

'Tis My Happiness Below*William Cowper (1731–1800)*

'Tis my happiness below
 Not to live without the cross;
 But the Savior's pow'r to know,
 Sanctifying every loss:
 Trials must and will befall;
 But with humble faith to see
 Love inscrib'd upon them all.
 This is happiness to me.

God in Israel sows the seeds,
 Of afflictions, pain and toil;
 These spring up, and choke the weeds,
 Which would else o'erspread the soil;
 Trials make the promise sweet,
 Trials give new life to pray'r;
 Trials bring me to his feet,
 Lay me low, and keep me there.

Did I meet no trials here,
 No chastisement by the way;
 Might I not, with reason fear,
 I should be a cast away:
 Bastards may escape the rod,
 Sunk in earthly vain delight;
 But the true born son of God,
 Must not, would not, if he might.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Tried With Fire: Chastening***Kevin T. Bauder*

We must beware of mixing the metaphors that God uses to teach us about salvation. For example, the work of salvation can be viewed under the metaphor of a courtroom in which the guilty sinner stands before God as judge. In this metaphor, God charges the believing sinner's guilt to Christ, who bears its penalty on His cross. God also credits the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner and, on the basis of this imputed righteousness, justifies the sinner (declares the sinner to be righteous). The justified sinner is now free of offense toward God and cannot possibly come under God's judicial wrath. All sins—past, present, and future—have been fully forgiven. The believing sinner is now accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6) and seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6).

The courtroom metaphor provides a powerful and glorious picture of the salvation God applies to His people. Magnificent as it is, however, it is only one of several metaphors, and it must not be pressed beyond its limits. How might that happen? I can give an example.

Years ago a man began to visit the church that I was pastoring. He began privately to teach our people that since believers are accepted in the Beloved, God could never be displeased with them in any sense. Since every sin had already been dealt with at the cross, believers never needed to take any other action when they sinned. Specifically, they did not need to confess the sins that they committed during their day-by-day walk. This would-be teacher claimed that all "confession" passages (like 1 Jn 1:9) must be addressing unbelievers. Furthermore, God could never chasten believers for sins committed after salvation. These sins were already forgiven, chastening was a form of punishment, and God would never punish believers whose sins were already forgiven.

I asked this self-appointed teacher to explain 1 Corinthians 11, where Paul tells believers to examine themselves so as to avoid judgment. In that passage Paul specifies that "for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor 11:20). I'll never forget how the visiting teacher responded that the weakness and sickness were natural consequences of the poor diet in which the Corinthians were indulging, and that their sleep



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occurred when, overcome by lethargy after their heavy meal, they dozed off during the sermon.

This unnatural exegesis resulted from trying to overlap the courtroom metaphor onto the doctrine of chastening. The problem is that chastening has no place in the courtroom, which is about guilt or innocence, condemnation or justification. Instead, the notion of chastening arises from an entirely different trope: the metaphor of a family relationship between father and child. Fathers chasten their children, not to condemn them for their guilt, but to correct them so that they do not continue to repeat the same errors.

The author of Hebrews clearly teaches that God chastens His children in exactly this way. The writer deliberately draws the analogy between divine chastening and human parental child-training (Heb 12:9-10). All who are genuinely God's sons can expect to receive this kind of chastening (Heb 12:8). While it may be painful (Heb 12:11), it is for the good of the one being chastened and will produce holiness and the "peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb 12:10-11), or sanctification. Several observations will help to clarify the doctrine of chastening as it is taught in Hebrews 12, 1 Corinthians 11, and other passages.

First, chastening is painful. God chastens us by permitting afflictions of various sorts. We would never choose these afflictions. Viewed in themselves they are calamities, and the calamities may be severe.

Second, we infer that calamity (in the form of chastening) may sometimes be the result of sin in our lives. God sends this calamity to correct us for sins that we have committed or are still committing. His purpose is to take those sins out of our lives and to bring us to Him as obedient children.

Third, chastening might not only be a result of sins that we have committed or are committing. Rather, it may be sent as a shield against sins that we would otherwise be tempted to commit. In other words, chastening may not always indicate that we are "in trouble" with God. Its purpose may be to keep us out of trouble.

Fourth, affliction might lead us to examine our lives for unaddressed sin. Such self-examination is probably the point of James 5:14-16. The severely or chronically ill may suspect that their illness could be divine chastening. If so, then they should call for the elders of the church to assist in the process of self-examination. Sins that are discovered during this process can be confessed in faith. These prayers of confession should be reinforced by prayers for the one doing the confessing. Such prayers of faith are efficacious for relieving the affliction that results from chastening. The anointing with oil, if administered, is not done for its sacramental or medicinal value, but as a symbol of God's blessing of and activity in the process of examination, recognition, and confession of sins.

Fifth, if divine chastening is ignored it may grow more severe. Indeed, 1 Corinthians 11:20 indicates that at some point God will actually take the lives of believers who persist in sin. Probably this is the "sin unto death" that John discusses (1 Jn 5:16-17). Some think that this extreme measure of chastening might also be in view in Romans 8:13. Furthermore, while there is little agreement about the warning passages of Hebrews, I am inclined to think that divine chastening is the theme of all of them. If so, then Hebrews 10:26-31 also includes chastening to the point of physical death.

Sixth, God always intends chastening to produce less sin in our lives. Even chastening that causes some to "sleep" is designed to keep believers from doing things that could bring their faith into greater disrepute. It is always for the good of the one being chastened; consequently, it is always a manifestation of God's love. It may also be a manifestation of God's parental anger (and in that sense a judgment—1 Cor 11:29), but parental anger is grounded in love rather than justice and is a different thing from judicial wrath. Chastening always shows God's love, never His wrath.

How should we respond to chastening? We must never despise or make light of it (Heb 12:5). Rather, we should endure it patiently (Heb 12:7). We should subject ourselves to the Father of our spirits so that we may live (Heb 12:9). In other words, we should deal with whatever sin we find in our lives. Rather than growing discouraged, we should take heart and press on toward holiness (Heb 12:12-14). Above all, we must never let bitterness take root (Heb 12:15). When we are being chastened, God is dealing with us as His sons and the result will be good.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
