

# Chastening

By Pastor Bud Talbert



Everyone who raises a child has times of frustration over the task. There are days when it seems as if our children will never learn, will never respond correctly, and will never get things right. Perhaps it would raise your patience threshold to try to write with your left hand. Then remember that a child is ALL “left-hand” when he or she is learning.

The same thing is true in a spiritual sense when we get converted. We are all “left-hand” spiritually, and we are ALL “left-hand” spiritually. God is growing us up to maturity, and He teaches us with infinite patience, infinite wisdom, and infinite love. In this growth process we must *endure chastening*.

If you had to pick a theme for Hebrews 12:5-11 what word would you choose to define that theme? Some form of the term *chasten* is used 7 times from verses 5 to 11. In addition, the word *corrected* in verse 9 uses the same root word, making a total of 8 uses of the word in this context. So, *chastening* would be the general subject that the author is discussing with in this section. In fact, Hebrews 12:5-11 contains the greatest concentration of this word in the New Testament (8 of the 21 times the root is used), so it becomes an authoritative passage for us in understanding this subject.

What does the word *chasten* mean? The dictionary defines our English word as meaning to *punish*, or to *restrain*, or to *refine*. It comes from the Latin term *castus*, which means *pure*. This is not punishment for punishment’s sake, but rather punishment to refine a person. It is training to correct bad behaviour.

What are some other words in this passage that are synonyms of the word *chasten*? In verse 5 he uses the term *rebuked*. Chastening involves rebuking, or pointing out someone’s error. In this case it is God pointing out the error of His children. In verse 6 he speaks of *scourging*. Chastening involves painful punishment. In verse 9 the author reminds us that our earthly fathers *corrected* us. Chastening refers to adjusting someone’s course, fixing something that they are doing wrong. These terms, and indeed the entire passage, make it clear that *chastening* in this context is a very unpleasant thing (verse 11).

The term that the Holy Spirit chose to relate this idea has as its root the word *child*. It means to *train* someone into a mature person, to *bring* them up with *training* and *instruction* in righteousness, as well as *correction*, *discipline* and *punishment* of wrongs. Notice what the writer of Hebrews opens with in verse 5: “*And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children ...*” This *child-training* theme runs through the entire passage. Chastening, then, is *child-training*, and it in Hebrews 12 it is *child-of-God* training.

Perhaps in this passage it refers to the persecution that these Hebrew Christians were going through. For us it can come in the form of sickness, or heartache, or difficulty at work or in the home, an unexpected attack, financial reversal, something that we *have* to do that we would rather not do, or something that is very difficult – all these would qualify as chastening.

What is the main thing that the author wants his readers to do about divine chastening? What are the two things we are not to do, according to verse 5? We are not to *despise* (i.e. treat lightly) God’s chastening or to *faint* (quit, look for some escape) when we encounter it. Verse 7 says that we need to *endure* chastening. Verse 9 tells us that we should regard God with *subjection*, just as we gave our earthly fathers *reverence* when they chastened us. These five terms, then, explain the attitude God desires His people to have regarding His chastening. They are not to despise it, or faint under it. Rather, they are to patiently endure it by subjecting themselves to Him and respecting His authority to chasten them.

This passage gives us three reasons why we should submit to God’s chastening. What are they? It is, first, a token of God’s fatherly love for us (verses 5-8). We should submit to God in it because He will use it for our good. Then, we should endure chastening (verses 9-10) because our earthly fathers chastened us

and we submitted to them. And God is much better at *child-training* than even the best earthly father. Finally, we should endure chastening (verse 11) because it produces eternally beneficial results.

We may accept God's discipline with Stoic resignation. This may be the acceptance of supreme wisdom. However, it is not the acceptance of a father's love, but of a father's power. Or we may accept God's discipline determined to get through it as quickly as possible. We regard it as an affliction which is to be struggled through with defiance, and certainly not with gratitude. Or we may accept God's discipline with self-pity, like those who give the impression that they are the only people in the world whom life ever hurt and to whom life ever brought sorrow. They are lost in self-pity. Even if it be the loss of a loved one through death, it is *themselves* for whom they are sorry all the time. Or we may accept God's discipline as a punishment that we resent. To this person, God is vindictive. When something happens to them, or to someone they love, their question is: "*What did I do to deserve this?*" They regard their difficulty as the undeserved and unjust punishment of God. It never dawns on them to ask: "*What is God trying to teach me through this? What is God trying to make me, what is God trying to do with me through this experience?*" But Hebrews 12:5-11 encourages us to see the hard things of life as the discipline of a loving Father, vastly wiser and more loving than our earthly father, and bring chastening to our lives so that we can enjoy closer fellowship with Him. (This is edited from William Barclay, *Hebrews*, p. 202f.)

Brethren, do not regard God's chastening with contempt, and don't do whatever you can to get out of it. Submit to it. Submit to Him. And love Him for it.