

Night of Weeping

Why GOD's Children Suffer

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CHAPTER 8

THE REBUKING

IT IS WORTHWHILE noticing the word which is used in the two well-known passages which speak of chastisement, "**Nor faint when thou art rebuked of him**" (Hebrews 12:5). "**As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten**" (Revelation 3:19). A little inquiry into its meaning and a little comparing of texts will help to set it in its true light.

It is the same word used in Matthew 18:15: "**If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault.**" It is the same word used in Luke 3:19, when John is said to have reproved Herod. It is the same word used in John 16:8, "**When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin.**"

We learn, then, from these expressions, that rebuke is not simply some stern word or frown, implying displeasure on the part of GOD, but such a frown which "*tells us our faults*" - such a frown which reproves or convicts us of sin. It is GOD's way of pointing out what He sees to be amiss in us, of calling our attention to it as a thing which displeases Him, and, on account of which, if not put away, He must certainly deal with us in chastisement.

The word rebuke seems to imply something more gentle than chastisement. And it is of some importance to consider it in this light. I know not a better illustration of it than CHRIST's address to the Churches of Asia.

The especial preciousness of these lies in this that they show us what the heart of CHRIST is when reproving. What a discovery do they give us of this!

Let us hear Him addressing them.

Thus He rebukes the angel of the Church of Ephesus. "**Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou has left thy first love; remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent.**"

Thus He rebukes the church of Pergamos: "**I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam . . . repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth.**"

In like manner we might quote His other rebukes to the other churches as illustrations of our meaning. But these are enough. They show the gentleness of the Reprover both in the manner

and the language. They are faithful, indeed, but how delicate, how tender, how mild!

They point out what is amiss with all distinctness and directness, yet in a manner the most fitted to win and in language the least likely to offend. He begins each of them by making most gracious mention of the past services and excellent deeds of the angel of the church, as if desirous to show how willing He was to praise, insofar as He could, and how unwilling to blame, save when it could not be avoided.

In listening to this voice speaking from Heaven, we seem to hear the same meek and lowly One that once spake on earth in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Wishing to reprove him for his evil thoughts of the woman who stood behind the Lord and washed His feet with her tears, He began thus mildly His rebuke, "**Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.**"

Yet while the rebuke of GOD is thus mild and loving, it is both faithful and solemn.

It is faithful, for it hides nothing from us. Its tone is soft, yet the words are full of meaning. They are quite explicit in their condemnation of the sin perceived in us. And the rebuke of Jehovah is a solemn thing.

It is not the rebuke of wrath, for that has passed away, yet it makes us stand in awe. The rebuke of love is as solemn a thing as the rebuke of wrath. A parent's rebuke is much to a loving child, how much more is the rebuke of our GOD - the GOD who made Heaven and earth!

Many are the rebukes which He administers. Some of them are lighter and others heavier. Yet in both He is laying His finger upon sin and intimating distinctly His desire that we should turn from it.

To the former kind I fear we oftentimes give but little heed. The touch of transient pain, a brief illness, a slight indisposition, a passing weakness, some common domestic vexation, some trivial casualty, some few days parting from one we love, some unkind word where least we looked for it, some disappointment or annoyance - these are all fatherly rebukes of the lighter and gentler kind. They are not so sharp as many others, yet they are not the less on that account the indications of a father's will. They are apt to be overlooked, for they are slighter and commoner than many and do not force themselves upon our notice. Yet surely it is worth our while to point them out and to make them the subject of special and prolonged consideration.

It is difficult to understand why we should so much undervalue them.

To one who weighs them aright, they cannot but seem peculiarly precious and affecting. Their frequency awakes us familiar with them, and on this account we slight them. Sad and strange! Does not their frequency show the unwearied pains that GOD is taking with us, giving us precept upon precept, line upon line? Should that very thing in them which displays GOD's untiring earnestness, His assiduous vigilance, and intense anxiety for our welfare tempt us to disregard such dealings? Their mildness, also, as well as their frequency, tends to make us undervalue them.

Unaccountable perversity! They are so slight and so gentle; therefore, they are not to be owned as the laying on of a father's hand! Had they been sharper and heavier they would have been

recognized as such, but being so tender they are hardly worthy of our serious notice!

On this point I am persuaded that an admonition is much needed, not merely by a heedless world, but even by the saints of GOD. The point adverted to is a much neglected one, and yet it is one which every day's events press upon our notice. A raging fever prostrates us. Our strength gives way. Our life is despaired of. Then we say, "This is the finger of GOD. This is His rebuke." But we take a slight cold, or sustain some slight injury - there is no danger and perhaps no piercing pain - then, alas! we do not own the doing of GOD; or, at the most, we own it vaguely and carelessly. The gentleness of the infliction makes us feel at liberty to undervalue it, and to forget it as coming from GOD. Ah! it is thus that we "**despise his chastenings.**"

And what is the consequence? We draw upon ourselves severer chastisement. We provoke GOD to visit us with heavier blows. We compel Him to chastise by our heedlessness of His rebuke. We make bitter trial absolutely necessary.

Let us never forget this. It is our own frowardness and negligence that impose a necessity for the infliction of suffering. Affliction is not a desirable thing in itself. It would be better could it be avoided. GOD afflicts not willingly. But we constrain Him. Many a sorrow we might escape were we not so heedless and unbelieving.

Most slowly and reluctantly does GOD stretch out His hand to chasten. For a while He wounds most slightly and mildly. If we may speak after the manner of men, He just hints or whispers His reproof. He is most unwilling to employ sharpness. He tarries long. He lingers on His way to smite. He tries other means.

He sends milder trials first that we may be led to self-searching and repentance and that He may be spared the necessity of inflicting a heavier blow. But we trifle with these; and then, at last, He lifts up His voice and speaks in a way which can neither be overlooked nor mistaken. How sad that we should thus so stubbornly persist in filling the cup of sorrow which GOD would fain have spared us!

Let us open our ears to the rebuke of GOD. His "**still small voice**" should be as effectual as the lightning or the earthquake. Let us learn the meaning and use of slighter trials. Let us count no touch of pain or grief, however mild or transient, too insignificant for our most serious thought. This would save us much. It would teach us many a blessed lesson in an easy, pleasant way.

Every trouble, however light, comes fragrant with blessing. Shall we then overlook it or thrust it away? It is a new opportunity of getting nearer GOD and learning more of His love. How foolish, how sinful, to disregard it! GOD is saying to us, "Improve this light cross, and you will not need a heavier." But we are deaf. And, oh, how much this deafness costs us!

It is not, however, our deafness under light troubles only that draws on us the heavier. We are too heedless even of these heavier ones, and this prepares for us heavier still.

The easy way in which some get over trials is very sad. There is a vehement outburst of feeling at the moment; and occasionally there may be a recurrence of this for some time after the calamity has spent itself, but, with the exception of such fits of grief, there is nothing like laying

the trial to heart.

To lay a visitation solemnly to heart is something very different from indulging in wild bursts of grief.

Hence, it will generally be found that those who give way to these are often, during the intervals between them, very easy and mirthful. This unequal pressure of trial is not only in itself injurious to the soul, but it neutralizes the right influence of trial, and thus renders necessary another and more stunning blow.

Hence, it is that we so often observe that when GOD takes up a case in earnest, if anyone may so speak, it is either by a succession of strokes, following each other closely, or else by a long protracted sorrow. And it is we who procure these things unto ourselves, in that we have forsaken the Lord our GOD, whom He led by the way (Jeremiah 2:17).

Billow after billow breaks over us, but we ourselves have called forth the storm; and it is our perversity that is keeping it alive, nay, perhaps, raising the surges higher till we are well nigh overwhelmed. Had we but yielded to GOD at once, and allowed Him to bless us as He desired, one wave might have been enough, and ere evening the storm breeze might have died away.

Yet, even in this there is consolation. Our foolishness is making our voyage a rough one, but it is homeward bound. All these many blasts and billows are toward Canaan, not away from it; and sometimes, from their topmost crest, we get a brighter glimpse of our eternal heritage than from the level calm of more unruffled days. It brightens the blackness of the tempest, and disarms it of many a terror to know that each blast, however fierce, is bearing us homeward, that each billow, however rough, is carrying us more swiftly to our desired haven.

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