcK Is that the thought of partaking of His holiness. We become characterised by that.

AEM Yes; and that is the standard.

DJW I was thinking of this question of exercise. Rebecca says, "why am I thus?", Gen 25: 22. In answer God really sets out a whole course of chastening and discipline that will come into her family relations. It is interesting that you get such a protracted view.

AEM It may be part of what being "exercised by it" means. It is something that has to be worked at. When something comes in, you may sense that God is having to chasten and having to say something. If the exercise went away the first time I prayed about it, and that happened every time, I maybe would not learn anything.

DJW Speaking from experience, perhaps God is working on a far wider front than the initial thing that I see that I am passing through at the time. He may be doing something on a much broader front.

AEM Is that not often the way? We find that God has something to say to us. Maybe for example He has to say something in our health, maybe He just touches our health, but that may stop us doing something else. That in turn may have been part of a course of action that I was intent on. The initial thing that God chastens us for may not be just the thing that He is saying to us. I think what has been suggested about being exercised is to really get to God and say to Him, 'What am I being taught in this? What am I to learn in what I am passing through?'

PWB I would like to add something that I read from Mr Stoney. He referred to God's ways with us in discipline. I am not to despise the chastening, like a duck in the rain, indifferent to it, braving as it were everything; neither am I to "faint when ... rebuked of him", like a hen in the rain, which is a miserable object. I am neither to be miserable nor indifferent, but thoughtful and exercised, JBS vol4 p284. We feel the effect; we are not just to shrug it off. God means us to learn something but it is to bring us to Him, to bring us to that closer and nearer relationship and understanding of Himself. That is where we get happy rather than being miserable.

AEM I think so. The word “despise not the chastening” seems to be key. If we despise it we will be miserable. If we are irritated by it and it gets us down we will be miserable because God is not going to leave us alone in that respect. He will achieve His end. If we are happy and we pass through it as one who accepts it from God and seeks to learn what He is doing, then I think we will be brought into accordance with His mind.

RDP-r Would the refiner in Malachi be something of this? It says, “he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he will purify the children of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver; and they shall offer unto Jehovah an oblation in righteousness”, chap 3: 3. They go through the exercise, through the refining process and the result is “an oblation in righteousness”.

AEM That is a helpful word, 'refined'; we need to use that in regard to God's work. It is very appropriate.

RDP-r We are in mixed conditions at the moment but there is a work of God in the heart of every one which is inviolate, and God is really bringing that to light by chastening.

AEM Yes; if you will excuse me I will use an example (although a poor one!). We use a training company at work. They come in to a company and they take the raw material that is there, the people that are there, and they polish them up so that they are more effective. If we think of God refining as you say, and adjusting and making us more appropriate for His presence, what a work He has begun in me or you. You will see why we should not despise it.

JB1 Do you think it is part of the refining process that I should realise that I am weak and mortal? The word for man here is 'Enosh' which means weak and mortal. Is that part of the refining process that I have to come to an end of what I am naturally and come to see a view of the work of God in me?

AEM Was it not Job who came to it at the end. He says, “I abhor myself”, Job 42: 6. Everything that he was, he finally came to it that in the sight of God it was nothing and that brings him to repentance, and then God can give him everything.

HJG James speaks beautifully about Job, he says “Ye have heard of the endurance of Job, and seen the end of the Lord;” and then he says, “that the Lord is full of tender compassion and pitiful”, James 5: 11. God

is watching each one all the time, whether we are enduring, whether we are accepting the chastisement. He is watching all the time to bring us to His end.

AEM He watched Job every step of the way. He watched everything; I just come back to it because I am affected by it, and these things are real. He lost his health, he lost his property, and he lost his children. God watched him and God was with him and He brought him to an end of himself. God brought him into line with what He had in mind for him. He may not, and we trust that He will not have to, pass us all that way. He maybe has to pass us some way through chastening to bring us to His end.

BCB I would like to link on with what you were saying about refining. There is a lovely verse in Isaiah. "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction", then it goes on "I will not give my glory to another", chap 48: 10, 11. God is refining something and it might be in the furnace of affliction; it might seem extremely hot and pressured but it is God's choosing.

AEM I think that is what we have to come to. The beginning of accepting this is recognising it is from God's hand. Who can say against God? Who is to go up against God and say it would be better done another way. We cannot do that. It is not to say we like it, but we learn Him.

ADP There is a poem called 'The Refiner's Fire'. There is a verse in that which says,

And His gold did not suffer a bit more heat,
Than was needed to make it pure.

AEM Yes; again that hymn -

Our Father's hand will never cause
His child a needless tear.

There is nothing excessive in achieving what God would achieve. We could speak of Apollos in that way. What interests me in this man is the way that he is brought to a new view of Christ; a new view of the Lord Jesus, simply through a small amount of adjustment. It is interesting, and I find it in my own soul. We do tend to go immediately to the extreme. We go to what God does in extreme circumstances. God may have to just slightly correct us and sometimes we might miss that if

we are not fully aware of what God is saying. Here Apollos “an eloquent man, who was mighty in the scriptures, arrived at Ephesus. He was instructed in the way of the Lord”. You say, 'That is fine, God has achieved His end with Apollos. He knows the Scriptures, he is taught in the ways of the Lord, and he can preach really well, people like listening to him'. God says, 'No, I have to make a slight adjustment'. I wonder whether we can ever say that God has finished adjusting us until the Lord takes us.

GJR It may not stop even then, because we will all be placed before the judgment seat. Even then we may need a slight adjustment.

AEM That is helpful. That would preserve us from ever thinking we have arrived at God's full thought.

GJR I think my perception of everything here is filtered through the fact that I will always be a human creature, because I am in flesh and blood. Even Paul says, “we see now through a dim window obscurely”, 1 Cor 13: 12.

AEM That is maybe one of the weights of Hebrews.

GJR We will see everything clearly.

AEM That is a joy to our hearts to know that we will be brought to that. On the way there I do need continual adjustment. Here we find Aquila and Priscilla who are ready to bring that in, in a beautiful way.

JRB The word “unfolding” is very attractive. It is not being stopped in your tracks and told you have got to follow this line, it is unfolding.

AEM Yes it is; I take two things from that. Firstly is the one that you mention, that they “unfolded to him”. This was not hammering it into him that he might do things differently. The subject matter demanded that unfolding. It needed to be done sympathetically because he was about to preach that Jesus was the Christ. That must be done feelingly and in love.

The second thing was that we should remember what kind of a man he was. This is very similar to Ananias unfolding things to Saul as he did in the manner of a brother. Aquila and Priscilla do it in the house and they do it gently but effectively.

JRB It is interesting; in Luke's words, “being fervent in his spirit, he spoke and taught exactly”; that fervency is protected so that the person

of the Christ can be glorified.

AEM I think it is important that this happens. Aquila and Priscilla did not try and show him it was wrong and he should do things in a different way. In verse 28, he still spoke with great force; that may link with the eloquence. They did not take away what God had given him to use and the ability to do it, but they adjusted his gaze. Before he knew only the baptism of John; now he knows that there is an anointed Man.

JAT Psalm 119 was written by someone who really was totally taken up with God and the enthusiasm that we are speaking of. It says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep thy word", v 67. That was the result of what we are speaking about.

AEM Yes; this husband and wife were very well equipped to do that. I think we know, for example, that they were converted Jews. This was a converted Jew also. They had been at various times in Corinth, in Ephesus, they then were in Rome; they knew Paul's teaching and they had the qualification and experience to unfold a further view of Christ. That is what we need to be able to do. God may just have to correct us in our view of Christ and to use our brethren to do it is a very beautiful way to.

JAT Would you say that the marriage bond is a wonderful bond, and the household too, because they are referred to variously, as husband and wife: so it was a wonderful marriage. The household would be a wonderful place to be able to speak and help.

AEM I have no doubt that the environment in which this was done was conducive to the effect that it had. He could still go out in what was a very dangerous environment: "he with great force convinced the Jews publicly". He did not then go into a house quietly. He went out publicly, using what God had given him by way of ability, using it under greater direction. He has been corrected by those who were able to do it feelingly.

RDP He was instructed in the way of the Lord and they unfolded to him the way of God. John the baptist came on the scene saying, "Make straight the path of the Lord", John 1: 23. There was a certain distinction in the early Acts. I think you mentioned it is almost like an expansion of the truth. I wondered if it is important to see that if we are to be in the path of faith it involves that our view is expanded as to Christ. Not only Christ for me but to see the glory of Christ for God, and

it is important that this man was not in any way defective. Perhaps the fulness of God's thoughts needed to be unfolded to him. It is amazing how quickly he embraces this. If you go to Colossians it speaks about the mystery of God, the fulness of the truth.

AEM There was that in this brother and sister which recognised that there was something further to be developed in Apollos. They recognised that his view needed widening and it needed refining, to use the word we had earlier. They are able to do it. I think that is a beautiful feature because not all of us get to the same place at the same time. We are not all at the same point in our learning and our understanding of the truth. Sometimes we get irritated with one another because someone does not see something exactly as we see it or as clearly as we think we see it. This husband and wife did not get irritated by it; they took Apollos into their home and they unfolded the truth to him, and the result was that a view of the anointed Man came into the heart of Apollos.

PWB They took him to them. That is beautiful; it links with really acting as God acted. As we had in the first scripture He had done it in the environment of affection. They did it in the environment of affection. Metaphorically they washed his feet before they spoke a word of adjustment. They assured him that it was being done in affection before any adjustment was carried out.

AEM I think what you refer to is something that we do well to keep in our hearts. There is the truth, and there is the right view of it, and that will always be the end. They knew that there was a part of the truth that this man did not have the sight for in his heart and they wanted to show him. The way they showed him was in affection. The two cannot be separated. They have to be held close together and the way that it is done brings him to that view. I think it would have been wonderful to hear him preach once he had this view. All of the things that he had, including God-given gift to announce the word, would take on a whole new colour because of the service of this brother and sister.

MTBM There is sensitivity needed as to how we bring correction in, that we do not break someone's confidence or affect them. A young person gives out a hymn in the morning meeting; it may not be quite the right hymn in the right place. How this is handled is important because you want to encourage participation. It may be just a suggestion made.

AEM I think so; one thing I take from this scripture with regard to that

is that they did it in the home. That is often very helpful, because, as you say, confidence is very important in this. The fact remains, just to use the example you give, that you do not want someone giving out a wrong hymn every week. You do not want it to continue. It may be something just needs to be said but it is done in the home and it is done in a beautiful way here with an eye to the result. It is not with a view to just saying that it is wrong, it is not in line with my thought. It is done with an eye to the result that Christ is glorified in the heart of Apollos and he can then use that in service.

We should touch briefly on Numbers. I just wondered if these little touches and corrections of chastening that we have been referring to can be applied to the “trumpets of silver; of **beaten** work”. I am not thinking of beaten in terms of hammering out in a vigorous way, but as I understand it, when they are making instruments, and particularly when they are making brass instruments, the care needed to ensure that it makes the perfect pitch and the perfect note is extreme. Idols that were made of silver in these days were made of molten work. There was not much care needed, that is just poured in, but these silver trumpets were of *beaten* work: care had been taken to ensure that the note and the sound was going to be correct. I wonder whether the view of this was that the priestly service in blowing them would be clear to all the Israelites as they moved. It was not a levitical service, this is priestly, in the sense the movements were for God. The sound was clear whatever the circumstance. We are to be ready for that and the adjustment that leads up to this.

DBB Would Apollos be one that was beaten so that his note was absolutely clear afterwards?

AEM I think so. As we have already said there was - up to a point - nothing wrong with it before, but it was purer as a result of the service of Aquila and Priscilla. It needed a tap just in a certain part to make the note sound clear. If you look through this chapter, each sounding of the trumpet heralded something different. They called them together and then they assembled and then they moved. It was clear what they had to do.

DBB The priest would put things for God first. Then as coming out from God's presence and through the experience of what he has been through he is able to do these other things.

AEM That is helpful. I can try all I like to try and rally the saints

together but if the note is uncertain then it is not going to have this effect. If the note is true, if I have allowed the chastening of God to work upon me, then what I am by way of influence, which is what these trumpets really were, will be according to God.

RDP There were various occasions when they were gathering and assembling, and during the journeying of the camp. There was the alarm, and then they were blown when it was not an alarm and then “in your new moons, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over your sacrifices of peace offering; and they shall be to you for a memorial before your God; I am Jehovah your God”; but it seems that it was a clear call. Paul says, “if the trumpet give an uncertain sound”, 1 Cor 14: 8. It just seems to be in relation to all the movements of the saints and in relation to all their offerings of peace offerings, sacrifices of peace offerings, the alarm, the gathering and the journey. All of it was marked by this feature that there was clarity in the blowing of the trumpet.

AEM All the beating, all the work that was on these trumpets, all the chastening that God may have in mind for me is to an end. It is to an end that there is a certain note; it is to be clear and the same trumpet can be used whatever the circumstance. Whether it is time to move, whether the camp is to move or assemble, whether there is conflict as in verse 9 or a day of gladness as in verse 10, God may not have just one end in mind: He may have many.

AMcK I was thinking of what was referred to at the beginning of the reading as to what was chaste. That would have in mind purity. Does that link with the clarity of the trumpets sound?

AEM I think it does. That must ever be in God's heart. He does not have another standard. If you excuse the expression, He never just says, 'Well that trumpet is just about right, that will be all right'. It was a trumpet of silver of beaten work. God's grace and His faithfulness over the way that He has brought us will bring us to what is pure and what is chaste.

MJW It is going to make us more useful, because if I can make a sound in every circumstance I shall be a help to my brethren rather than perhaps being a specialist. All these different circumstances involve that the person had to be adjusted in various ways so that they could be useful under God's hand in all sorts of circumstances.

AEM That chimes exactly with what I am thinking here. They would not have reached for a different trumpet in a day of conflict to when they were glad. On a day of gladness and in the set feasts, they did not then go and find another one, you might say one that was jollier. They used the one that had been worked on and the one that was tried and tested and could keep everyone together.

ADP There is no trumpet call for retreat. This was for how they were to move, how they were to assemble, how they were to gather, but there was nothing for retreat.

AEM That is good; the very last clause of the verse where we read, “I am Jehovah your God”; the testimony is not going to go backwards. Chastening and discipline is not to hold the testimony back or move it backwards. It is that it might go forward in the clarity of what God would have for us.

DJW What is collective is in view. I was thinking of your reference to 1 Thessalonians 4. We get the trumpet there but we also get the idea of an assembling shout.

AEM It says, “with an assembling shout, with archangel's voice and with trump of God”, 1 Thess 4: 16.

DJW Do you think in that way Paul has in view what will be the final movement?

AEM Yes, and in that sense that is an instance where there will be no doubt as to the sound of the call. That is to be represented here now. It is to do with the Lord's own movements and His own desires.

DJW I wondered whether Paul had that in view. If we have an assembling shout then we need to know how to assemble now. If we hear a trumpet we need to learn to listen for the trumpet now.

AEM I think so. We cannot say where He is working or why He is chastening me let alone anyone else. We are to be exercised by it and learn by it simply that the voice of divine Persons might be clear. We might say that the sound of the divine speaking is clear in heaven: so why maybe is it not clear when it is in my heart?

BCB During the recovery in Nehemiah's time it says, “And he that sounded the trumpet was by me”, Neh 4: 18. The one who was in control of the building and gathering them together could say, “he that

sounded the trumpet was by me”.

AEM It is interesting here that the priests would have been in that place. They would have been at the entrance of the tent of meeting. That is where they gathered. If we are to make any sound at all we have to ensure that we are of this calibre, you might say. There was a scripture this morning on the calendar, “leave not thy place; for quietness pacifieth great offences”, Eccl 10: 4. Leave not thy place. Where is our place? If our place is by Christ, if we are there as you suggested, then quietness there will pacify great offences. The clarity of the chastening, the reason for it, the next movement forward will become clear.

JAT “The trumpeters and singers were as one”, 2 Chron 5: 13. What a moment for God.

AEM That is a good note to finish on. That is in God's heart. The voices, the singing, will we not come up to that tomorrow morning? The voices, the heart, the singers will be as one in the presence of God.

Birmingham

9th November 2013

B C Bodman, Bristol; D B Bodman, Birmingham; J R Brien, Witney;
P W Burton, Taunton; H J Glass, Malvern; S J Herbert, Newport;
J B Ikin, Manchester; M T B Matthews, Birmingham; A McKay, Witney; A
E Mutton, Witney; R D Painter, Yeovil; A D Plant, Birmingham;
R D Plant, Birmingham; G J Richards, Malvern; J A Turner, Malvern;
M J Welch, Newport; D J Willetts, Birmingham

THINGS THAT GOD HATES AND LOVES

Peter J Mutton

Proverbs 6: 12-19

Luke 15: 11-32

You might not fully realise this, but God is a God of love; “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son”, John 3: 16. He loves the world. And He loves you, friend. Is it not a wonderful thing that God should love you? You might say, ‘What is there lovable about me?’. Maybe you are not sure. Maybe you do not love yourself; maybe you dislike yourself. Some people do: they cannot bear to pass a mirror in case they see their reflection. Some people are disgusted with themselves and the things they do but cannot find the power to stop. But God in Jesus is telling you of His love.

It is sobering however to reflect on the fact that there are also things that God hates. I expect there are the things that you hate; maybe the things that some days you have to eat for dinner, things that you have to do at school and you have no option but to do them. But God, because He is holy and a sin-hating God, also hates certain things. He hates things that are an affront to His majesty and to His glory, and in Proverbs where we have read we have a list of six things, and then a seventh is added. The first thing on the list is “**haughty eyes**”. God does not like haughty people. Why would that be? I expect we have all met haughty people. Usually they are people who have been successful; they are a bit haughty because they think they are somebody special. God does not like that; He hates that. *Why?* We see the answer in Jesus, He who came from God and *was* God and was found here in figure as a Man, and who “humbled himself” (Phil 2: 8) to be found like you and me in the condition of men, and who went about doing good, not to haughty people but to people who were nobody. Jesus is knocking on your door tonight because He came to seek and to save that which was lost; He humbled Himself. How can God tolerate people with haughty eyes who think they are special, when His own Son, who **was** special, humbled Himself to be found as a Bondman?

Sinner, see thy God beside thee,
In a servant's form come near,
Sitting, walking, talking with thee!

(Hymn 112)

Jesus has come down to our level because God wants us to know Him. Is not that wonderful? God does not like haughty eyes and He does not like pride. "God sets Himself against the proud, but gives grace to the lowly." James 4: 6; so if you are marked by pride, be aware that it is a thing that God hates and He sets Himself against it.

"A lying tongue" - God hates that too. He hates lies. Maybe you tell lies or maybe you call them fibs. There are no good fibs and a "white lie" is not a good lie. Do not have anything to do with lies because God wants every man to speak truth with his neighbour, Eph 4: 25. Always speak the truth. It might cost you. When the teacher says, 'Who did that?', you may have to say, 'I did it'. Speak the truth, because God honours it. And because you are going to be honest and truthful, you will have to say to God, 'I am a sinner', and God will bless you because for once you have been truthful. Now because you are always going to be truthful that does not mean you have to be rude to people. You put a guard on your mouth and you think before you speak.

He hates **"hands that shed innocent blood"**. If you prayerfully study the ten commandments, you will begin to discover that the love of God lies behind them; He was instructing His people on how to behave. Now He has sent us something more wonderful than that, He has sent us the Lord Jesus. He showed that the law can be summed up in a couple of sentences, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy understanding", and, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself", Matt 22: 37, 39. Jesus says, 'That is the whole law'; that is it in a nutshell. The attitude of God is that He wants you to have right relations with Him and right relations with other people; it is called righteousness. And because of this He hates bloodshed, He hates murder, He hates innocent men losing their lives.

"A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations". Well! Do you think sometimes in your heart things you would like to do to people? Do you have a bully at school, would you like to make him suffer?; you start to think what could you do, what trouble could you get him into. "Wicked imaginations": God hates them. You say, 'Well, life is starting to get boring for me, all these things I have to let go of'; but what it is to feel God smiling at you, looking down on you with approval. Think of that! He wants to look at you as He looked at Jesus as He walked amongst men, the One of whom He could say, "*This* is my beloved Son", Matt 17: 5, as though God was saying, 'Look at my Jesus. He is wonderful!'. God is "a rewarder of them that seek Him out", Heb 11: 6.

He wants to bless you, but you need to know what God hates because if you love what He hates, you have no place in His kingdom.

“Feet that are swift in running to mischief”. If you have already thought of something nasty you could do to someone, doubtless you would want to do it quickly. You cannot wait to trip them up, cannot wait to put that little barb into that conversation that might make somebody feel uncomfortable. Jesus did not do that. No, He addressed Himself to men because He wanted to bless them.

“A false witness that uttereth lies”. Here we are, lies again and unrighteousness; false witness is an abomination to God. Then, **“He that soweth discords among brethren”**, this is the seventh thing, sowing discords: how easy it is sometimes to do that, slip something into the conversation, to be critical, to gossip, and God hates it, He especially hates it happening among brethren.

So these are the seven things that God hates. He hates sin but He loves sinners. So what could God do to separate a sinner from his sins? The fact is that He loved men so much “that he gave his only-begotten Son”, then comes the simple statement, **“that whosoever believes on him may not perish, but have life eternal”**, John 3: 16.

I wonder if we could just turn to Luke 15 from verse 11-32. Did you notice in that passage someone with proud eyes and a proud heart, someone who was swift to do mischief, to sow discord? Who was it? The elder brother, was it not? He was furious because his brother who was a sinner had come home and was given royal treatment. Some people hate the fact that God is gracious, that God is forgiving, that God loves. They want the wrong doer to be punished. There are people like that in the world. The prisons would never be big enough to satisfy them; the punishments would never be severe enough to make them happy. They want punishment. But God does not; He does not desire to punish anybody for their sins. In fact, God today is withholding punishment, He is staying the execution of judgment, and He is insistent that the glad tidings of His grace are preached just as you are hearing them this afternoon. He is insistent that the name of Jesus is spoken about as man's one and only hope for salvation. “God so loved”: the intensity of His love and the greatness of it, He “so loved” that He has given us the answer to His love. He gave it in the Person of Jesus,

God waits in grace with hands outstretched to bless -

Glad news from heav'n.
Mercy dispensed in perfect righteousness,
Sinners forgiv'n!
Repentance only God requires from man
And faith in Christ, His well-beloved Son.
This priceless favour you may now embrace;
'Tis offered free,
Since Jesus suffered in the sinner's place
On Calv'ry's tree;
Blest sinless One! for us He sin was made,

Jesus tells three stories in Luke 15; and it has been said that these three stories tell us about what makes God rejoice. What makes God rejoice is when He finds somebody who is lost and can bring them home into their intended place. Luke 15 first tells us what makes the Lord Jesus rejoice, that He, as the Good Shepherd, went and found the sheep that was lost and brought it back. It tells us what makes the Holy Spirit rejoice, when that lost coin is found and brought back into circulation; and lastly it tells us what makes God the Father rejoice.

This Father sadly had two dysfunctional sons. The wayward younger son wanted to have a good time, to 'sow his wild oats' as men say, and the elder son was proud and unforgiving. The younger son has the temerity to say to his father, in effect, 'I cannot wait for you to die; I want my inheritance now'. And graciously his father gives him the part of the property that he was eventually going to inherit. Are you like that? 'I want my own way and I want it now!' And off he goes and he wastes his inheritance. He went to the far country to do his own will and found himself some new companions. You see, sometimes we do not know when we are well off, do we? We think there is something better. Men always seem to think that the grass is greener in the next field, do they not? Perhaps that is why the sheep wandered off in the first parable in Luke 15. We think there is something better, but God in Christ is already offering us the best.

All the money is soon gone, because of these friends and his riotous living and eventually he becomes lonely. There is nothing lonelier than being away from God and then finding that your friends have all gone away because you cannot indulge them any more. And then on top of everything else there came a famine, a famine that ate into his soul, and he began to be in want.

You know the things that God hates - we have read about them - but God has given you a conscience. He has given you a testimony to what is good and evil in your soul, and every time you do one of those wrong things, there is a little goad inside you that pricks your conscience and you know that you have done something wrong. Have you ever experienced that? God hates a lie and He has given you a consciousness of sin inside of you. This young man went against all of God's law about honouring his father. He did not honour him. He wanted what was his; *but it was not his*; it did not belong to him. And so he begins to be in want and he ends up looking after pigs. For a Jew, it was a bad thing looking after pigs because in the law pigs were unclean creatures. So this young man is now so hungry that he wants to eat what the pigs are eating; then it says *he comes to himself*, he starts to think. And God would help you to start thinking straight. If you want proof as to the existence of God, there is plenty of it. And if God exists then you will need to get wise as to what His interests are, and you need to think out in your mind, if God created you, what is He expecting of you? If He put you on the earth there must be some purpose in His doing it: what does He expect from you, and what are you to expect from Him? This young man starts to think. Mr Darby wrote a pamphlet with quite an imposing title, *The "Irrationalism of Infidelity"*, vol 6. He was addressing certain people who did not think clearly about God, and in that paper he points out how irrational they were; they were not thinking clearly. If you look about you and see creation, if you get your telescope out and you start to look at the stars, and if you get your microscope out and start to look at microbes and bacteria, and if you had a big enough microscope you could perhaps start unravelling the wonderful building blocks of creation; in all these things you can discover that the finger marks of God are everywhere. He exists. We have our being in Him. Without Him we are nothing. Evolution is taught in our schools and colleges; how supposedly, one day, materials in the universe somehow fused together and life forms began in some primordial swamp, and gradually something crawled out of the water and started to live on land and eventually it turned into man; indeed, more than that, it eventually turned into man and woman and reproduced. Oh, if only persons would simply believe that "He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast", Ps 33: 9. Read that Psalm! For you see, God speaks and things happen. The heavens and the earth, however, are not His most majestic and wonderful things. No! We have yet to see what God has prepared for those who love Him, "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells

righteousness", 2 Peter 3: 13. The things He hates will be banished forever, and in this new world, what wonders await those who are going to live in it! God here is working in this young man and He is becoming unhappy. If you are unhappy it may well be because God is working in your soul and He is turning it inside out; He is causing you to start using your mind to think, 'There is something wrong here'.

The younger son may have thought, 'I had everything and now I have lost it, and oh, wait a minute, back home my father has servants and a house. He could give me a job, I could have a roof over my head, somewhere to sleep and food to eat'. God would say to you, 'Let us talk things over': "Come now, let us reason together ... though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow", Isaiah 1: 18. God would talk to you. This young man started to think and he said, 'I am being foolish, I am perishing through famine. I know what I will do'; "I will rise up and go to my father, and I will say to Him, Father I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son". And what he said was very right. It is against God that we sin. "I have sinned against heaven." Other people may be affected. When we lied, somebody else was affected by it, maybe a colleague or a fellow-student, or our brethren. They were affected by it, but it was against God that we sinned. "I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son". He asks to be given a job. It has been said, 'If he thought he was fit for a job, he was fit for nothing'. That is what sin does and we were born in it, *fit for nothing*.

And so he goes home. I dare say, as he went, he would think, 'How do I put this? How do I say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son?"'. Can I have a job? Maybe I could clean the sandals. Maybe I could look after the animals. I have a bit of experience now. It is on my CV'. The fact is we do not deserve anything. We are sinners; we are finished, except that God in His mercy is looking out for us. He wants us home. You may be lost in sin, but God is looking for you. In fact if you have any interest in what I am talking about tonight, God is already working in your soul. Thank Him! And maybe, yes, you feel in want, but God has more than enough to satisfy your need.

I like a painting I have seen of this parable - the artist created a picture of the prodigal son coming home. *Except he did not*. What he drew was the father standing on the top of his house shading his eyes and scanning the horizon. The father was pictured looking out because

he missed his son. You see, that young man did not really know his father, did he? He did not know what his father liked or loved or wanted. He was too busy knowing what *he* wanted and then feeling wretched when he lost it all. His father was looking for him. "But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him." God is looking for you, friend, waiting for you. The opportunist comes home, and his father runs, and we know that at that time, a mature man would *not* run. Men were dignified in their long robes, and walked. But no! Think of that: this father demeaned himself. The neighbours might say, 'What is he doing? This wretched son is coming home and he is running, he is falling over him. Look at him! He is embracing him; he is kissing him. What is going on?'. How can we reckon with the love of God? How powerful it is, how perfect, how complete! I am not sure how deeply repentant the son was yet; he knew the right thing to say; he knew that he was a sinner, and he knew that his father had jobs; it was all rational - I believe that it was not until the father kissed him that he experienced true repentance; he was overwhelmed by grace. He began to understand the love of his father when he came home. Now while his father is kissing him and embracing him he starts his little speech, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee; I am no longer worthy to be called thy son". But he did not ask for a job. Look what the father had to say, "Bring out the best robe and clothe him in it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it". He had come home. This is what God loves. We read about what He hates, but God loves unconditionally. Is that not wonderful? He always wanted to bless you but, thanks to the death of Jesus and the shedding of His precious blood at Calvary, God is empowered to receive you, not as a servant, but He receives you as a son. God loves to have people in His presence. In fact, in the eternal day He is going to dwell with men. Look at what happened in the Garden of Eden! God wanted to spend time with Adam and Eve, wanted to have a relationship with them. Alas, sin came in and spoiled everything. In the day to come God is going to bring back the tree of life. He is going to bring back all the good things that were lost in Eden and even better.

Sadly the elder brother is disgusted. He is too proud to go into the house. 'I am not going in there': "this thy son, who has devoured thy substance." You can imagine his anger spitting the words out in his fury, can you not? 'Look at him! How could you do this, father? It is an affront'. But the father said, "it was right ... because this thy brother was dead and has come to life again". Oh, friend, may you know what it is to

come alive! Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly", John 10: 10. Some of you may feel half-dead, may feel as though you have been exhausted by sin, but there is a way back to the Father's house. What wealth He has! The younger son might have thought: 'I have consumed all you gave me' - but back in the house there is nothing wanting, nothing is missing. What wealth God has! What wealth He has in Jesus!

Now, we often talk about an old sister who was local with us. When she was seven years old, she did not know if she was saved or not, and she used to say, 'Do you know what, nobody told me what I must do.' Then it came to her; 'One night I was sitting at home by the fire and I thought to myself *you must know something*', and then she remembered the words of Paul to the jailor in Acts, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved ...", chap 16: 31. Then turning to God she said, 'but I *do* believe, ...so You have to have me, like it or not!' - she was a believer and knew that God is as good as His word.

Friend, if there is any doubt in your mind as to whether you are saved, this is what you have to do: Cry to God where you sit and tell Him, 'I am a sinner, but I believe on your Son Jesus Christ and I believe that He died to save me'.

May the Lord bless you, for His Name's sake.

Manchester

16th June 2013

DISCIPLINE

James Alex Gardiner

Hebrews 12: 5 - 11

Hosea 14: 8 - 9

Since Lord's day, I have been very interested in this scripture in Hebrews, beloved, because it shows how God is bringing up a family; He has been doing that since the day of Pentecost. The largest part of the family is already with the Lord, but while we are here in this scene we need discipline. Every parent knows that in ruling a household discipline has got to be exercised. This chapter is very interesting and we have not to be afraid of its teaching, but we should learn how to conduct ourselves in the house of God; it describes the features that are proper to persons who belong to the household of God. It is more than citizens together - it relates to members of the household of God, which places a very wonderful dignity upon us. As you sit there and I stand here, let us consider the blessedness of being in God's house. Fellow-citizens are the saints - I suppose that suggests where you belong to. You might ask someone, 'Where do you come from?' and they would say, 'I come from Aberdeen, or Grangemouth', or wherever it might be. Well, you come from heaven; you are a fellow citizen of the saints; that relates to the assembly. But then you are a member of the household of God which is a slightly more intimate thing. You know your way about the house and do not need directions - you know where to go and how to behave. But we know from our natural experience as parents how children ought to be brought up, and how they ought to be disciplined. Being so easily distracted by changing pleasures, they need discipline because, as we all do, children like their own way; and when they do not get it they may create a fuss, screaming or stamping their feet or something else that manifests the flesh. We have been through such things ourselves, but what is in mind here is the school of God to which we go, so as to be able to conduct ourselves appropriately and learn. We should know how to live in God's house. What is in mind in the discipline is that it results in our being partakers of His holiness. It is the quality itself that is meant: if you follow the footnote; it is not exactly the characteristics that come out, it is the quality, it is the substantiality of the thing in a person. Members of the household of God, as grown up and able to move in the house in a way that reflects what is proper to it, show forth the features of Him who has called them into His marvellous light - that is a wonderful thing. And so the building

goes on according to Ephesians 2: 21. Let us be encouraged, beloved, if things are not just going the way we think that they should, because God knows how things are going to work out, and He is directing things, it may be even in a providential way, so as to secure His ends. That is why we come under His hand in discipline and training in order that we may come into the enjoyment of God's house in a real and full way.

So where I began reading it says, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives. Ye endure for chastening, God conducts himself towards you as towards sons". God never had any lower level in mind. We may accept a lower level at times, perhaps at many times, but that is not true of God. He conducts Himself towards you as towards a son, and you are a very special son in this family because you are a firstborn son, "the assembly of the firstborn who are registered in heaven", v 23. Think of that: you are registered in heaven; you are in the divine register as firstborn. As firstborn, of course, you get the double portion. Think of the wealth that is yours, that belongs to you and has been conferred upon you! Hence the need for this chastening, this discipline and this education that comes through God's ways with us. It may not exactly be some terrible thing that comes upon us; I think God uses the ordinary events of everyday life to bring in discipline, it may be providentially, but everything is under the hand of God. So let us be encouraged and submit ourselves to God and to what He is doing, and seek help in His presence as to why one thing is happening and another not happening, and thus we will grow in our knowledge of God. It goes on to say, "Moreover we have had the fathers of our flesh as chasteners, and we revered them; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?". "Father of spirits" is in contrast to what is natural, our natural fathers. Think of the greatness of God! It is our spirits that are being formed - our bodies will be changed later when the Lord comes, but at the moment our spirits are being formed so that they become increasingly like the spirit of Christ. "For they indeed chastened for a few days, as seemed good to them"; that was just to keep children in order - your father would have done that, and it is right that it should be done. It is out of order or unseemly when children are rowdy, undisciplined and cannot behave properly. That kind of thing cannot be allowed in God's house. If persons cannot behave themselves it is a manifestation of self-will and results from not getting the gain from, and not being concerned about, the discipline. He says,

“But no chastening at the time seems to be matter of joy, but of grief” - well, we do not like it, we all know that - “but afterwards yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it”.

Think of that, beloved; it is a matter of taking on change. Instead of being in inward upheaval you find peace in your soul, peace with God, peace with the brethren, “the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those exercised by it”. I had in mind to say something about Arabia, but I do not know if the Lord in His wisdom would have me say it. I suppose it is the case in all our histories; Paul went to Arabia and was there for three years. Going there involves a change of circumstances; morally you do not know the language, you do not know the people and you feel you are just on your own, a stranger. It is in God's ordering if that is your situation, because you find in yourself elements that want to link on with whatever the Arabians do, and that is the flesh working in you. It is like going through the exercises of Romans 7. You younger brethren, do you know about the deliverance that is spoken of in Romans 7? Do you realise that there is a law in your members that is warring against the law of God? You need to be delivered from that law because it is much more powerful than you are. You may have the light of things, and may have the light of the truth, but you do not have the power to walk in it. It can be a very prolonged and serious and most uncomfortable exercise and yet it is necessary to come to deliverance. Paul says, “who shall deliver me out of this body of death?”; then he says, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord”, Rom 7: 24-25. You begin to realise that Jesus has not only died for your sins, but He has died to deliver you from yourself. As you go through life you will find that what scripture calls the 'old man' or 'the flesh' is always popping up and wants to intrude itself and become central, but once you are delivered you have power to keep it in its place. You come to understand that whatever may happen, or whatever situation comes up, self always wants to be promoted and to take some glory, but that there is power in the Holy Spirit to put self out of sight so that it no longer has a place.

I referred to Ephraim in Hosea because, whilst he relates to Israel and Judah in their recovery in the day to come, I think that we find in him a person who has got the gain of the discipline: “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?”. At one time God said of Ephraim, “Ephraim is joined to idols: leave him alone”, chap 4: 17. It is a solemn thing to be left alone. God says, 'Well, if that is the way you want go, go - I will have nothing more to do with you, but I will meet up with you'. It says later on that “Ephraim is a cake not turned”, chap 7: 8.

It is a very peculiar expression; one side looks all right, but the other is just a soggy mess: it is not cooked. Then it says, "grey hairs are here and there upon him, and he knoweth it not", v 9. What does that mean? It means that life was beginning to ebb away from him. An old person of course, has grey hairs, but that is not exactly what it means here. It means rather that he is out of touch with the power of life in Christ. I hope there is nobody like that here. Grey hairs come upon you, you are less vital, and your locality is not what it used to be. All that was true of Ephraim and Israel, so much so that at the moment they have become apostate, but in this section they are recovered. God says in verse 2, "Take with you words, and turn to Jehovah; say unto him ...". Beloved, how gracious God is: He puts words into their mouths and this is what they say, "Forgive all iniquity, and receive us graciously". Think of God telling you what to say, to tell that you are repentant and are recovered and that the power of life is beginning to work. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? (I answer him, and I will observe him.)". Think of that: He is looking to see how you are getting on. God is extremely interested in you, beloved, and He has conducted Himself towards you as towards a son, so as to be in Christ. Ephraim says, "I am like a green fir-tree"; there are no grey hairs now. There is a power and a vitality of life, and God says, "From me is thy fruit found". So he is back in touch with God.

Beloved, I think these scriptures are wonderful. There is a great area of divine activity in operation amongst the saints: God is working by the Spirit, using providence, using circumstances, to further His own work. It is a wonderful thing, and as we are exercised about the discipline we reap the peaceful fruit of righteousness. May it be so for His Name's sake.

Aberdeen

24th December 2013