

Practical Christian Living

Lesson 9 – God’s Discipline

We have seen how God shows us in our conscience what is right and what is wrong in His sight.

In this lesson we will see **how God trains His children to walk in obedience to Him.**

God Judges the Unsaved

Many times it seems that the wicked get by with their sins and prosper in this life, while God's children have many trials and troubles. In Psalm 73, the psalmist was complaining to God about this very thing. He said,

"For I was envious of the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...they have more than heart could wish." Psalm 73:3, 7

The thought of how the wicked were prospering was painful to the psalmist until God showed him what would happen to the wicked. The Bible says,

"Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors." Psalm 73:18-19

The truth brought out here is that the wicked will receive the final judgment for their sins in the next world. They may prosper in this life, but they cannot escape God's righteous judgment. One day they will stand before the Great White Throne where they will be judged for every sin.

God Disciplines His Children

The Saved – will be disciplined in this life. Death - God’s rewards - Heaven

God's children have a privilege that the unsaved do not have. They come under the discipline of their heavenly Father.

What is discipline? Discipline is *"child-training."* It is the training a father gives his child. A father does not discipline the children of others, but he pays close attention to the training of his own children.

When a father disciplines his son, he is training him to be what he wants him to be. A good father wants his son to be obedient. He wants him to be truthful. He wants him to be honest. He wants him to be diligent. He wants him to be polite and considerate of others.

A good father begins the training of his son at a very early age, and he continues his training until his son reaches maturity. Day by day, he faithfully and lovingly disciplines his son to make him what he wants him to be.

God Disciplines His Children by Teaching Them

God is a good father. He faithfully and lovingly disciplines His children to make them what He wants them to be. He trains and teaches His children so that they may bring honor to His name. The Lord gives this promise to His children:

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye." Psalm 32:8

God teaches us as we spend time alone with Him over His Word. He teaches us through pastors and Bible teachers. He teaches us through the example of godly men and women. Throughout our lives we should be learning about God and His ways.

God Disciplines His Children by their Circumstances

God uses our circumstances to discipline us and to make us what He wants us to be. The story of **Jacob** in the Old Testament is an example of how God uses circumstances to discipline His children.

Jacob did not have a very good character. He was not only clever and cunning, but he was also greedy and dishonest. He was always trying to get the best of other people.

Jacob cheated his older brother out of his birthright. He deceived his father. In fact, he managed to get the best of almost everyone with whom he came in contact.

God knew what Jacob was like, and He was dealing with him.

Jacob was a deceiver, and God sent him to work for his uncle, Laban, who was the same kind of person as Jacob.

Jacob fell in love with Laban's daughter, Rachel, and wanted to marry her, but Laban required that he work seven years for her. Jacob gladly agreed to do this. The Bible says,

"Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her."

When his seven years were completed, Jacob asked for his bride. Laban prepared a great wedding feast. When it was over, Jacob discovered that he had been deceived. Laban had substituted Leah, his older daughter, for Rachel. Jacob had married the wrong girl! He had to work another seven years for Rachel.

For twenty years Jacob was cheated by his uncle. During this time, Laban changed his wages ten times. Eventually, Jacob left the land of Haran to return to his home. During the journey, Rachel became sick and died.

Later, Jacob's favorite son, Joseph, was sold as a slave by his jealous brothers. These brothers deceived their father into thinking that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. Jacob believed that Joseph was dead and mourned for him many years.

Jacob had deceived others, and he himself was deceived. He encountered one difficulty after another. At one time, he cried out, *"All these things are against me."* Actually, though, God was working all these circumstances together for Jacob's good. Through discipline and chastening, God was bringing about a change in Jacob's character.

In the end, we see a different Jacob. The one who had started out as a cunning deceiver was now a prince with God. He was gentle, humble and matured—a man who walked with God. Even Pharaoh, the mightiest king on earth at that time, recognized Jacob as a man of God. Pharaoh bowed before Jacob to receive a blessing from him.

We have much of "Jacob" in us.

Every one of us has much of Jacob's nature in us. We are selfish and self-seeking. We know how to be clever and even deceitful to get what we want. Therefore, God has to discipline us.

How does God discipline us? He disciplines us by our circumstances. God arranges all sorts of happenings to teach us what He wants us to learn. The things that happen to a child of God are not accidental. All the things that happen to us are either ordered by God or permitted by Him, and they are working together for our good. The Bible says,

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Romans 8:28

Many things that happen to us do not in themselves seem to be good. Indeed, they may be painful and bitter to us. But God's Word says that we can know that *"all things work together for good to those who love God."*

God Disciplines His Children by Chastening Them

If we do not heed His teaching and His discipline, God has to chasten us. Chastening is a form of discipline from God. God chastens us when we are disobedient.

Chastening is not the same as punishment.

Chastening is not the same as punishment. The object of **punishment** is to make a person **suffer** for his wrongdoing; whereas, the object of **chastening** is to **help** someone to be a better person by correcting him.

There is another difference. Punishment does not involve love, whereas chastening does. A father shows his love for his son by chastening him. The Bible says,

"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him chastens him promptly." Proverbs 13:24

The Meaning of God's Chastening

When God has to chasten us, we may feel sorry for ourselves and wonder, *"Why is this happening to me?"* We may look around and see others who have done the same things we have done, and yet they are not having the problems that we are having. We wonder why. We may even think that God does not love us or that He is angry with us. But these are wrong conclusions. Now let us see the true meaning of chastening.

· Chastening is proof that we are God's child.

The first thing we need to see about chastening is that it is proof that we are God's child. God does not chasten unsaved people. He chastens only His own children.

Five children were playing in a yard. They were covered with mud. Suddenly, a mother came out and disciplined three of the children, forbidding them to play there any further. One of her children complained, *"Why didn't you discipline the others too?"*

"Because they are not my children," replied the mother.

Do you wonder why unsaved people do wrong and seemingly get by with it, whereas when a child of God does the same thing, he is chastened? The reason is simply this: Unsaved people are not God's children. God only chastens His own children. The unsaved will be punished for their sins in the next life, but God chastens His children in this life. If God chastens you, it simply proves that you are His child. The Bible says,

"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chastens? But if you are without chastising, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons." Hebrews 12:7-8

· Chastening is proof that God loves us.

God chastens us because He loves us.

The second thing we need to see about chastening is that it is proof that God loves us. God does not chasten us because He does not like us or because He is angry with us. He chastens us because He loves us. The Bible says,

"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." Hebrews 12:6

When we realize that trials and difficulties come from our Heavenly Father, and that they come to us because He loves us, our whole attitude toward them changes. The psalmist said,

"Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law." Psalm 94:12

How should we receive God's Chastening?

God tells us in His Word how we are to receive His chastening. The Bible says,

"My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor faint [be discouraged] when you are rebuked by Him." Hebrews 12:5

In this verse, God tells us that there are two attitudes we are to maintain when we are being chastened.

1 - We must not despise the chastening of the Lord.

The word "despise," as it is used in this verse, means *"to treat lightly."* The Bible tells us here that we are not to treat lightly the chastening of the Lord. If God chastens us, we should take it seriously. We should seek to find out what He is trying to teach us.

Unfortunately, many Christians go on for years without learning what God is trying to teach them. Why? Because they either do not realize that God is chastening them or they do not take it seriously.

Our Heavenly Father is constantly training His children; yet many of God's children do not see the hand of God in the things that happen to them. They think that what happens to them is only accidental, never realizing that God is behind their circumstances. They do not realize that God is using these things to try to teach them His ways. It is indeed tragic for a Christian not to see God's hand in his circumstances. And it is tragic to despise or treat lightly God's chastening.

Therefore, one of the first attitudes a child of God needs to learn is to take seriously the chastening of the Lord. We certainly do not say that every sickness or every accident is the chastening of the Lord. But we should pay careful attention to our circumstances.

When something occurs, our first questions should be, *"What does this mean? Is God trying to teach me something? Is there something in my life that is not pleasing to Him?"* We must take seriously the dealings of the Lord or they may go by without benefiting us.

2 - We must not "faint" when God rebukes us.

The word "faint" here means *"to lose heart"* or to become too discouraged. The Bible tells us here that we are not to take it too hard when God rebukes or chastens us. This is the opposite of treating it too lightly.

When God is dealing with us, we may become so discouraged that we feel like giving up. We may think that we just cannot live the Christian life. But God tells us not to *"faint."* He wants us to know that He is chastening us because He loves us and desires only the best for us.

The Peaceable Fruit of Righteousness

May God enable us to see that the trials, experiences, and chastenings which He sends are for our highest good. There is nothing enjoyable about being chastened, but if we accept it in the right way, it will yield precious fruit in our life. The Bible says,

"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." Hebrews 12:11

To whom does chastening yield *"the peaceable fruit of righteousness"*? It yields it to *"those who have been trained by it"*—those who are submissive to God's chastening.

David knew what it was to have God's chastening hand upon him. He also knew what it was to submit to God. He did not accuse God of dealing with him unfairly. He did not hold resentment against Him. Instead, he was thankful to God for His faithfulness. David said,

"I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." Psalm 119:75

This is the way we should receive God's chastenings. We should tell Him that He is altogether right in what He does. We should be thankful to Him and learn the lesson He is teaching us. We should realize, too, that God will use our experiences to help others who follow after us. The Bible says,

"Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed." Hebrews 12:12-13

What does this mean? It means that we do not live to ourselves; we influence others. Others are following after us. If we are disobedient, we make a crooked path and lead others astray. But if we walk in obedience to the Lord, we make a straight path for others to follow.

Discovered Gem

God disciplines His children that they might walk in Obedience to Him.

Questions

1. Do wicked people often prosper in this world?
2. Will the wicked receive the final judgment for their sins? If so, when?
3. What is Discipline?
4. Does God discipline us by our circumstances?
5. What does chastening prove to us about God?

6. What is the attitude that we are to maintain when we are chastened by God?
7. What did Joseph's brothers do to him?
8. Is chastening is the same as punishment.
9. What attitude should a child of God take when he is chastened?
10. Is it true that the path that we make with our lives will be followed by others? How so?