

LEST YE FAINT

by

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EFFECTIVE ANTIDOTE FOR APATHY

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3).

IT IS SUPERBLY IMPRESSIVE to observe how eminently solicitous of our welfare is the loving heart of God. Consonant with His great desire is the gentle insistence of the Holy Spirit who, in New Testament times, lays plea after plea before the conscience of Christians to avoid the pitfalls of the ancients. **“Today if ye will hear his voice,”** He tenderly urges, **“harden not your hearts”** (Hebrews 4:7).

Then ensues the wisest of counsel to safeguard our spiritual health, to strengthen our confidence, to stimulate our action, and to increase our fruitfulness.

The Challenge of the Lord to the Sons of His Love

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:3).

The keynote of this verse is found in the little word **“lest”**.

- It introduces an admonition.
- It is indicative of danger.
- It tells us that, unless careful attention is given to a particular consideration, the inevitable result will be decidedly sad.
- It divides the verse into two parts, the second of which we desire to observe first.

LEST YE BE WEARIED

This is not physical fatigue. It is mental discouragement. It is that unhealthful state of mind which breeds doubt and dismay. Spirituality had dipped to such a low ebb in Malachi's day that the people said, **“It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord”** (Malachi 3:4).

They were ready to give up. In fact, they had given up. In their distorted minds, they appraised the service of the Lord as vain and His statutes as valueless. Since this was their impression, what incentive was there to spur them on? None whatsoever.

This weariness of mind sometimes asserts itself in the form of self-pity. Elijah was a good example. He went a day's journey and sat under a juniper tree to think over his problems. No one, he thought, was as badly off as he. **"It is enough, O Lord,"** he complained, **"take away my life . . . because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and, I, even I only, am left"** (I Kings 19:4, 14).

Personal reverses sustained, privileges lost, problems encountered, purposes defeated—all combine to produce a pressure which incapacitates. Such a condition is the direct result of failure to daily renew one's strength. **"Even the youths shall faint and be weary . . . but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength"** (Isaiah 40:30, 31).

LEST YE . . . FAINT IN YOUR MINDS

The weariness is the prelude or the precursor; the fainting is the prostration. This is the dangerous probability of tolerating discouragement. When one faints, one becomes oblivious of one's environment. One is not conscious of what is going on. Such an one is impotent to contribute a directed and productive effort while in such a condition.

This is most obvious from the physical point of view but let us translate it into a spiritual setting.

Inattention to spiritual exercises leaves the spiritual life weak and vulnerable. The enemy is quick to take advantage. He begins by nibbling at one's faith until doubts arise. He then spars subtly with his unsuspecting victim until the guards are lowered and then he fells him with a knockout blow. One is useless to the Lord in such a state. He is out of the picture, as it were, and the sad thing about it is, he does not know it. He does not realize that through his failure God is losing glory, the sinner is losing an opportunity, and he, himself, is losing the reward. **"Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not"** (Galatians 6:9).

The antidote for such pathetic apathy is embodied in the first part of the verse at hand: **"Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself"** (Hebrews 12:3).

To run the race that is set before us, we are exhorted to keep **"looking unto Jesus"** (Hebrews 12:2); to surmount the obstacles in the course, we are urged to **"consider Him"**. This is more than a general consideration. It is a qualified and specified observance. Many people have given too much effort to consider the lilies of the field because of our Saviour's statement. The object of observation in His mind was not so much the flower as its growth. **"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow"** (Matthew 6:28).

In this given antidote for apathy, the divine prescription calls for a consideration of the contradiction which the Lord Jesus Christ endured of sinners against himself.

- He was brutally buffeted and blasphemously attacked.
- He was the victim of jeers and taunts, vitriolic and vile.

The word “**contradiction**” (an-tee-log-ee-ah, from an-til-eg-o) means *to speak against or dispute*. Peter, in a tribute to his Lord’s graciousness and patience under trial, said, “**Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not**” (I Peter 2:23).

This is what we are to consider when things are contrary and people are contradictory. The potency of its stimulating effect and the strength of its counteraction are incalculable.

We may, at any time, become the victims of a false witness or the objects of an unwarranted verbal attack. How should we react? Resign from a church office? Leave the assembly? Stop praying? Harbor ill feeling? Plan revenge? Not if we consider (weigh in mind) the example of our blessed Lord. This is the antidote. Paul said, “**But watch thou in all things**” (II Timothy 4:5).

The Chastening of the Lord Upon the Child of His Care

“**For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth**” (Hebrews 12:6).

Parental discipline is the tempering of childhood and youth to withstand the trials and turmoils of maturity. The chastening of the Lord is the guardrail of protection against the disastrous chasms into which disobedience would catapult those who swerve from the faith. It is the hand of love which tenderly turns wandering feet back into the course of willing obedience.

There is a threefold purpose underlying the chastening of the Lord. It is, statedly, for profit, for promotion, and for production. It is correction for character and conduct.

THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD IS FOR OUR PROFIT

“**For they (our earthly fathers) verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure, but he (God) for our profit**” (Hebrews 12:10).

For our profit. How wonderful is the Lord to have our interests in mind. It is a solemn fact, and one little considered, that we shall never know how many blessings we have missed through disobedience and carelessness, but the profit we have gained we shall know when the rewards are distributed. The chastening of the Lord insures for us a greater reward. This is what our Father had in view when He so lovingly counseled, “**My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him**” (Hebrews 12:5). It is for our profit.

THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD IS FOR OUR PROMOTION IN HOLINESS

“**. . . that we might be partakers of His holiness**” (Hebrews 12:10).

Promotion in holiness is simply spiritual advancement in grace, by the Holy Spirit, resulting in an evident conformity to Christ.

This is a very likely development in a believer when the Holy Spirit's work is not hindered. Chastening, therefore, is for the purpose of eliminating the hindrances which we would otherwise countenance.

It is in a sense the burning of the dross in a refining process; but, more practically, it is divine intervention for the removal of those subtle satanic obstacles standing in the way of spiritual progress, concerning which we have knowledge (or should have knowledge) but would not of ourselves be too disposed to deal with. This occasions the necessity for the Father to invoke discipline. **“If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged”** (I Corinthians 11:31).

That is, self-judgment would often obviate the necessity for divine chastening. But let it be known, and appreciated, that when our Father must lay on the rod, it is that we might be partakers of His holiness.

THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD IS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF RIGHTEOUS TRAITS.

“It yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

Of course, discipline at the time is never enjoyable, often painful, but later on, however, it affords those schooled in it the peaceful fruitage of an upright life. This is the end to which it points, the purpose for which it is designed, and the reason for its invocation. And never forget it, the whole of the life is affected by the chastening of the Lord.

Unbecoming traits can fully overshadow the more commendable characteristics. Wayward tendencies, impious actions and improper attitudes could well choke the growth of the finer, nobler qualities of an upright life, limiting thereby the influence and effectiveness of a Christian proportionately.

Our Father could not love us with a pure, holy love if He did not move to correct such ill-advised inclinations and such dangerous propensities. Our energies must be directed into a productiveness of peaceable fruit of righteousness.

The Command of the Lord for the Sheep of His Fold

The instruction which follows pertains to the hands, the feet, the heart and the eyes. **“Lift up the hands . . . make straight paths . . . follow peace . . . looking diligently”** (Hebrews 12:12-15).

What we have here is both practical and timely. The deteriorating effects of an apathetic condition are pernicious. Apathy reduces the spiritual stamina; it blurs the vision; it curtails, if it does not entirely eliminate, the usefulness of a Christian; it robs the life of joy.

It is a present, prevailing blight which bodes ill for succeeding generations. In keeping with its malignant character, it creeps upon one so gradually that the condition is usually undetected until the vitality is at low ebb.

The fourfold command of the Lord, as suggested by the language of the King James Version, is both preventive and remedial. The symbolical significance of the lifted hands points toward prayer. **“I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands”** (I Timothy 2:8).

When the hands droop, the knees shake. When the knees become unsteady, the path becomes devious. When we deviate, we are at variance with the things of God and the people of God. This destroys peace and unity. It paves the way for worthless disputation. This produces bitterness.

This is why Paul was firm in his exhortation to Timothy: **“But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness”** (II Timothy 2:16).

The surest protection or the strongest defence we can have against spiritual anemia, with its distracting disorders, is to be constantly **“looking diligently”** (Hebrews 12:15).

The student will observe this advice throughout the New Testament.

- **“Watch and pray,”** said the Lord Jesus, **“that ye enter not into temptation”** (Matthew 26:41).
- **“Live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world: looking for that blessed hope”** (Titus 2:12, 13).
- **“Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus”** (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

It would seem that comparatively few professing Christians are enjoying the present, practical benefits of the Blessed Hope; so few are looking with diligence and with desire.

The Caution of the Lord to the People of His Hand

“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh” (Hebrews 12:25 88).

How vitally essential is it that God should communicate with man. How utterly hopeless would we be if He did not do so. It is irrefutably established that the Lord speaks to men (Jeremiah 10:1), that He speaks righteousness (Isaiah 45:19), and that He speaks expressly (I Timothy 4:1).

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His son” (Hebrews 1:1, 2).

There is a twofold need for this important cautioning.

First, there is the danger of DEAFNESS toward His voice;
Second, the tendency of DEPARTURE from His Word.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that those **“who refused him that spake on earth”** did not escape the judgment of God, nor will we escape His chastening if **“we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven”** (Hebrews 12:25).

This indicates something of the seriousness with which heaven views earthly inattention to the divine revelation.

God speaks to the sinner and the saint. His approach to the unbelieving world is one of gracious longing. **“Come now, and let us reason together,”** said the Lord; **“though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as (washed) wool”** (Isaiah 1:18).

While these words were directed to His ancient people in their backsliding, no one will question the expressiveness of this statement as setting forth appropriately the desire of God for a lost humanity. The truth involved in it is profound in its presentation, almost incredible in its proposition and eternal in its provisions.

The burden of our consideration, however, concerns those who have already received enlightenment, those who have reveled in the announcement of glad tidings, those who have become the recipients of eternal salvation but are, in attitude and action, as renegades in their rebellion against the divine commands.

What a contrast between the firm and faithful people of God in Hebrews, chapter eleven, and the faithless, faltering folk of the twelfth chapter. The challenge must be established; the chastening rod must fall; the commands tending toward a rectification of conditions must be presented; and a caution must be registered with emphasis. **“See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.”**

The Counsel of the Lord for the Servants of His Calling

“Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Hebrews 12:28).

Discipleship involves a trinity of indispensables— learning, loving and labouring. Second Timothy 2:15 reveals that study and service are inseparably linked together. The student is equally a workman. The grace which brings salvation teaches us to live, labour and look (Titus 2:11-13).

The subjective side is to be produced. The Lord Jesus said, **“Look unto me;” “Call unto me;” “Come unto me.”** This was His exhortation to the sinner. He further said, **“Learn of me;” “Follow me;” “Go for me.”** This was His expectation of the servant.

Jesus had just made an intimate disclosure to His disciples concerning His death and resurrection when He detected a defective perception. So little did they grasp the picture, so limited was their understanding of the matter that He deemed it necessary to teach them a lesson in true discipleship. **“If any man will come after me,”** He began with directness and convincing force, **“let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23).

There were no questions and no apparent objections. The conditions were clearly stated. The servant either accepts them or rejects. They cannot be amended nor are they outmoded.

Today, as then, it is this standard or none. Taking up the cross speaks of preparation and price, denial and death. Following Him denotes purpose and procedure, determination and delight.

The three ultimate ends to be accomplished are stately, acceptable service, heart reverence, and godly fear (Hebrews 12:28).

These are to be utilized and magnified in a kingdom which cannot be shaken. An inexhaustible supply of grace is available for all that perfect obedience entails in willing service and constant devotion.

In an eastern city lives an aged woman of culture and superb Christian integrity. Upon arising one morning in her apartment, she sat on the edge of the bed and reached for her clothing which was on a chair nearby.

Her fingers touched the garments, but she could not grip them firmly enough to pick them up. She tried again and again without success. Having a sense of humor, she smiled at her inability, and with increased determination, reached once more with like result. Suddenly, it dawned upon her that she had suffered a slight stroke while she slept. She was sufficiently able to summon her physician who confirmed her conclusion.

How illustrative this is of the Christian Church today. It has suffered a stroke while sleeping, and although there is much reaching toward certain objectives, the grip is no longer there. This is the deadly result of apathy, and it is pathetic in the extreme. **“Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down”** (Hebrews 12:12).

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