

# Beholding The Love Of God Through Our Tears

Galatians 5:22; Hebrews 12:5-6

May 4, 2014

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Those who are the beloved children of God are being perfected in the love of God throughout their lives. And one of the means our loving Father uses to perfect us in love is leading us through the valley of tears, affliction, heartache, and trial. With David (a man after God's own heart) we cry out to the Lord, who loves us with an everlasting love: "I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears" (Psalm 6:6).

We saw in the previous sermon God running to the believing and repentant sinner, showering him with kisses of love, clothing him with the tokens of sonship, and ushering him into the banquet of love and communion with the Father. We are astonished at such love for such undeserving, wasteful, lawless sinners whom the Lord draws unto Himself in faith and repentance to Christ. Our eyes are filled with tears, for we know this parable is the parable of each of our lives.

But let us not think for a moment that the love of God is finished with us, once we are received, honored, and rejoiced over by the Father as a beloved son/daughter of God. The love of God not only receives us as a child of God, but also chastens us as a child of God. The love of God is not only manifested in the kisses of God, but is also manifested in the rod He uses to discipline us for our good. The love of God is a tender love, but it is also a tough love (as we shall see). "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Hebrews 12:6). The father of lies (the devil) will tempt us to despise the rod, but the God of love (who cannot lie) will exhort us to kiss the rod.

The main points from the sermon this Lord's Day are the following: (1) Our Sin In Despising And Fainting Under God's Chastening (Hebrews 12:5); (2) Our Comfort In Knowing God Loves Us By Chastening Us (Hebrews 12:6).

## **I. Our Sin In Despising And Fainting Under God's Chastening (Hebrews 12:5).**

A. This inspired letter was most likely penned by the apostle Paul (although his name is not specifically attached to the letter), and was directed to Hebrew Christians who were tempted to fall away from the Lord Jesus Christ in order to avoid the persecution they were presently undergoing for their faith in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:32-36). Two most powerful comforts to these Hebrew Christians remaining faithful to Christ and not viewing their afflictions as unique to themselves were given by Paul in Hebrews 12:1-4: (1) The faithful contending of witnesses from the past (cf. Hebrews 11); and (2) the faithful contending of Christ Himself. If God gave sufficient grace to those witnesses of the past to stand faithfully when persecution arose, and if Christ stood faithfully in the face of the cursed death of the cross for His people (and all that He suffered), then God will give grace to all Christians who face affliction, trial, persecution, and heartache that they too might courageously and faithfully endure with patience these loving strokes of the Lord and not fall away from the living God. A third comfort to their perseverance is yet to come in our text: God the Father is chastening His children with His *agape* love through the afflictions they suffer in order that they might be partakers of His holiness.

B. As we consider the love of God in chastening (disciplining) His dear children, we must from the outset distinguish between the loving discipline of God the Father for His adopted children (who trust alone in

Christ alone) and the fearful punishment of God the Judge for those who are not His adopted children (but rather continue as unbelieving and impenitent rebels against Him and His offer of salvation through faith alone in Christ alone).

1. In a strict sense, God does not “punish” nor can He “punish” His own adopted children, because Jesus Christ bore all of the punishment for sin, which we who trust alone in Christ alone deserved (2 Corinthians 5:21). For punishment carries the idea of repaying a just sentence for some transgression of the law (retributive justice). For example, when God condemns the wicked to hell, He, as an absolutely just Judge, punishes them forever, for their transgression of His holy Law. That is what all sinners deserve (it is even what we, His adopted children deserve, but Christ bore our punishment and we shall never again bear punishment for sin, otherwise Christ did not bear it all, contrary to His words, “It is finished”). Our justification before God settles this issue once and for all—all “punishment” for sin is forever removed.

2. However, the fatherly discipline (chastisement) of God flows from a heart of love and carries the idea of training, correcting, and reforming the immaturity or disobedience of a beloved child. There is no thought of getting even with the child, satisfying justice against the child, or condemning the child with a holy wrath. That which moves the Father to chasten and discipline us, His adopted children, is His everlasting love for them and His eternal purpose to conform them to the image of His Only Begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:10-11).

3. There is no adopted child of God that the Father does not discipline in love (yes, even with a tough love that cares more for the child’s conformity to Christ than his comfort in this life)—it is a sign of our belonging to God and His belonging to us, as Father and child. To be without God’s fatherly discipline is rather to be a “bastard” (Hebrews 12:7-8), i.e. to have not God as one’s Father, to be the child of another father, namely, the devil (John 8:44). Just as you should not consider it

your duty to step up and discipline the neighbor's child for sin (because discipline is an act of love reserved to your own child), so you treat your own child as if he/she was not your own child if you forsake the loving discipline that all children are entitled to within a family (Proverbs 13:24). The same is true of our loving Father, which art in heaven.

4. Dear parents, how we must always remember that in the discipline of our children that we not indulge our sinful anger and "punish" our children, rather than lovingly discipline our children, that they might become partakers of God's holiness. Parental bitterness, name-calling, and fits of anger will not help them to see more clearly the loving discipline of the Lord. It will provoke them to wrath (Ephesians 6:4). And where we fail to lovingly discipline, let us be humbled before the Lord in confessing our sin to the Lord and to our children (lest we incur the discipline of our Father in heaven for reflecting to our children a perverted image of God as our Father, and treating His children with such contemptible anger). Dear ones, God tenderly receives us with His kisses, but He also toughly loves us with His rod. May God help us to embrace God's love in His rod as we embrace God's love in His kisses.

C. The Holy Spirit knows so well our tendency to forget what we have learned when we read: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speakth unto you as unto children . . ." (Hebrews 12:5). Dear ones, forgetfulness is not a harmless mistake, but rather leads us to sin against the Lord. Just as you, parents, will not excuse forgetfulness in your children after you have carefully instructed them, so the Lord does not excuse our forgetfulness (it becomes a very convenient excuse for our irresponsibility—"But I forgot"). To the contrary, it is our loving duty to God to "remember" (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 15:15; Luke 17:32; Revelation 3:3). We generally remember what is important to us (whether a vacation, a promotion, our birthdate, our email address, where we were born, duties and specific information associated with our

jobs), but how we forget (or do not want to remember) that God disciplines us with an everlasting love in the afflictions and trials we face every day. Such forgetfulness is sinful neglect on our parts, for which we must flee to Christ for His mercy.

D. This loving exhortation (in Hebrews 12:5) originally comes from Proverbs 3:11-12. This fatherly exhortation first addresses two sins from which we as God's children must refrain.

1. The first sin from which we must refrain is this: "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord" (Hebrews 12:5). The Greek word that is translated "despise" literally means "to think down or against" someone or something (i.e. to despise). In this context, the apostle warns us how easily we fall into the sin of despising that which is painful, uncomfortable, or unpleasant to us. I know that is a very natural reaction, but the Lord calls us by His grace to do that which is supernatural, and that is not to despise the afflictions, trials, and hardships we face in this life, because they are God's loving discipline, correction, and training that He uses in our lives (Psalm 23:4; Psalm 119:67). God's loving discipline may be directed toward us to expose sin in our lives and to bring us to repentance (Jonah in fleeing from the Lord brought a life-threatening storm and even brought a great fish to swallow him), or to mature us so as to prevent our falling into sin (Job, Abraham and Isaac, Paul and the thorn in the flesh to prevent boasting in the heavenly revelation he received, 2 Corinthians 12:7). The same event may be discipline to the child of God and yet judgment to the rebel against God (The flood that fell upon the earth at the time of Noah), for it is not the event, pain, trial, affliction, or heartache itself that determines whether it is punishment or discipline, but is rather the intent and design of God in sending it (whether for loving discipline to His adopted children or for holy punishment to His hateful enemies). How might we despise the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father (who can do us no wrong)?

a. **We despise the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father** by forgetting that all the trials we face are flashing neon signs that God our Father loves us so much and that He will not allow us to continue in our sin.

b. **We despise the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father** by taking no steps to correct/reform our lives (either ignoring the connection between the trials in our lives and the loving discipline of the Lord, or refusing to repent of sinful thoughts, words, or deeds, or blaming others for our sins rather than owning our own responsibility).

c. **We despise the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father** by murmuring and complaining against God who reveals His love for us through the hardships, pains, tribulations, and heartaches that He sends by way of a tough love to train us to depend upon Him for everything we need (rather than upon our health, our financial security, our family relationships, our gifts and abilities, or our dreams and ambitions). The Lord in love will at times take away from us that which we have come to depend upon in order to cast us upon the might of His power and the love of His mercy to us. It's not that we rejoice in pain and heartache in themselves, but rather that we rejoice in knowing and kissing the rod of our Father's love as He chips away (like a sculptor) at the hardness of sin that will eventually reveal the glorious image of Christ. We are stubborn children, but the Lord continues to chip away.

d. **We despise the loving discipline of our Heavenly Father** by despising those who correct us, rather than praising God for the correction He has sent, even if they do not intend to be so used by the Lord (Genesis 50:20; 2 Samuel 16:12). If we are more concerned with the person that corrects us or the manner in which he/she corrects us, than we are in carefully considering the correction brought to us, we despise the loving discipline of God. One of the greatest hindrances to receiving correction from others (as correction from the Lord) is our own stubborn pride. Pride does not want to be a student and be taught by

others, but wants to be a teacher at all times. Pride is unteachable. But God our Father has sovereignly determined in His most holy plan that the way to become more like Christ is to crucify our pride, acknowledge we don't know everything, and thankfully receive the correction of others (Balaam's donkey, Numbers 22:23-30; Proverbs 6:23; Proverbs 15:10).

2. But the Holy Spirit lists a second sin from which we must refrain as we face God's loving discipline: "nor faint when thou art rebuked of him [i.e. rebuked by the Lord—GLP]" (Hebrews 12:5). The Greek verb translated here as "faint" means literally "to loose or release out" (e.g. to unloose a tight bow string, to relax, to loosen up, which in this context means to grow weary and faint in being bound to our profession of faith, to our Terms of Communion, to a practice of righteousness and the truth). Thus, this aspect of the exhortation of the Lord calls us not to relax or loosen up our faithfulness to Christ and His truth regardless of the fiery furnace we might face, for the Lord has sent these trials and afflictions our way not to discourage us, but to see in them expressions of His fatherly and loving discipline that He uses to produce in us the fruit of patience and perseverance in professing and walking in the paths of righteousness and truth. Why do we as God's children fall into the sin of fainting in the midst of the battle (whatever that may be in our lives), a battle that God uses to discipline and train us?

a. **We fall into the sin of fainting and relaxing our hold upon Christ in the midst of affliction** because we have believed the lie of Satan that we have been forsaken by the Lord, but the actual message is this: Hebrews 13:5-6.

b. **We fall into the sin of fainting and relaxing our hold upon Christ in the midst of affliction** because we are walking by sight rather than by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). We are not looking to the example of Christ (Hebrews 5:8) or to the faithful witnesses and martyrs of Christ (Hebrews 11:33-38). Who do we think we are in thinking we

have gone through so much suffering and that we can only suffer so much before we break and give up (2 Corinthians 10:13; Matthew 12:20).

c. **We fall into the sin of fainting and relaxing our hold upon Christ in the midst of affliction** because we lose hope of ever being freed from the pain and sorrow of such grievous afflictions and trial, and fall into despair (Hebrews 11:39-40; Christ's bodily resurrection is our hope—just as He suffered and was raised to glory, so shall we).

## II. **Our Comfort In Knowing God Loves Us By Chastening Us (Hebrews 12:6).**

A. The Lord has not forsaken His *agape* love when He sends the rod of discipline our way by way of afflictions and heartaches, “for whom the Lord loveth (with *agape* love) he chasteneth.” There is perhaps nothing more important to our growth in Christ than our growing in the grace of Christ to be able to identify all of our trials, afflictions, and even reproofs for sin in our life as a divine expression of God's love for us, and that by these we are confirmed to be the very children of God. A true measurement of our growth in love is that we are learning to more and more kiss the rod of God's tough love, rather than trying to break the rod of God's tough love over our knees. We are then able to rest in the confidence that this God who knows us best (even the worst about us) is the very God who love us the most (even from everlasting to everlasting with an infinite love—for He loves us as He loves His Only Begotten Son). This God, who has freely and graciously adopted us into His family to become the heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, will only chasten, yea scourge us (as with a lash) for our good, for our profit with infinite wisdom and infinite love. Thus, as tears flow down our cheeks for all that we may be suffering or may have suffered, God is always up to something good in your life and mine (as His own dear children). Nothing catches Him by surprise. He makes no mistakes. When we shall know as



we have been known by the Lord in the glories of heaven, we will be able to connect the dots between God's love and the events that have happened in our life (until then we cast ourselves upon the love of God, knowing He can do us no wrong, trusting He sends these trials for our good as tokens of how near He is to us and how near His love is to us).

B. The Lord scourges every child that He receives (without exception). In the previous sermon, we saw the prodigal son received with kisses of the Father. In this sermon, we see the prodigal son that has been received with kisses now being taught in the school of Christ the love of God for him in walking with him in love through the fiery furnace of trial and affliction. How often we ought to reflect upon the suffering of Christian brethren in hospitals with incurable diseases, with lost loved ones, with divorces, with torture in prisons, with beheadings and crucifixions in mockery of Christ.

Dear ones, how do you, the child of God, not only cope by mere resignation, but use the trials and tribulations in life for your sanctification? The only way to do so is to take God at His word, that He is lovingly disciplining you and giving you through every heartache a token that you are His beloved child and that nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). And He proves it to us every day.

But what is your comfort in all that you face in this life if you are not the adopted child of God? There is no comfort to you in these afflictions and trials of life. In fact, they are tokens of God's righteous judgment that you deserve and that will fall upon you in the full fury of God's holy wrath. Flee the wrath to come, my friend, and come with empty hands, tattered garments, and complete poverty of righteousness to Christ, calling upon Him to save you, and He will do so ("Whosoever shall call on the name of

the Lord shall be saved” Acts 2:21). And then you will come to know the comfort of the Lord that all the trials, afflictions, and heartache of this life are His loving strokes to conform you to image of His dear Son.

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