

# PART 4: THE KINGDOM

## CHAPTER 15

### The Epistle to the Hebrews

#### CHASTISEMENT (Hebrews 12:1-13)

by G. H. Lang

#### Chapter 12:1-13

1. Therefore let us also, seeing that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, 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,
2. looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
3. For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls.
4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin:
5. and ye have forgotten the exhortation, which reasoneth with you as with sons, My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art reprov'd of him;
6. for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.
7. It is for chastening that ye endure; God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father chasteneth not?
8. But if ye are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.
9. Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?
10. For they verily for a few days chastened *us* as seemed good to them; but he for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of his holiness.
11. All chastening seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous: yet afterward it yieldeth peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, *even the fruit* of righteousness.
12. Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees;
13. and make straight paths for your feet, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed.

1. THE RACE (vers. 1, 2).

i. *The Course*. The life of the Christian is a race. The length of the race is not settled by the entrant. God has determined its length for the individual believer and for the whole company of the contestants. For the duration of the whole series of contests is settled by the authorities (Acts 1:7; Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32).

The chief matter is to “finish the course” (Acts 20:24), to get to its end, and not to drop out by exhaustion or be disqualified for misconduct, by not observing the rules (2 Tim. 2:5). Paul succeeded in this: “I have finished the course. Therefore he had secured the crown, the reward, the incorruptible glory of the victor (1 Cor. 9:25). The success of one is the encouragement of others. Much more should we be stimulated by the success of the many racers mentioned in chapter 11.

ii. *The Cloud of Witnesses*. Peter mentions that he and others had been “eyewitnesses” of the majesty of Christ (2 Pet. 1:16). The word he uses *epoptes* is the normal word for an onlooker, but it is not used in our passage. Here is used the usual term for one who bears witness to a matter (*martus*), not one who is at the moment an eyewitness of it. Fifty years ago Sandow astonished audiences by lifting enormous weights. To those who hear of him he still witnesses to the high degree to which the muscles of man can be developed, but this is no evidence that he, being dead, watches the athletic contests of to-day. There seems no Scripture in proof that departed saints are spectators of our conflicts, but the records of their lives do testify to us that faith can enable heroic living.

iii. *Jesus our Example*. But above all others who stir us to steadfast endeavor Jesus is pre-eminent. He is both author and perfecter of faith, its most illustrious example. He originated the principle of faith in God, for there can never have been a moment, even before creation, when the Son did not trust the Father; and He perfected the development and display of faith by surrendering His original glory, by stepping down to the state of manhood, by walking on earth as a dependent being, amid above all by surrendering Himself unto the death of the cross. Death by crucifixion was shameful, both by the exposure of the person and because it was reserved for the most despised persons and desperate crimes. But such was the vigor of His faith that Christ simply despised that of which, ordinarily, man would and should be ashamed.

This perfect life commenced in faith: “Thou didst make me to trust when I was upon my mother’s breasts” (Ps. 22:9). It was carried through in faith, as has been already stated at chapter 2:13, where the Writer follows the Septuagint in making an Old Testament phrase mean (as the Greek may be expanded) “I shall be [one] having trusted [habitually] on Thee,” that is, My life entire will be marked by trust.

Faith worked in the Son of God according to its own proper nature: it made real the invisible and the future; first, a seat on the throne of God, as promised to Him (Ps. 110:1); and, then, the joy to be there experienced, according to Ps. 21:1-7 as a reward of faith: "For the king trusteth in Jehovah, or Ps. 16:6, telling Him that the lines would fall to Him in pleasant places, since He would be shown the path to resurrection life (ver. 11) and would reach in the presence of God "fullness of joy," and at His right hand "pleasures for evermore."

Of the authentic sacred spots of Palestine two left on my heart an indelible impression, one may almost say, a movement of soul that has never subsided. On the east of Hebron there is a long, steep, rough path that leads to the high ground that stretches several miles to the mountain land above the Dead Sea. It was along those miles that the Son of God, not yet incarnate, walked and talked with Abraham His friend (Gen. 18:16ff; 19:27). To the west of Jerusalem there is a stretch of high and broken land where the ancient track to Emmaus still ran. There that same Son of God, now risen from the dead, walked and talked with two men till their hearts burned within them (Luke 24).

To Abraham He spoke of judgment and mercy; to the two disciples of suffering and glory. "Behooved it not the Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26), and this He enforced from Moses and all the prophets. As ver. 34 shows Peter was not one of those two, but he learned well what they learnt that night, that the Spirit of Christ in the prophets "testified beforehand the sufferings [that should come] unto Christ, and the glories that should follow them" (1 Pet. 1:10, 11). This double and inseparable prospect the Son of God embraced, and steadfast faith that His Father would give the promised glory strengthened Him to tread to the end the one path that could lead there.

He has gone to that supreme place and bliss as our Forerunner (6:19, 20) and we are to follow. One who followed Him to life's end in a violent death exhorts us thus: "Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh arm ye yourselves also with the same mind" (1 Pet. 4:1); or, as our Writer puts it: "let us run with patience . . . looking unto Jesus" (ver. 2), "ponder the One having endured *such* gainsaying of sinners against Himself" (ver. 3).

For he who does thus set his heart on Christ will find that Christ's faith develops within him by the Spirit of Christ, even as Paul says of his life of conflict and suffering: "the life that I now live in the flesh I live in faith [the faith] of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20).

For the development and exercise of this faith, and for the running of the race, there are three requisites.

(1) The laying aside of every weight. We do so carelessly and foolishly encumber ourselves with things unnecessary, unhelpful to the life of faith, indeed, as positive a hindrance as a burden to a racer. Wesley wisely and well said that we ought continually to cut off the unnecessary things that surround us, and that God commonly retrenches the superfluities of our souls in the same measure that we do those of our bodies.

Superfluities of the soul— What are these? Pride, anger, bitterness, jealousy, selfishness, lethargy, anxiety—are not these, and such-like, superfluous to the Christian, states of spirit he could very well do without? Let him then deliberately cut off the superfluous *material* things, and he will find that, ridding himself of these weights, the Spirit of holiness will free him from the moral weights. And of all weights wealth is the heaviest: “with what difficulty shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God” (Luke 18:24).

This is what the founder and head of an immense and prosperous factory wrote to me:

Your words may save a soul from death.

Early days—I was out and out.

The Spirit of God was mighty.

I. Obedience to Him was a delight.

His Word was illuminated.

It was the chief delight.

His service was supreme.

Everything was done by prayer.

Great distress and crisis in business.

Remarkable deliverances.

II. Tide turned.

Prosperity dawned.

Responsibilities increased.

III. Prayer time shortened.

Practically nil to-day.

Experience of his presence gone.

Life no longer on the heights.

Foundations of things on the low level.

Impossible through sheer impotency.

Habits have the grip.

Will power gone.

IV. The truth and force of your words realized,  
but case hopeless.

With the outline of your address I can fill in practically all you said: it shall be my close study and may be the recovery of my soul.

“Let us lay aside *every weight*,” everything that cumpers and impedes the movement of the heart Godward. Let us remember what again Wesley said, that laying up treasure on earth is as plainly forbidden by our Lord as are adultery and murder.

(2) Let us lay aside “the easily clinging around us sin. What racer can hope to outstrip the swift if he have not first stripped himself of close-clinging oriental robes? Now clothes are not wrong in themselves, but they may be a hindrance to a *racer*, so he doffs them. A soldier on reserve must perchance engage in business, but he must not become *entangled* in it and be unable to respond promptly to a call to the colors. Still less must a soldier on service allow this (2 Tim. 2:4); and the Christian is always on service, because the battle is unceasing.

(3) The racer requires staying power: “let us run with patience,” steadfastness, dogged endurance. This is a long race, lifelong; sprinting will not win it. The heart steadfastly engaged with Christ will find that His faith infused by His Spirit will generate in the soul His patience also: “the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ” (2 Thess. 3:5). Love is patient.

Thus with Christ as his life, his in-working vital force, by the Spirit (Eph. 3:16-19), the racer will be fortified against the double peril of first growing weary and presently fainting (ver. 3), thus dropping out of the race and so losing the prize.

There is no need for the Christian to grow weary in soul. He ought not to have to say that if the trial continues he will not be able to bear it. The prophet said that God the Creator “fainteth not, neither is weary,” that “He giveth power to the faint; and to him that hath no might He increaseth strength.” Thus those who have reached the end of *their* resources may count on *His*. For “even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall,” for trials may become so severe and lasting as to exhaust all natural vigor; yet even then “they that wait upon Jehovah,” that is, those who “look unto Jesus,” “shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and *not* be weary; they shall walk, and *not* faint” (Isa. 40:28-31).

Whatever else this may mean it can mean this: that walking represents the ordinary activities and tasks of life, such as all must undertake habitually; that running pictures more strenuous efforts, which some must make sometimes; that flying suggests times of special strain when that which is impossible to man naturally must be borne or undertaken. And that waiting upon the Lord, looking unto Jesus, secures His strength, so that the man of faith proves that he can do all things in the power of Christ Who strengthens him (Phil. 4:13).

iv. *Discipline* (vers. 4—13). The Writer continues his remonstrance and encouragement.

(1) *Our Antagonist* in the battle is sin, sin in ourselves and others, including the Devil. Hence the severity of the strife, for sin is bitterly, implacably hostile to holiness. "The flesh *lusteth* against the Spirit" (Gal. 5:17), and presses the fight with such relentless fierceness that the blood of the witnesses of Jesus has flowed freely; "they loved not their life even unto death" (Rev. 12:11).

You, says our Writer, have not yet been driven to this extremity (ver. 4). Things might be, nay yet be, worse than they are. One cut his finger and exclaimed, "Praise the Lord," for, he added, "I might have cut it off." Do not be discouraged. The blood of the martyrs testifies that grace to die can be gained.

(2) *Forgetfulness* (ver. 5), is a deadly disease. In our opening pages it has been shown that God works by speaking. It is by words that He imparts wisdom and courage. Therefore to forget His words is to induce foolishness and feebleness. We are especially ready to forget *exhortations*. Information can be interesting, even exciting; but exhortation is like the crack of the whip, disagreeable; it calls to duty and effort.

(3) *Sonship* (vers. 5, 6). The Writer quotes words of Solomon. The quotation illustrates how words spoken by a God-taught man to *his* son might convey deeper and larger instruction by God to *His* sons.

Solomon might rightly contemplate his son as being heir to his kingdom and he counseled him accordingly. God is bringing many sons unto the glory of His kingdom (ch. 2: and He trains us accordingly. This honorable relationship and its prospects are a key to His ways and a proof of His love. Hence

My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord,  
Nor faint when thou art reproved of Him:  
For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,  
And scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.

(4) *Chastisement* (vers. 6-11). The word so translated *paideia* has the root *pais* a child, and signifies all those steps which a parent takes to educate, correct, train the boy he loves and to fit him for his post and privileges in life. This is proof that

(a) ver. 7, the child is the genuine son of the house, for a father does not chasten another man's child;

(b) ver. 8, that he is no bastard, one not really a member of the family, or his training would be neglected.

Let Job take this to heart and he will not misread the lesson of affliction.

(c) ver. 9. *The Father of spirits*. Right-minded children give respect to their earthly fathers and accept the discipline exercised, though this may be sometimes misguided and work injury to the child in character and work. Much more should a son of God revere and obey the Father of spirits. The title is significant. That new spiritual nature begotten in the believer in the Son of God is actually the life of God in him, by which he is as literally related to God as child to father as he is related to his human father by his bodily nature. The child who does thus honour God finds that the Divine discipline continually advances his true heavenly life in preparation for his future.

(d) ver. 10. *Holiness*. Human training is very brief, “a few days”—(Note this instance of “day” meaning a period. Compare “hour” in John 4:23, 24 and “moment” in 2 Cor. 4:17). But God is training His children for eternity, and He takes care that the education shall suit the destiny. For the central, vital necessity is holiness. The believer is *reckoned* to be *righteous* in Christ; but he has thereupon to be made actually *holy* in himself. The imputed righteousness grants him a real valid eternal standing before the law; upon that as basis there is now to be developed in him a godly character and walk.

For the former purpose the parental discipline of God has no place. It is as an *enemy* that man is reconciled to God, his sovereign, by the death of God’s Son (Rom. 5:10). It is the *ungodly* to whom righteousness (*dikaiosune*) is reckoned (Rom. 4:5). It is the *dead* to whom life is granted as a free gift (Eph. 2:1; Rom. 6:23), and they become thereby children of God, being thus born of His Spirit (John 3).

This having been effected by grace, *now* the parental training begins. The man being now God’s child has a new nature, but the old and sinful nature is still present, will assert itself, and, if allowed, will choke the good seed. Against the tendency to yield to this, and so to continue ungodly in practice, the Divine discipline has its necessary place. The Father chastens us “that we may be partakers of His *holiness*” (*hagiotes*, not *dikaiosune*).

(e) ver. ii. *Exercise*. A wise father does not use the stick first. He begins by talking to his boy about his errors of conduct and defects of character. If the boy heeds and obeys his development advances. Thus is God’s word profitable (1) unto teaching His child that which he needs to know, (2) or reproof wherein he is wrong, (3) for putting him right through obeying, and then (~) for further instructing him in righteous conduct (2 Tim. 3:16).

Thus he grows to be a *man* of God, complete in character and furnished completely unto every good work.

But when the child does not heed the word he must feel the rod. “He scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” And *scourging* is a pretty severe ordeal. For the lack of it too many sons have become a scourge to the indulgent father. But the Father of

spirits is too wise and too loving not to be firm. Job was upright in walk but not holy in heart. Scourging corrected this. His pains proved more profitable than his pleasures. They fitted him for double blessing and to rule over doubled possessions (Job 1:3; 42:12). It was thus with Nebuchadnezzar after his scourging: "I was established in my kingdom and excellent greatness was added unto me" (Dan. 4:36).

But scourging is painful. If it were not so it would not be profitable. No chastisement seemeth for the present to be joyous but grievous. It makes us smart. But *afterward* I Paul did not glory in tribulation for its own sake, but because it developed that patience which is the quiet atmosphere in which other graces grow (Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:2-4).

Similarly the Writer says that chastisement yieldeth in the end "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Peace is a fruit of righteousness (Isa. 32:17; Jas. 3:18). Where unrighteousness flourishes peace dies, in a land or a life. On time contrary, the kingdom of God is blessed with peace and joy because righteousness rules in its King and its true subjects (Rom. 14:17).

Now to walk righteously in the midst of the wicked, as Abraham did, demands great care, constant watchfulness in all transactions, strict self-discipline. It is an exercise, as Paul said: "I *exercise* myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man always" (Acts 24: 16). Such a blissful inward harmony does not come haphazard; it is sweet fruit that must be cultivated sedulously. It demands exercise of soul.

The root idea of righteousness is completeness of character when scrutinized by the eye of the law. This is *reckoned* to be the condition of a believer because God's law sees him as in Christ Whose character is complete and perfect. The added parental discipline of God is directed to the producing in the justified the same personal completeness as has been already reckoned to be his in Christ.

The word *exercise* (*gymnasticize*) carries the picture of the Greek gymnasium where youths were trained for athletic contests. The prizes were coveted, the struggle arduous, the training correspondingly severe. The gymnasium was so called because the candidates were stripped naked (*gymnos*) in order that the trainer might study every muscle of the youth and also that each muscle might work with complete freedom. Nature dislikes and dreads being stripped, so that all things are naked and laid open before God.

The trainer studied the youth to observe which muscles were underdeveloped in relation to the whole body. He set such exercises as should develop the undeveloped and produce symmetry of the whole form. For it would be the weak muscle that would give way under the strain of the contest. The chain is no stronger than its *weakest* link.

It was by this process that the Greek athletes became such perfect models of the human form; they attained to completeness, with no part excessive, with no deficiencies. Judged by the severest standards the form was "right," perfect.

It is this symmetry of character which God has always required in His sons and still requires: "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44, 45; 1 Pet. 1:15, i6). This wholly indispensable end is served by chastisement; it is the end to which every kind of training is directed. But if exercise is thus to develop the muscles the pupil must put his heart into every movement. Listless action profits little. If the thought be concentrated on the movement the brain automatically directs nervous force to that muscle, this stimulates the flow of blood to it, and thus it receives nutriment and its growth is aided. Sandow has been mentioned. He asserted that if thought were thus concentrated undividedly upon the movements the muscles would grow and harden as well without dumb-bells or clubs as with them.

All this is abundantly true in the spiritual realm. Spiritual growth and stamina require that the son of God co-operate heartily with the discipline of the Father of spirits, however long, however severe, however varied the exercises set. The heart must be concerned, not to escape the trials of life, but to profit by them. Then will the fruit grow. Then will holiness of heart and righteousness of practice be attained, to the glory of God in the perfecting of His sons.

(f) *Vers. 12, 13. Exhortation.* A weary traveler, tired of the road and the buffetings of the tempest, stands dispirited and limp. With shoulders bowed, hands hanging slack, knees bent and shaking, he is ready to give up and sink to the ground. Such can God's pilgrim become, as pictured by our Writer.

But one comes to him confident of mien, with kindly smile and firm voice, and says: Cheer up, pilgrim; pull yourself together; stand erect, brace your limbs, take heart of grace. You have already come far; throw not away your former toils. A noble home is at the end of the journey. See, yonder is the direct road to it; keep straight on: seek from the great Physician healing for your lameness, for the limping turn readily into By-path meadow, where Giant Despair may fling you into the dark dungeons of Doubting Castle. Your Forerunner went this same hard road to the palace of God; others before you have won through; others are on the way; you are not alone; only press on! only press on! and you too shall reach the goal and win the prize.

Happy is he who knows "how to sustain with words him that is weary" (Isa. 50:4). Happy is he who accepts exhortation (chapter 13:22). And thrice happy is he whose faith is simple and strong, so that he finds no occasion of stumbling in the Lord when His discipline is severe.

Here bend thy knee and bow thy neck,  
And love the pain by Jesus given;  
He trains thee here by chain and check,  
And leads on bleeding feet to heaven.

He schools with lessons kindly stern  
His sinner in a world of sin;  
And brings thee line by line to learn  
The bitter-sweet of discipline.

But there, in spotless heaven serene,  
He gives His rule of suffering up;  
There joy shall keep for ever clean  
The pain-wrought largeness of His cup.  
(H. C. G. Moule.)

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The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Practical Treatise for Plain and Serious Readers  
*Chastisement* (Chapter 15) by G. H. Lang.

First Printing, The Paternoster Press, 1951  
Second Printing, Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc., 1985

Schoettle Publishing Company, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1246  
Hayesville, NC 28904  
(706) 896-3333

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