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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
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HEBREWS 12 v 11

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.

This verse has an important connection, a connection indeed with the 11 chapter not so remote in spirit as it appears to be with respect to verses, for the 11 chapter is one wondrous testimony to the power of faith and to the faithfulness and love and wisdom and power of God. In the beginning of this chapter the Lord's people are exhorted to pay attention to the testimony of the great cloud of witnesses, the cloud being the 11 chapter, the witnesses, the martyrs of Jesus. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" - of unbelief and the beginning of apostacy - "and let us run with patience" - hearing what has been said before, and seeing the great prize set before us in the gospel - "let us run" - gathering up, or putting off, the loose, flowing, hindering garments of the race, rather the hindrances of the race - "let us run", looking unto Jesus the end and the author of faith, and the giver of a crown. Whoso overcometh shall sit with Me in My throne. "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith". When a child of God looks to either the difficulties before him, or the improbability of winning in the race because of his weakness and liability to turn aside or to faint, he gets weak, he grows faint, is ready to give up. But if the Holy Spirit comes to him and turns his eyes away from his weakness, his cowardly spirit, his readiness to give up, to the Lord Jesus and shows that wondrous Person under the curse and enduring it, despising the shame attending it, and is now at the right hand of the throne of God, then he is strengthened, greatly strengthened, and he is able to say that a double crucifixion takes place in his heart, namely he is crucified with Christ, he is crucified to the world, and so

patiently he gathers up the word of truth as a girdle and girds himself therewith and runs patiently; at least for a time his courage is great. But, says the Apostle to these Hebrews - whose difficulties were great, who were subject to unbelief and a readiness to turn aside from the despised Nazarene - "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him". Remember that He told you, that it is holy Scripture - "In the world ye shall have tribulation". Remember that you are not of the world though in it. Remember that your Lord and master went before you in the path of tribulation, and by remembering these things you will be encouraged and strengthened. "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord". Very apt to do it, are not we? Very apt to get tired in the way of trouble and think that the end is not likely to prove what we had hoped. Or, if we do not despise we are ready to faint under the rebuke, the chastening, and to forget again that "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth". Would you choose, you tried people of God, would you choose the easy path of the world? If you might get rid of your particular trouble would you? If you might have given to you to walk in an easy path, would you choose to walk in that path? Our readiness to faint or despise is a trial when felt, and also it becomes a sin. "If ye endure chastening"; not if you have trouble, but if you endure it. What is enduring it? Submitting to the will of God, taking up your cross and following God, waiting His time; that is enduring. Impatiently turning away, despising, or fainting, is the opposite of this enduring. "If ye endure chastening God dealeth with you as with sons". He is giving you, not only the necessary training, but also the necessary grace to hold on. "God dealeth with you as with sons". O what a wonder to get a trouble turned into a token of the love of God; into a sign of sonship. "God dealeth with you as with sons". If you saw in the street two boys quarrelling and ready to fight, and as you drew near saw that one of them was your son, what would you do? Would you take hold of the other boy and have nothing to do with your son? You would just take your son home and deal with him according to the case. What does God do when He sees you in the world, when He sees your heart turning after some vanity, when He sees your affections placed on an idol,

when He sees that you are too ready to get into a path of ease? What does He do? He sees that you are a son and so He chastens you, does not let you have your own way. Difficult? O yes. Hard to flesh and blood? Yes. But to faith a great token of the love of God. What, does He take such notice of me and care for me in such a way as to deal thus with me, chasten me and call me to His footstool? Thank Him. "If ye be without chastisement" - not if ye be without trouble. Let me here distinguish between chastisement and trouble. Trouble may come, does come, to all men. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble", born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Chastening is training, instructing, teaching. The rod chastens, the rod has a voice, and the wise man will hear it. Chastening is God's dealing. Trouble is natural, sin procured, and it falls upon all men; there is no exemption from trouble. Alas, there are few comparatively, who are favoured to be trained, trained by the Lord. "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?" "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous - no training. This loose muscle must be tightly drawn and made taut, and we object to it. O the aching of a young recruit when the training starts and he finds every muscle loose and the tightening of every muscle brings pain to him and if he has not a spirit to look forward he is ready to faint, or to despise the thing. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous"; on the contrary, grievous, painful, disagreeable, objectionable; you do not want it. You would rather be left to yourself and to choose your own way. And if you must have a cross, well, as Tiptaft said, you choose one of a few straws. God's cross, well that is another thing. O, the difficulty of that. "For the present". Chastening is not to continue always. "He doth not afflict willingly or grieve the children of men". Our time of ease is always. "For the present". The present is what we love if we have comfort in it; the present difficulty is what we would be rid of if we could. The present is all we see, the future we do not know, the past we do not look back upon much, at least by occasions we turn away from the past. The present. When God sends a word to you to reprove you, it is a present trouble. When the Holy Spirit brings some difficult matter to you to deal with, then it is a present affliction.

Training and chastening - it has to do with the conscience. Conscience is not let loose to go here and there, not allowed to harden itself as to be seared as with a hot iron. It has to do with the affections. Ah the Lord has seen some of us many times running after foolish things which could not profit us, and because He loved us, He put a check on the spirit, and sent a conviction into the conscience. We were treating Him badly, basely, returning ingratitude for all His goodness and His mercies, and we were chastened, and the present was painful.

Here let us look at the word Paul uses - "Exercised". "Yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby". This exercise is a close matter. It comes to your heart and it says to you, you have been loose in your spirit, you have got prayerless, the Lord seldom hears your voice now, you have become carnally minded and there is a death attaching to that. And the Scriptures you cannot understand, at least some of them, because you can only take a little milk, at the best, in your present condition. Now when God thus trains a child of His there is an exercise. He is brought to close quarters with conscience; he is brought into contact with God; God deals with him. This exercise goes on in particular ways. For instance, faith is quickened into new movements and observation teaches you that, while nature goes one way, faith goes in exactly the opposite way. Nature goes to the earth and the world; faith goes to God, and the exercise of faith brings you to your knees, and your heart kneels down before Him, while walking across London Bridge perhaps. O the business you have to do with God now. Faith sees Him, honours Him, justifies Him when speaking against you; clears Him in His judgements in providence, and brings you to perceive that He is just and right, without iniquity; that you are altogether wrong by nature, and disposed constantly to turn away from the throne of His heavenly grace.

Exercise also is this - Lord wilt Thou graciously restore my soul. Memory goes back with your conscience and you remember times when it was a delight to you to know God, when you could walk in that Scripture - "Delight thyself also in the Lord", and O the grief you feel that you have turned away from that sweet condition. Faith here also brings you to confess. Nature, proud

and haughty and hard, says, what have I done? Faith says you have done nothing but evil since you turned aside. You forget God and you forget His Word. You forget tribulation was a necessity, that Christ even promised it; you have forgot that. O the things we have forgotten. Now they come to memory in the training and teaching of the Spirit and you go to God confessing. One of the greatest comforts, if comfort begins before the forgiveness of sin, is this, that you are free in your spirit to go to God and make full confession. You may have been like a wayward child found out in some wrong thing, some act of disobedience, or something in the hand that the parent said should not be there, and the poor, crafty, wicked little thing would put its hand behind its back to hide that act of disobedience, and you say, I have just been that. Now with open conscience, face and spirit, you confess to God. "So foolish was I and ignorant" said the good man, being restored; "I was as a beast before Thee". This is exercise, real exercise. Nature justifies itself because it is wicked. A living soul condemns itself and that condemnation of self is chastening. And the thing that irritated you, the trouble that provoked you, that made you so foolish as to wish you could get out of this particular trouble anyhow, it would not matter to nature - now faith goes another way; it goes to God and says, I was as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; I vexed and grieved the Holy Spirit; I turned away from the holy guide, the infallible guide, Scripture, and I did not want the Holy Ghost to come. I had no desire, for the time being, and now I am chastened, and O the relief it is to get a spirit of confession. A simple illustration I have before me, let me repeat it. If you get a chill and begin to feel very cold, you sit by a big fire; you are not relieved. You load clothes on yourself, you are not relieved. The chill is inward. When some remedy you have taken has its intended effect, you begin to perspire; then you say I am better. You may be shut up in a self-righteous spirit, and nothing affects you properly. Well, but when the Spirit of God comes, and faith is in exercise, you begin to confess, and you say, I am better. I am relieved, my heart is relieved, I have poured it out before the Lord, and He has not rejected me. There is such a thing in Christian experience as feeling God has accepted you. "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins". Exercise? O remember this, no chastening,

no training, no difficulty that God may send, no cross that He may lay on you can be pleasant; grievous indeed it must be, a pain, and to nature, an irritation. Perhaps some of you have been nearly as wicked as I have been, for when a cross was laid before me to take up, I said, Lord, I wont do it. Grace came and I did it. If present trouble is with you, take notice of it, and do pray; if you pray at all, do pray that God may teach you by the affliction and cause you to come to His gracious footstool, that He may turn the evil to good, that He may make the rod speak well to your heart, that He may get your affections and set them on Himself; a thing you cannot manage. For the present it is grievous. Go to those martyrs of Jesus. What is your affliction to their trouble and affliction? They were stoned, sawn assunder, were tormented. Go to the cloud, look at it, the great cloud speaking. Speaking what? The goodness of God to them. Speaking what? The steadfastness of their faith which stood in the power of God. Speaking what? That they saw in the future an inheritance, a throne, a palm, a crown, the presence of Christ for ever and ever. Listen to this cloud; it speaks of God. And so, looking at the cloud, and listening to its voice, go on with your exercises - "To them which are exercised thereby" - that is to say the trouble in which you are involved, out of which you cannot run; the cross that you cannot throw off; chastening from which the Lord wont let you get. Listen to it all. And what will the end be? In this life it will be the peaceable fruit of righteousness to your souls. Peaceable. Perhaps you thought again and again in your affliction and chastening you neither had peace, you deserved no peace, and you could not regard God as being a God of peace to you. Trouble may make you think - no peace in affliction, and all for my sin. When the Lord sees that the affliction has had its due, its designed effect on your spirit, what does He do? Relieves you. The cross may continue with you, but you are relieved. You may retain your trouble, but you do not retain your sad thoughts of God. You justify Him, you thank Him for the pain He has been at to bring you to your senses, to your knees. You thank Him for His kind dealing with you. If you cannot do it, tried child of God, you will do it one day before you die, and when you come, perhaps on your dying bed, you will say I have been reckoning up myself, I have been thinking of my mercies, and amongst them I do feel that I am obliged, humbly,

thankfully obliged, to reckon my deepest troubles, my keenest sorrows, for God blessed them all to me. I have thought that is my own case from time to time, for some years past. I have many a day of reckoning now, but I cannot leave out my troubles, for the Lord has made use of them. Peace, and He smiles. O, the smile of God; it is in Jesus Christ; it comes by Him, and you get hold of Him and He has hold of you, and the mutual embrace, well it is a little heaven below; it is full of peace. God is not quarrelling with you; you are not quarrelling with Him. "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 for him; I will surely have mercy upon him". Until you get it you cannot conceive the peace that fills the soul; it is like a river; "the peace of God which passeth all understanding". You cannot understand how so great and glorious a Being, whom you have offended, whose goodness you have despised, whose justice you have outraged, whose kindness you have been unthankful for, how that He, notwithstanding all, can be to you, and in you, the God of peace. "Peaceable fruit" - the issue, the peaceable issue of chastening - righteousness. There are two righteousnesses which the saints have. One is that of justification - when a man enters into the state of justification, God justifying him; faith receiving Christ's righteousness. Therefore and thereby he is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. He stands cleared; his character is cleared. He was guilty, now he is just. He stood trembling in the court, now he is bold. He feared God's face, now he sees it a smiling face. He knew himself guilty, now he knows that he is a just person - not by his nature but by the imputation to him of Christ's righteousness. As the Apostle says to the Corinthians - made of God unto them, righteousness. This is the title for heaven; this is the standing before God. Those of you who have had this, endeavour by God's Spirit and grace to hold it fast. Do not try to patch something on it of your own; it is just a perfect robe. It does not say, but your affections are wrong; it just says, you are just; you are a just person. That, O the peace of that. Why, you will say perhaps, even though you be not old, I could die now. Justified by God, what have you to fear? Grave? Why there is no terror left by Christ in the grave of a saint. Law? The sin which gave the law strength to hurt and

curse you is done away, and therefore there is no terror there. The peaceable fruit of justification brought home. But the second righteousness I would mention is this, the work of the Spirit. The work of God in the soul is righteousness. This is not only what God speaks in His Word about justice, but it is also what He speaks about sanctification. There is a work of purity in the conscience, in the affections, by the Holy Spirit, and when an affliction has been sanctified to you and your exercises in it, and by means of it, have been keen and close, and you have been cleared, and God has been cleared by you - "Yea, what revenge, yea what clearing of yourselves" in such and such matters - in all those things you have declared yourself to be a child of God, having repentance that needeth not to be repented of, and so the exercises cease in peace, real peace, not because you are no longer a sinner, but because, though a sinner, you are blessed with the presence of God and the smile of God. "The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon thee and give thee peace". I am inadequate in this, not being able to fully or properly speak of this wonderful thing, the peaceable issue of trouble. Well, it is very wonderful. Take your own heart for the moment, and you say, I have in it no quarrel with God, I have no fault to find with Him; I believe and know that He is good; I have proved Him to be so. I know that He is kind and wise, that He cannot make a mistake; that in all He laid on me and I had to go through, it was goodness in Him. I know that He took great pains with me, and I needed the difficult things and I needed the chastening; I needed the rod and He gave me grace to listen to it. I have nothing to say against Him. David said that God was clear when He spoke against him, and you say, God is clear. I clear Him in my conscience, in my affections; God is clear. Now that is a very beautiful experience and as you have no quarrel with God, nothing to say against Him in all His dealings with you, so He has nothing to say against you, and this is still more wonderful. One of the things that has occasionally filled me with amazement, that God should not be always quarrelling with me. I have been ready constantly to pick a quarrel with Him, but He,- though having infinite reason and occasions to do so,- has foreborne any quarrel, and when you get that you have got peace, the peaceable fruit of your trouble. Now there is an instruction in this. I may not have been able to express it properly to you, but there is

an instruction in all this. "It yieldeth the peaceable fruit", the peaceable issue, peace flowing like a river, mercy coming, sweet peace coming; "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" into your exercised soul. May the Lord give His people grace in their afflictions to wait on Him, and when your exercises are close and keen do not think, if you can avoid it, do not think that those exercises are against you. Fainting is wrong, despising is wrong, exercise is right when it is Godward. When your face and heart and thoughts and mind and will and affections all turn to Him through the power of His Spirit, that is a good thing. O exercised people, wait on Him. There is an issue awaiting you, a blessed issue, the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

AMEN.