

Whom the Lord Loveth He Chasteneth

"Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing?"—James 1:4

THE purpose of the letter to the Hebrew believers was to renew their confidence in the Hope of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus. In ch. 10, the apostle Paul begins to exhort, emphasizing endurance, patience, and longsuffering—

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith—our hope—without wavering. Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

"Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward! For ye have need of patience, that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

"Faith is the confident assurance of that for which we hope, a conviction of the reality of things we do not see."

Then through ch. 11 he gives examples of living faith: a witnessing of faith by men of God of various generations, men who set forth as their mark the hope encompassed in a coming Messiah, the coming "Seed of the Woman" who would ratify the Covenant of the New and Living Way, a way understood only in shadow by these faithful men of old—

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."—that "better thing" or better plan centering on the Lord Jesus Christ. He then writes—

"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; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).

The word for "wherefore" is used only one other place by the apostle Paul. The word is **toigaroun**, which implies a reaching back and gathering of all pertinent information. The lexicons say this is a double strength adverb, emphasizing the preceding statements.

The word for "cloud" is not the word for a single sharply outlined cloud, but **nephos**, which signifies a large general mass in which outlines are not emphasized or distinguished; a dense multitude or throng.

This throng bears testimony to **faith by experience**—their lives bore witness to their conviction; they are examples of faithful expectant brethren. Paul is saying—

"Therefore, being surrounded by this great throng of faithful witnesses who have gone before, we also should run the race set before us."

Paul again chooses for example as a figure the games. In this instance, as in 1 Cor. 9: 24-25, he chooses the race course. All who have entered into covenant relationship with God have entered the race for eternal life—the faithful men of old; the Hebrews; the Christadelphians.

The race for the prize of immortality is not a short dash—it is a contest of endurance. Therefore training is strict: condition must be as close to perfection as possible.

The runner sought to remove any "swelling, superfluous flesh," to enhance his chances of victory. The believer is thus exhorted to remove anything which might retard him, anything—**everything**—which does not help, but hinders.

Anything, no matter how small it may seem, that impedes our progress, must be cast off. Perhaps a good example of this would be that of Bartimaeus who sought the healing power of Jesus. When Christ called for him to come, he—

"Casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus."

Nothing was going to bind him or cause him to stumble as he stretched forth to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says we must "lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us."

The words "easily beset" are translated from the word **euperistaton**, meaning "readily, deftly, cleverly, to place itself around," like a long loose robe. A runner in the games would not be found wearing a robe—in many instances the runner removed all clothing—not allowing any outside interference.

"The "sin which easily besets us" could be sin in general, as when Paul said that when he would do good it seemed that evil was there present. Or it could refer to a specific weakness—the specific weakness of the Hebrews being the tendency to apostasy, brought about by lack of conviction when faced with trial.

The believer is to run the race with endurance and **persistence** (as the word translated "patience" implies). The race that is "laid before us" can end with the joy that was Christ's. Paul said that—

"Forgetting those things which were behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, he pressed toward the mark (or goal) for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14).

We, as the Hebrews, are to keep our eyes steadfast on the finish line and the prize that awaits those who cross. A runner dared not look behind or to the side for he might break stride and lose the race.

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"Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (v. 2).

Throughout the book Paul has shown the superiority of Christ. Once more he does this. These faithful men of old were examples for us truly, but they were all participants in this race as we are, all looking unto Jesus as the Leader and Perfector of the Faith—

"If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

The word translated "look" carries more than this idea: it means to "turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something"—in this case on the example of Jesus Christ who endured the ignominious death on the tree, heedless of its shame, for the end in view of joy at God's right hand.

The testimony of Jesus' faith was and is the greatest of all. If we would emulate anyone, brethren and sisters, let us emulate Christ!—who as the supreme example of faith became the author of salvation to all of us who would follow him who endured such contradiction of sinners—

"For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds" (v. 3).

Christ received joy for tribulation; his faith was shown to be perfect through trial. The Hebrews were told to look fixedly at the example of Christ and compare the sufferings he endured with those things they were faced with.

Jesus was a faithful, obedient man, yet he suffered "extreme opposition": should they expect less? His example and the reward he received for holding fast would serve to strengthen their weary and faint state of mind. They are then reminded of two points—

1. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin."
2. "For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

They might still suffer pain and death as a result of the faith, but if they died daily to the lusts of the flesh and lived unto God they had only joy to look forward to.

Paul's statement regarding Divine chastisement is taken from Prov. 3:11-12. This idea of Divine chastisement is not or should not be new to them—

"Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children" (v. 5).

Job was chastened of the Lord and his faith was tried in the furnace of affliction.

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"If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"

"But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (vs. 7-8).

Paul draws a parallel between the natural relationship of father and children, and the spiritual relationship of God and His sons and daughters.

There is an interesting fact concerning this word "chastisement." In both Hebrew and Greek, the word for "chastisement" is the same word for "education or training." As a verb, the word in Greek denotes "to train children," suggesting the broad idea of "education or instruction; to chastise, whether by correcting with words, reproving and admonishment or by infliction with calamities." As a noun it denotes "the training of a child, including instruction; hence, discipline, correction, chastening," as Eph. 6:

"And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture (chastisement) and admonition of the Lord" (v. 4).

The idea is not infliction with evil in mind as an end, but corrective measures which will eliminate bad tendencies and encourage good actions. The proper rendering of v. 7 should be:

"It is for discipline that you have to endure."

(Not, "If ye endure, etc.")

As fathers we know that our children oft require chastisement in their process of learning. Should it be any different in the relationship of God and His children? Rather in the case of God dealing with His children, discipline would be given without human weakness. God would be unerring in dealing out chastisement—

"Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"

"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness" (9-10).

Chastisement is a proof of sonship; Paul says if there is no chastisement then the individual is illegitimate. In a like figure, there must be **submission** to chastisement or instruction by trial; lessons must be learned, and the things learned must be applied. We must pass through the refining process if we are to be purified. If we rebel, our Father will be displeased with us. If we respect the "fathers of our flesh," shall we not still more submit ourselves to the "Father of our spirits"?

How is God the Father of our spirits?—

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit."

In the perfect sense we are not born of the Spirit yet; but we have been begotten by the Spirit-Word, and in baptism we have become new creatures. It is only by acknowledging the Truth and being immersed that we can truly claim God as our Father. Simply by being works of His creation does not entitle us to call upon Him as Father.

Since God has loved us enough to give us the opportunity to be His sons and daughters, should we not give Him due reverence? He offers us life forever more.

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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."

Strenuous exercise is difficult and tiring, but as it develops the athlete on the physical plane, so is the athlete in the race for eternal life developed by instructions in righteousness and submission

to Divine will. V. 12 is tied in with the preceding verses. Since chastening is necessary and discipline results in holiness, therefore—

"Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.

"And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed."

Paul here quotes Isa. 35. We have physical infirmities depicting spiritual maladies. The exhortation can have a twofold purpose:

(1) To remind those who have some spiritual strength to aid those who are becoming weak, and near permanent affliction, as this is a matter of duty.

(2) If the situation is left untended, others could be affected by this "spiritual sickness." If parts of the body are left diseased, the whole system can be poisoned.

The primary idea must be help, and restoration rather than amputation. The word translated "lift up" is **anorthoo** which means "to restore to straightness or erectness, to reinvigorate," It was used by medical writers of the act of setting dislocated parts of the body.

The word "hang" is from a word which means "neglect, relax or loosen." The word for feeble is **paraluo**—"to weaken, enfeeble," and is the word which is transliterated "paralytic"—

"Wherefore, the hands which are relaxed and the knees which have become paralyzed, reinvigorate."

The exhortation to us is— "If there are brethren or sisters whose progress is at a standstill or whose work in the Truth is lax, make it our duty, our desire to strengthen them if possible." Paul exhorts the believer to make the way smooth and even; remove any stumbling blocks or rough places in the way which could cause the spiritually lame to become totally disjointed, rather than healed. Paul then writes—

"Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (v. 14).

For the word "follow" Paul again refers to the strain of an athletic contest. The word is **dioko**, which means "to run swiftly in order to catch some person or thing, to run after, to press on."

Paul uses the same word in Phil. 3 when speaking of "pressing on" to the mark of the high-calling. We should labor diligently and press forward swiftly and without delay to be at peace with all men, as long as we are not expected to sacrifice the purity of the Truth.

And even then it does not necessarily involve unpeacefulness—but rather dissociation; for holiness or purity or separation from that which is in opposition to God and His Truth is also to be sought after diligently—

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Then again we see the reference to ecclesial responsibility:

"Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (15).

The Hebrews are exhorted to use oversight ("looking diligently"—**episcopeo**) over themselves lest anyone fall back on the favor they have received from God. Here again is the admonition to purity in the Body in order to keep down the leavening tendency of immorality or unhealthy doctrine. In Deut. 29:18 we find the phrase—

"Lest there be in you a root springing up with gall and bitterness."

Here is a picture of the nation of Israel in apostasy, having turned to the gods of the other nations. The Hebrews were turning away from Christ back to the superseded Judaistic form of God's law—apostasy was developing.

A plant does not grow overnight. Seed must be sown and time must pass for the plant to send forth its first root formations. If the plant finds soil which will be acceptable, it takes a firm hold and begins to come to the surface—springing up. In the parable of the sower Jesus speaks of seed which landed on ground which would not support root growth—the seed-plant withered away.

Paul says to carefully oversee the ecclesia lest one become apostate or fall away; lest ground be provided to allow plants bearing evil fruit to spring up and cause problems, contaminating the many.

If thorns or thistles are allowed sufficient time they can overrun the entire section. The ideal is to eliminate this danger by—

"Considering one another and inciting one another to love and good works."

If a brother or sister was or is allowed to remain in a spiritually sick condition for a long period of time, the possibility of renewal is slight.

The next example Paul draws upon is Esau who sold his birthright, and gave up the blessing for that bread which perishes—

"Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

"For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears" (vs. 16, 17).

When he had his fill and realized what he had done, he tried to get his father to rescind the blessing upon Jacob, and to restore him to what he thought was his rightful position, but he was rejected.

Esau was a profane person— unhallowed, unspiritual, common—the very opposite of holy or consecrated. Esau had no thought for that which was spiritual—only that which gave pleasure to his natural desires.

He was in such a condition that repentance in its true sense was not manifested by him, though he was extremely remorseful.

Of the two words which are translated "repentance," the one used here signifies a complete reversal. It wasn't that God would not have forgiven him his sin **had he been repentant**. Esau just could not truly realize and regret that he had done wrong, and change from his fleshly thoughts and ways—although he was aware of what he had lost.

The warning to the Hebrews was not to seek for temporary satisfaction and ease and welfare at the expense of the Promises which are "great and precious." The fruit of apostasy is rejection—

"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

Let us take heed to the warnings and run with patience the race which is set before us.

—T.H.
