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Sermon preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by Mr. J. Delves on Sunday
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"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."
Hebrews 12.11

This chapter constitutes an indubitable evidence of the truth that God does discipline His people, that He chastens them for all-wise purposes; purposes known to Himself from the beginning; purposes made known in the experience of the subject as the Lord sees fit they should be. The subjects of this heavenly discipline are very clearly defined in this chapter; they are certainly and definitely the Lord's chosen ones; they are His children, those who are under His peculiar care, devotion and protection, and what is so amazing here is that they are the object of His everlasting love. "For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." All these things are of divine appointment. Inasmuch as the Lord did choose the persons of the elect in the everlasting covenant, He did also at the same time appoint the path for them, the way wherein they should have to walk. They are said to be "chosen in the furnace of affliction". What a place! I say, What a place!! Not in a bed of roses. It seems like that by some people's religion, but that word implies that the way to heaven must of necessity, according to God's decree, be "through much tribulation". The Lord Jesus confirmed that when He was speaking to His disciples before He left them. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Me ye shall have peace."

This being chosen in the furnace of affliction implies the blessed though solemn truth that every trial, sorrow, grief, affliction, distress, persecution, or whatever cross may be laid upon a child of God, is given to him, ordered for him, and is ultimately to be for his good. That is the remarkable feature of the case, and it can be said of no one else but the ransomed sons of mercy; every trial is made to work for their good in the end, though

sometimes the reverse seems to be the case. We find, if we look through the preceding chapter, that the worthies of old had a path of affliction; they suffered distresses, persecutions, trials, cruel mockings and scourgings, bonds and imprisonment. They proved the truth of the word in Isaiah's prophecy, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction". But there is a reason why, and the Lord reveals, makes known that reason, in His people's experience in due time; not often, perhaps we might say, while they are passing through a certain trial; no, but afterwards.

"Why through darksome paths we go,
We may know no reason.
But we shall hereafter know
Each in his due season."

The Lord said to His disciples when He washed their feet, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter". O, there are many things that have to come along afterwards, and the Apostle here refers in the opening of the chapter to this cloud of witnesses for our encouragement. We see the worthy fruits of faith there, the power of faith to fight and to prevail, and he would say in effect, God is the same God now. Our trials are of a different order from theirs, not so severe; we have not outward persecutions in that sense, though some are suffering similar things in other parts of the world. At the same time, in your path and mine, we may look at this cloud of witnesses and see what grace did for them, and beseech of God to give us grace that we may hold fast and endure unto the end, that we may be profited by whatever degree or measure of furnace-work divine Wisdom may appoint for us.

Then the Apostle goes on further to direct them more particularly to their blessed Forerunner. They were to "consider Him Who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds". A very strengthening thing this to faith when you are helped to do it. I know this because I have proved it and yet we cannot do this unless the Spirit of God manifests a Saviour's love and grace unto us. We need Him to lift the cloud and give us faith to follow Christ; to see the way He has

gone before, and in our little humble measure seek to follow Him. The Apostle defines the difference between despising and fainting. If we despise the chastening of the Lord we shall have no profit; if we faint we do but fall a prey to our own weakness. "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him." We are very capable of both of these things are we not? They arise from the weakness of nature. There is something sometimes in us, in our nature, that would say with regard to a certain thing perhaps, something you may have before you, some peculiarly trying path you may have to walk in, 'I will brace myself up, I will go through it, I will endeavour to be fearless'; and you may try, as it were, to strengthen yourself by a determination of will, and yet be a gracious character all the time. But you are really despising the chastening of the Lord. If the Lord's chastening hand is upon us and we are endeavouring to throw it off and say, 'My troubles are no worse than others, and I can battle through things as well as most', that is like despising; that is the working of nature. On the other hand might we not also faint? In fact we are more likely to faint because we soon prove how weak we are; when a stroke is laid upon us we have no strength left; something seems to sap all the religion we have. Or perhaps you have something before you and you say, 'I can never meet that, I can never rise to this or that thing, whatever shall I do?' That is fainting. Now enduring comes, as it were, between the two things; enduring is not a prevalence of our human will to overcome with a determination; no, it is a committing of a thing into the hands of God. There is such a thing as taking our burden, our trial, our affliction or whatever it may be, and casting it upon the Lord; and though you may cast it upon the Lord yet at the same time you have to carry it. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee; He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." But if you get help of the Lord then you can go in the strength of the Lord God, making mention of His righteousness, even of His only. The deportment of a believer in

and under these chastenings, or when in a furnace of affliction, is to humble himself before the Lord therein; and if the Lord gives you a cross you must take it up, you must carry it, it is given you for that purpose. You may often see someone's case which may be much easier than your own, but the heart knoweth its own bitterness. There are no two paths alike in the circumstances of the Lord's people; it is true some things do seem to go very, very hard with some, so much so that their life seems to be but one constant smouldering furnace, and yet have we not often seen that the Lord favours in a particular way His people who have much affliction to bear? He does.

"Know, whom the Saviour favours much
Their faults He oft reproves;
He takes peculiar care of such
And chastens whom He loves."

O it is one thing I know to talk about these points, but it is very different to walk them out. Some of you here have had to walk them out in a greater measure than I have; but I believe the truth.

Now in the words I have read this afternoon the Apostle shows the contrast between present and future in relation to the Lord's chastening. "No chastening", he says, "for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them which are exercised thereby". If we consider this solemn matter (I know I lack grace and competence to discourse adequately upon it), with respect to chastening, I would say this that the Lord will show you personally in your own case what is a chastening. I know you may pass through different phases of life and perhaps have some trials in which there may not seem to be anything more than is natural, but when the Lord chastens one, if that chastening be in the form of some trial or affliction, He will show you that it is His chastening. And what is the cause of that? The cause may be considered both as in God and as in ourselves. The cause in God arises from His fatherly love and care. "Whom the Lord loveth He correcteth". Eliphaz was able to say, "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the

chastening of the Almighty: For He maketh sore, and bindeth up: He woundeth, and His hands make whole. He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee." Is it not then, my friends, a favour to be chastened? I believe it is, in fact we read that it is so. "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest and teachest him out of Thy law." The chastenings here seem to have particular regard to the persecutions they suffered which were as a fire to test them, a purging fire; but whatever the Lord may lay upon you as He may intend it for a chastening and give you to realise it, that may be in your case a purging fire, a furnace of affliction. And it is grievous now; for the present it is grievous. Why? It is grievous because of the conditions in us, though this heavenly discipline comes from the heart of sovereign divine love. It does. But the condition is in us, there is some reason in us why we should need thus to be dealt with. There is a reason in us because of our sins; we are sinners and we are made to feel it too; and when the chastening of God is upon us and it discovers this condition in us, it is grievous to us, and it is grievous because it gives pain and grief to the mind. We are brought under the Lord's all-wise discipline; and though His ends and purposes are for our ultimate good He will see that there is a smarting under the rod too, otherwise it would not be a rod at all. It is intended to give pain.

Not only so, it is grievous because of what it may sometimes stir up in our hearts, is it not? especially when we rebel against this discipline like Ephraim. O there is some beautiful instruction in the dealing of God with Ephraim. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke." That seems to be the first stage. Ephraim is put into the yoke, the cross is put on him and he begins to kick as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke, (and that is how you are) like a wild bull in a net, kicking, struggling, but only injuring himself with all his struggling. Another says 'I will not have this thing, I will not bear it', but revolts against

it as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke. But follow Ephraim a stage further; he has to turn. "Turn Thou me". "Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth". That is the second stage; he leaves off kicking now and begins repenting; he is brought down in some good measure. "Surely after that I was turned I repented". He is not as "a cake unturned" now; no, he is moving after God; God has turned him over, as it were, on the other side. He repents, he smites upon his thigh. Have you ever had in a spiritual sense to smite upon your thigh, and say, 'Lord, I am ashamed of myself'? "I did bear the reproach of my youth". O, but what a blessed issue! See how the Lord returns in divine compassion towards His Ephraim. "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still: therefore My bowels are troubled (yearn) for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." O, I think that is so sweet. You see the Lord comes and embraces this repenting Ephraim and manifests His fatherly affection towards him. He is something like the poor returning prodigal when he was of necessity obliged to return to his father's house. When he came to himself he said, "There is bread enough in my father's house and I perish with hunger". He said "I will arise and go unto my father", and so he did; but his father saw him a great way off and ran to meet him. "Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child?" He was a wayward one, but now he returns and the father's love is never stronger than when the returning prodigal returns; He goes toward him. O, says the prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in Thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son". O, the Father received him, the very best had to be provided for that repenting, returning Ephraim. No chastening for the present seems to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless afterward ... Now we hear the word, "Is Ephraim My dear son?" Yes, he is. Is My love the same toward him? Yes, it is. Shall I have

compassion upon returning Ephraim? I will. The Father's bowels yearn and move after him. So it is in grace. Not joyous for the present but grievous.

"Nevertheless afterward". O yes it is this afterward. The chastening or the dispensation of God's providence may be joyous or grievous as it is viewed by reason or faith. If we view God's dispensations by the eye of reason how grievous they often are. Why should the Lord deal thus and thus with me; cross my path, blight my prospects? But when viewed by faith, O how different! Paul viewed them by faith when he said, "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope". See how he goes from one link of the chain to another; so it is in the experience of God's people. You will prove that to be true. It all leads up to the shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart by the Holy Ghost, and there is the Spirit of adoption, the witness of a child. Therefore whom the Lord loveth He correcteth. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward..." "Afterward". I think there is much in this word. It may mean the latter part of the furnace work, or it may be after the deliverance is given. Yet this 'afterward' is not limited to any immediate period after deliverance. No, it takes in the whole of your future life. "Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness". Don't you feel you can receive that? But have there not been times when past trials, trials even of years gone by, have been sanctified to you in future days? The teaching you may have had from them at that time has been renewed in you to your sanctification even years afterwards. "Nevertheless afterward". You see that follows right through. This is "peaceable fruit". The branch now and again gets a shaking, is blown by the winds of temptation; and yet the bud shoots forth and the fruit appears.

"Though bleak winds the boughs deface
The rooted stock shall still remain."

"Afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness."

This peaceable fruit is not an automatic issue. Although we have trouble it does not necessarily automatically, follow that there will be fruit. In every case there is a condition defined; "Them that are exercised thereby". O that is the point. If we have grace to watch, watch ourselves, watch the hand of God, watch His working in us in our trials, watch our spirit under them; if we are exercised thereby, there will be fruit in the Lord's own time, even the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Here there are two things. There is reconciliation; there is sanctification; these are peaceable fruits. Before, there was a war, enmity perhaps, distance, separation, a barrier; but now that is broken down; the spirit is reconciled, there is a holy subjection wrought to the will of God. This has been done by the furnace of affliction. There is a resignation to the sovereign purposes of Jehovah. "Peaceable fruit". You are reconciled. I know that properly speaking, it is the blood of Christ alone that brings this reconciliation, but in experience when the furnace has done its work, when the dross is thus purged, the sinner is brought in humility and love to the foot of the cross, reconciled. Reconciled; ready to fall into the hand of God; there is no quarrel; no, faith says, Lord I pass through this discipline and I fall into Thy hand, do what Thou wilt with me. There is such a passiveness. If you come there you will say, Lord, I would not have anything altered; choose Thou the way for me and still lead on. This is the 'peaceable fruit'. When one has been thus in the furnace and when fruits begin to appear on the branch like this, there is such peace in the conscience. This is one of the fruits, and a very choice fruit too. The Father smiles; He owns relationship too in your heart and you can claim Him in the embrace of faith and love. The "peaceable fruit of righteousness" - reconciliation, sanctification. It is also separation from the world. Perhaps formerly we were too much taken up with it and its things. That hymn we have been singing expresses it far better than I can, the purposes of God in this holy discipline. (623). It is to renew

the heart, purge away sin, and seal home a sense of forgiving love in the heart; and that is sanctifying, O very sanctifying. If we have been chastened and brought as a chastened soul to the foot of Christ's cross, how we shall long to be free from sin; how we shall say, Lord, do keep me every moment of my future life; do not leave me to go astray as I have done; hold me up in Thy ways, keep my conscience tender, Lord; help me to live every day; give me grace to live, and grace to die; keep me from sin that I walk not in it nor fall into it.

"The peaceable fruit of righteousness." May we not for a moment dig a little deeper in regard to this point? I think we may. These peaceable fruits of righteousness seem, as it were, to gather in all the sweet graces of the Spirit in their diversified operations. You know if there is any fruit; you know the effect that fruit has in your soul, if the spices flow out, the spices that send forth their fragrance. And one of the fruits, I believe it would be right to say, is just this, that when the Lord has dealt with one it brings him to say, Lord, had I been consumed altogether, and cut off for ever, Thou wouldst have been just, for it is only what I deserved.

"If with my sin compared, 'tis light,
And all in faithfulness is sent."

You acknowledge God to be just in the way He has dealt with you; and you may have to acknowledge Him to be just even were He to condemn you. That is fruit. It is a humbling fruit too, because when the Lord returns and when you return to Him, O what a flowing out there is, what a sense of undeservedness there is on the part of the sinner. "I am no more worthy to be called Thy son", and yet He receives your confessions, and it is so sweet. He receives your confessions; you have such access to Him, such sweet communion and companionship with Him; the relationship is there. Not only so, but He seals home forgiveness. Forgiveness; O it is sweet to have the conscience cleansed by the blood of Christ. This is one

of the peaceable fruits - resignation to the will of God; the Lord bends your will to His, does He not? and helps you, as it were, to seek grace to go on day by day. And when He touches the heart by His love it is a sweet fruit of the Spirit. O have you ever loved Him for His corrections? for dealing with you as He has done? I remember my late pastor once coming into the pulpit again after an illness, thanking the Lord for taking such pains with him in afflicting him; and I believe that there are times when we can thank Him, though the way may have been thorny and rough, and is still; yet if we are favoured, in a right way to see a Father's hand, there is a sweet ingredient in the bitter cup; there is much mercy mingled with the judgment, is there not? These fruits spring up; you find them springing up in your heart, the holy affection of a chastened child. Love flows forth and O what sweet embraces of faith are made, what acceptable confessions are made, what sweet forgiveness, worship and faith and love!

"The peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". Amen