
Chastisement

Divine Discipline

Introduction

Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, whether it is an individual, a city or community, or a nation. Because God loves the whole world, there has always been a lot of chastening going on. The history of the Jews as a nation is, in part, a story of the cycles of discipline and recovery they experienced throughout all their generations. There are many parallel lessons to be learned by individual believers regarding the way the Lord handles the individual and nation in Grace when either is disobedient.

Chastisement (Divine Discipline) of the Christian Believer

Chastisement of individuals is for believers only (HEB. 12:5). God's discipline is based on love, and when a believer is out of fellowship, discipline is aimed at only one thing, to get the believer to acknowledge his sin to God, to confess in order to be restored to fellowship (HEB. 12:6).

Discipline never means a loss of salvation (GAL. 3:26; HEB. 12:6). Divine discipline is chastisement for sins of the believer in the immediate context of the sin that was committed. And discipline is removed by Biblical confession of sin (1 JOHN 1:9; 1 COR. 11:31), "...if we judge ourselves...".

Suffering may well be part of the chastisement, and confession does not remove the suffering. However, when suffering continues after the believer has been restored to fellowship, the cursing is turned to blessing; that is, the suffering is for a positive purpose.

If a believer continues in sin and refuses to repent and confess, the chastisement will become more and more severe. Certain sins bring compounded discipline, particularly those in which the believer is acting as a stumbling block to others (MATT. 7:1-12). In extreme cases, the believer could suffer the Sin Unto Death. However, all chastisement is confined to time; there will be no discipline for believers in eternity (REV. 21:4)

The believer can avoid divine discipline through a consistent exercise of the principles of Christian

living outlined in the Word of God, as illustrated by the passage in HEB. 12:1-6.

Confession is equivalent to "laying aside the weight" of HEB. 12:1. The result is production and the fruit of the Spirit. The phrase "...let us run with patience" refers to the Faith-Rest life. This is Faith-Patience, also spoken of in JAMES 1.

The next recovery principle is Occupation with Christ, the "looking unto Jesus..." of HEB. 12:2. Then, avoid sins of the mind; avoid becoming "wearied", a reference to mental depression resulting from sin in HEB. 12:3. If any of the following are harbored continually, mental illness can result: A guilt complex; bitterness or hatred toward others; jealousy or envy; fear about the present or future; anxiety or worry about little things; desire for revenge; arrogance; judging another or running him down to others.

HEB. 12:4 refers to having victory over the Sin Nature. Confess, keep moving, separate from the sin, grow up in Christ, stand on Grace principles, exercise Faith-Rest, rely on positional truth.

Live in the Word, HEB. 12:5.

Divine discipline is designed to restrain us from sin and to teach us lessons which will result in growth (HEB. 12:11).

Divine Discipline for a Nation

The Bible has many examples of divine discipline being brought against communities or nations. The most dramatic discipline of a city occurred at Sodom and Gomorrah when God destroyed the cities and their inhabitants at one stroke. There had not been even a remnant of faithful people there in order to preserve the cities from final judgment. Even Lot and his family protested against having to leave.

Another example is the destruction of heathen Jericho in which all inhabitants were killed except for Rahab and her family. Rahab obviously had positive volition toward the Gospel, and her family enjoyed blessing by association in their narrow escape.

As the individual goes, so goes the nation. In order for a nation to avoid divine discipline, there must be at least some of its citizens who live in fellowship with the Lord. A question arises as to how many positive believers constitute a remnant, a "quorum". The answer is that at least some of the citizenry and some of the political leadership of a nation must be faithful believers and have enough influence to maintain the Divine Institutions in that nation. It's possible that the remnant could be very small if it is composed of the most influential and powerful citizens, such as kings, presidents, or other top political and business leaders. In a democracy, the remnant would probably have to be fairly large in order to have divine viewpoint influence in elections.

The key is this: in order for a nation to survive there must be freedom and morality. These are vital for the preservation of national integrity and for the maintaining of the Divine Institutions of volition, marriage, family, and nationalism.

There must be freedom so that the Word of God can be taught clearly and every citizen be given a chance to decide on issues of salvation and Christian living. People need freedom so that, under positive volition to the Word of God, they can keep their marriages and their families together. Families and nations are a part of God's plan for the human race. Satan's program is immorality, family breakup, and internationalism. The Divine Institutions were given to preserve the human race after the Fall and to protect the nations from the inroads of Satan's program.

There must be morality in order to protect people from criminality, disease, and the other consequences of unchecked sinfulness. In particular, the institutions of marriage and the family are very much dependent on a high level of morality in the community so that parents can maintain positive momentum for long periods of time while they are training and nurturing their children. It is the breakdown of morality which is the first and most obvious indication that both the individual and the nation are in trouble.

The Five Cycles of Discipline - Leviticus 26

The five "cycles" of discipline refer to the five levels, or increments, of chastisement which God brings on a nation which steadfastly refuses to repent of its immorality and live according to

God's plan. When a nation at first very subtly begins to drift away from the Lord, indicated by a laxness in morality in many of its citizens and an indifference to the Word of God, the Lord begins the discipline with relatively gentle reminders in the form of a loss of peace, a reduction in prosperity, and so forth. At the other end of the scale, God allows the complete destruction of a nation which has defiantly ignored all levels of discipline. This destruction is analogous to the Sin Unto Death suffered by an individual who is intractable in his defiance of God (Nadab and Abihu, Saul, Ananias and Sapphira).

At this point you should read LEVITICUS 26:14-29. That chapter provides a concise outline of God's warnings about the levels of punishment He will bring on the nation of Israel if they will not turn from their sinful rebellion. Discipline of the nation begins with relatively mild problems, including people's loss of inner peace and mental depression. There will be great fear and paranoia among the people, accompanied by lack of success in business and agriculture, poverty, sickness, and defeat in battle.

Verses 18 to 20 show the second stage of discipline which is characterized by a continued lack of fellowship with the Lord, loss of national prestige and honor, a cessation of God's grace provision for the nation, and a great barrenness in the land.

The third cycle, verses 21 and 22, includes great plagues, no control over natural enemies, a general inability to subdue the earth, the death of children, and the beginnings of great desolation among the people.

In verses 23-26 chastisement becomes severe, with increased attacks by enemies, invasions by foreign powers. There is extreme economic adversity and poor productivity, even in the production of necessities, resulting in famine. Some national sovereignty remains, but invaders have ever-widening influence in all areas of life. There are increases in plagues and disease.

The fifth cycle of discipline involves complete loss of personal and national sovereignty, the destruction of the family and the nation. Offerings to God are unacceptable. Nations which have undergone this destruction have experienced slavery, cannibalism, and the assimilation of its surviving citizens into other cultures.

Seeds of National Destruction, Genesis 11

The people of Babel, in defiance of God, thought they could construct a better society, a more secure, more compatible, more idealistic community. Their volitional defiance of God began at the grass roots level, "They said to one another..."; then they united in an effort to organize their society under agreed-upon principles. They had a complete disregard for God; there was no communication between God and man. They refused divine viewpoint and the commandment to go throughout the world and multiply.

During the Age of the Jews there were many examples of national discipline. HOSEA 4:1-7 gives an example of the nation rejecting Bible teaching and building for chastisement. They were engaged in false business practices (4:2); there was no application of grace, "no truth...nor mercy" (4:1); they were in a miserable state "languish" (4:3); there was false prosperity "they are increased" (4:7); they followed their religious leaders to destruction.

The whole book of Isaiah, notably chapter 28, was directed at the nation which had rejected the authority of God.

National destruction came on every nation that rejected the Word of God, not just the nation of Israel. Canaan was destroyed by the Jews under Joshua. There was divine discipline on Egypt for refusing to let the Jews leave. Assyria was destroyed (2 KINGS 19:35; 2 CHRON. 32:21). Babylon, in turn, faded quickly as a nation (DANIEL 5).

And discipline is related to cities as well as to nations, as the following examples indicate:

Sodom and Gomorrah, GEN. 18:20

Jericho, JOSHUA 6

Jerusalem, LUKE 21:24; JER. 5:1

Damascus, ISAIAH 17:1

Nineveh, NAHUM 3:5-8

Babylon, ISAIAH 13:19-21

Tyre, EZEKIEL 26,27; ISAIAH 23:1

Rome, REV. 17:11; 18:1ff

Chorazin and Bethsaida, MATT. 11:21

Sidon, EZEKIEL 28:20,22

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