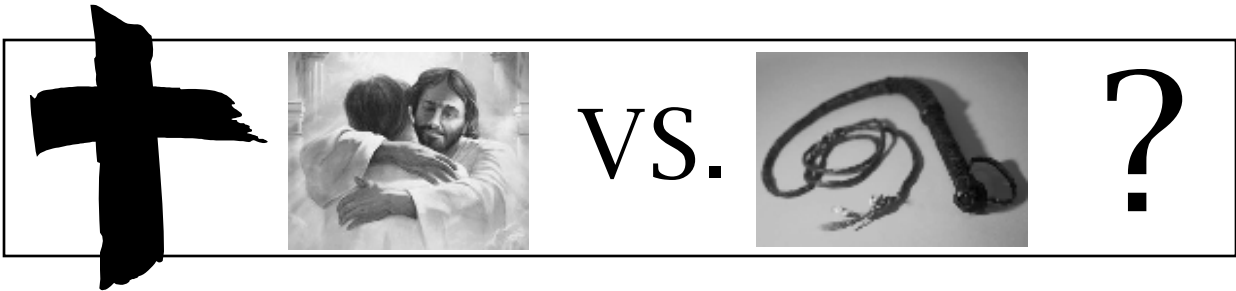


CHAPTER 11

Reigning Grace AND DIVINE CHASTISEMENT



Patrick J. Griffiths @ 2009

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in the Storyline of the Bible. She is determined by design to have a God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching focused on personal discipleship through intentional and systematic instruction; a Global-impacting mission that resolves to be a church planting church; and a Grace-based fellowship where disciples are invited to live under a reigning grace characterized by a Gospel-driven sanctification that celebrates a divine monergism to the Christian life.

CHAPTER 11

REIGNING GRACE AND DIVINE CHASTISEMENT

“Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?” (Heb. 12:9)



QUESTION

“Does God directly and immediately punish His people for sin?”

“Are you saying that God's wrath or judgment has nothing to do with a believer's sin or lifestyle?”

“I don't understand the chastening of God. I know sin has natural consequences but many times, we do not see them at all. When it says, "God chastens His children" and "whom the Lord loves He chastens" I am confused. If I continue in sin, will God not stop me?”

“Does God ever punish the believer for his sin?”

“What happens when a believer sins, does God punish His people for their sins? If God deals with me after my sin, what does this say of His Son's cross work? What about the passages which appear to address the issue of divine chastisement?”



This question is difficult. It has several tentacles that are pervasive and far-reaching. Yet I believe this truth is a watershed truth for the believer. If one understands this particular truth, they will be able to experience what it means to be free in Christ and to be walking in the grace of God. I believe there are several levels to answering this question.

- **First**, when Christ died for my sin did He take care of every sin or are there sins I am still to be held accountable for before Him?
- **Second**, if God is not judging any of my sins, then can I sin without restraint?
- **Third**, when God sees me, how does He see me? Does He see me in His Son? Does God even see my sin?
- **Fourth**, how do we handle chastening passages like Hebrews 12, Acts 5, 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 John 5?
- **Fifth**, what should be my relationship to sin?

It is impossible to answer the above question without examining these other areas. All of this comes in to play in the answering of this one question.

It is not my intent to open up the proverbial “can of worms.” As much as possible I would like us to stay focused in our discussion on the topic before us. We will not all agree, but with regard to our current study, we must agree to disagree agreeably.

I. **How Extensive Is the Death Christ Died in the Atoning of My Sin?**

When Christ died for my sin did He take care of every sin or are there sins I am still to be held accountable for before Him?

The person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ removed the divine judgment against sin. Thus, Christians will never face the wrath or judgment of God against them. Neither in this life nor in the life that is to come is God going to judge me for my sin.

When we speak of the death of Christ and the scope of its coverage, we say He forgave us of all our sin both past, present and future sin. This is not a disputed issue in evangelical doctrine. There is no sin that His death has not dealt with in full. There are a number of places where it says simply that he “died for our sins” or for us as sinners (Rom. 4:25; 5:60-8; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:17-18). Several passages

address this issue (Acts 13:38, 39; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 1:7, 9; Col. 2:13; Heb. 9:12, 26, 28; 10:10, 14).

“Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the **forgiveness of sins**: 39 And by him all that believe are **justified from all things**, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38).

“To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, **not imputing their trespasses unto them**; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19).

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son **cleanseth us from all sin**” (1 John 1:7).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to **forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**” (1 John 1:9).

“I write unto you, little children, because **your sins are forgiven** you for his name’s sake” (1 John 1:12).

“And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, **having forgiven you all trespasses**” (Col. 2:13).

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, **but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us***” (Heb. 9:12).

“For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: **but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**” (Heb. 9:26).

“So Christ was **once offered to bear the sins of many**; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28).

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**” (Heb. 10:10).

“But this man, after **he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever**, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb. 10:12).

“For **by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified**” (Heb. 10:14).

The death Christ died was and is sufficient to eliminate all of my sin debt. Such great theological words as justification, propitiation, and redemption all speak of this glorious truth. God has declared me righteous and has imputed to me the righteousness of Christ. God's wrath against me has been placated. The debt of sin I owed has been paid in full and cancelled. All of this is the substance of Romans 3:21-26.

²¹ "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²² Even **the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe**: for there is no difference: ²³ For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; ²⁴ **Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**: ²⁵ Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for **the remission of sins that are past**, through the forbearance of God; ²⁶ To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and **the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus**" (Rom. 3:21-26).

The reason why many do not enjoy the power of Christ's sacrifice is that they do not understand what God did for them by means of Christ's death. The benefits placed on those who believe are marvelous.

They are the *forgiveness* of sins (Acts 5:31; 13:38; 26:18; Romans 4:7; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:22; 1 John 1:9; 2:12), our *cleansing* from sin (Eph. 5:26; Heb. 9:14; 10:22; 1 John 1:7,9), our *healing* (1 Peter 2:24), our *salvation* (1 Cor. 1:18), our *life* (John 6:51-56; 12:24; 1 Thess. 5:10), our *justification* (Romans 5:9; 8:33), and our *sanctification* (Heb. 13:12).¹

To believe God is still dealing with me after my sin is to diminish the effectiveness of the sacrifice. **If I have to answer for any sin, in any way, then I must answer for all sin.**

Often it is said that God punishes us when we do wrong even as we would punish our own child if he did wrong. Yet, think about it. If my child did wrong and was punished for it, why would I punish him again for that which he was already punished? The only reason would be if I somehow felt the initial punish was not enough nor sufficient.



ILLUSTRATION

Let us assume your child disobeyed at school. The principal reprimanded him. When your child came home, you spanked him; why? Because the

reprimanding received at school was not enough. Now let us say he was severely paddled at school, would you then spank him when he came home? I think not (or at least I hope not). Let us follow that thought through. If God punishes us for our disobedience after Calvary, is it not somehow being suggested that the initial punishment was not enough nor sufficient?

If we could not pay for the penalty against sin initially, why is God now demanding payment for subsequent sin?

What happens to my sin that is committed on a daily basis? The effectual nature of His work that was begun at Calvary continues to this day. God's work of forgiveness *in time* continues unimpeded. Emphasis is placed on *in time* because from His vantage point we are as forgiven now as we will ever be. This is the genius of John 13 as well as 1 John 2:1, 2. Christ, unconditionally and unasked, continues His work of forgiveness. Without such a work on His part in our behalf, we could never enjoy what He has secured. Jesus Christ is our advocate.

This is what makes 1 John 1:7 and 9 so powerful. Because God is completing the work He has begun (Rom. 8:29, 30; Phil. 1:6; 2:12, 13; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24; Heb. 12:2) perseverance is both inevitable and certain for those who are His. Again, remember that inevitable and certain does not mean automatic or without means.

²⁹ "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, **them he also glorified**" (Rom. 8:29, 30).

"Being confident of this very thing, **that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it** until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

¹² "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ¹³ **For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure**" (Phil. 2:12, 13).

²³ "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ **Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it**" (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

"Looking unto **Jesus the author and finisher of our faith**; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

I believe our Lord Jesus intercedes for me unconditionally. I do not believe I have to ask for His forgiveness based on 1 John 2:1, 2. Unfortunately, some have misunderstood this to mean believers do not confess sin. In the life of the believer, there is legitimate remorse and an emotional response of hatred toward committed sin. This does not change the theological fact of my full forgiveness or the unconditional and unasked advocacy of Christ in my behalf. I believe the advocacy of Christ is unconditionally activated every time I sin. If the only sin forgiven is the sin I confess, then I am in a state of constant rebellion against God. To think you have to confess your sin in order to be forgiven puts too much stock in human ability. You and I are incapable of bringing anything to the plate. God must do and does it all. Again, our minds have been so conditioned that to say you do not have to ask for forgiveness is tantamount to saying you can sin with impunity. ***Yet not to ask for forgiveness does not mean you do not have to be forgiven.*** God forgives without us *having to ask*. If God's ministry of forgiveness stopped in the believer's life, he would be without hope. Not to confess sin is like saying believers do not have to walk in obedience. Neither one is possible.

I understand 1 John 1:9 to say that all true believers will confess their sin because it is what all true believers do. The same is true with reference to verse seven. Verse seven is in the same grammatical structure as verse nine. We would no more say that walking in the light results in the purifying of sin as we should say that confession results in forgiveness. Why do I walk in the light and why do I confess my sin? Because I have been cleansed and I have been forgiven.

The confession of sin is no different from good works or fruit bearing. The confession of sin is simply the outworking of the Spirit's ministry in my life. It is interesting to see that some hold to the idea that verse nine is referring to the initial act of repentance and belief for the unsaved (i.e. Geneva Bible, John Gill, Bob George, Craig Massey).

II. How Does the Father Currently See His Children?

When God sees me, how does He see me? Does He see me in His Son? Does God even see my sin?

I find this question most intriguing. I do believe my identity is retained in positional truth. God sees me as an individual with personality. However, my standing before Him is always based on the merit of Christ. This appears to be the message of Romans 6:3-4, Galatians 2:20, and Colossians 3:1-4.

³ “Know ye not, that so many of us as were **baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?** ⁴ Therefore we are **buried with him** by baptism into death: that **like as Christ was raised up** from the dead by the glory of the Father, **even so we also should walk in newness of life**” (Rom. 6:3, 4).

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless **I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:** and the life which I now live in the flesh **I live by the faith of the Son of God,** who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

¹ “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. ² Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. ³ For ye are dead, and **your life is hid with Christ in God.** ⁴ **When Christ, who is our life,** shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:1-4).

When 1 John 4 speaks of “perfect love,” he says that we have within us His perfect love and as a result of this perfect love, fear of torment is removed. Why is this so? “Because as He is, so are we in this world.”

¹⁷ “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. ¹⁹ We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:17-19).

God sees me just as He sees His Son. Why do we struggle with such a concept? Oh, what joy to embrace such truth. God the Father says of His children, “These are my beloved sons in whom I am well pleased.” How can such a thing be true; because they are standing on the merit of His only begotten Son. We live in a world of constant fear. Fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of being unwanted, unloved, and unaccepted. We fear the pain of missing the mark, of not measuring up, of being different. We fear the failure of failed expectations and desires. Such fear has no place in our relationship with God. Such fear is fueled by a theology that believes our standing before the Father is based on our ability to persevere. Such thinking is man-centered and denies the power of the cross to both justify and sanctify. The only merit I have before the Father is that which has been secured for me by His Son. This is the doctrine of grace. This is the Christ life.

III. What about the convicting work of the Holy Spirit and divine chastening?

Many people treating the area of sanctification draw a distinction in

God's dealings with His children in this way. Their reasoning is as follows. The believer will never face God as a condemnatory judge but he will face Him as a disappointed Father. Such thinking says that a sinning believer will never be brought into God's courtroom, but because of his sin, he will not be allowed into the "living room" of God for fellowship. Is there a legitimate dichotomy between God treating me differently positionally than He does paternally?

Does my sin in any way affect God's dealings with me and His opinion of me? The idea of convicting is to reprove or convince of wrongdoing. It is used of the unbeliever in several passages (Luke 3:19; John 3:20; 8:9; 16:8; 1 Cor. 14:24; Eph. 5:11, 13; Titus 1:9) and of the believer (Matt. 18:15; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:20; Titus 1:13; 2:15; Heb. 12:5; Rev. 3:19). Jesus Himself, however, was never convicted of wrongdoing (John 8:46). In the life of the Christian the Holy Spirit reveals to them attitudes and activities of the "flesh" and works in them and through them to put it off. This is one of His ongoing ministries in the life of the Christian. When I sin God's Spirit convicts me of my sin, but I do not have the "feeling" of guilt that accompanies it as it would in the life of the unsaved. The guilt aspect of sin was taken care of in the atonement.

I recognize this brings up the issue of whether or not believers are to feel guilty for their sins. Let us remember what guilt is. Guilt is being correctly charged with wrongdoing and the resultant sentence against it. Believers are never guilty before God. Why? Because of the finished work of Christ negates the penalty of sin against me. John Gill made the following statement concerning this passage:

Not that they have no sin, or no sense of sin, or that their consciences are seared, or that they never accuse for sin, or that they are to make no confession and acknowledgment of sin; **but that they are discharged from the guilt of sin, and are not liable to condemnation for it;** and through the application of the blood of Christ to them, have peace with God, and joy in the Holy Ghost.²

The word "reprove" or "convict" is **elegxw**.

- It is used of telling a brother his fault during the kingdom age in Matthew 18:15.
- John the Baptist is said to have "reproved" King Herod (Luke 3:19).
- The unsaved hate the light, Jesus Christ, because He reproves their evil (John 3:19-21). The same idea is found in Ephesians 5:13.
- John 8:9 (NASB & NIV - when included do not have the word **elegxw**). Jesus rebuked the sin of the unbelievers.
- In John 16:8-11 Jesus clearly identifies His activity of conviction with the world. These people are unsaved. They "do not believe in"

Jesus Christ.

- In 1 Corinthians 14:24 the unbeliever is convinced (**elegxw**).
- Believers are told to reprove the unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11). This same idea is seen in Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15. We are to rebuke those who oppose the truth. Such confrontation endeavors to keep people in the faith.
- There is a time when a church's congregation is to rebuke the sinning pastor for public offenses (1 Tim. 5:20).
- From 2 Timothy 4:2 it is noted how segments of preaching are for the rebuking of sinners and sin. 2 Timothy 3:16 also identifies this as an element of the Word.
- The law is also seen as a tool used to convict transgressors of their way (James 2:9).

An initial observation can be made by looking at the various occurrences of the word.

- **First**, conviction or rebuking is a part of the normal Christian life.
- **Second**, such conviction comes as we are exposed to the Word of truth.
- **Third**, it is the Spirit of God using the Word of God through the process of renewing the mind that creates the rebuking of sin in the life of the believer.
- **Fourth**, as sin is exposed through the intake of God's Word it is the responsibility of the believer to put it off.
- **Fifth**, the process of progressive sanctification is delineated in such passages as Ephesians 4:22-24.
- **Sixth**, the Spirit's work of exposure is in direct proportion to the intake of God's Word. **Conviction is Word-Centered and Confession is Spirit generated.**
- **Seventh**, the process described in Ephesians 4:22-24 is a certain part of all God's children.
- **Eighth**, not to have this action-taking place is a sign of unbelief.

The convicting work of the Holy Spirit is through Scriptural application and providential consequences.

Only two passages speak of the Father "rebuking" (**elegxw**) His children. The first is Hebrews 12:5. The second passage is Revelation 3:19. These passages will be noted later

IV. What about the Providential Judgment of God against All Sin?

Calvary removed for me the divine penalty against sin. This does not mean that Calvary removed for me the providential penalty against sin. If I was a smoker, or a drunk, or promiscuous, or a cheat, or a compulsive liar, or slothful prior to salvation and received Christ and am

now delivered from the bondage of these things, this does not mean that I will not face the consequences of those things. However, the judgment against those things will be providential and not divine.

Does God see my sin? God sees all sin and all sin grieves Him whether in the life of the believer or unbeliever. Nevertheless, such sin as it is found in the believer is never taken into account by the Father (Rom. 4:6-8).

⁶ “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, ⁷ *Saying*, Blessed are they whose **iniquities are forgiven**, and whose **sins are covered**. ⁸ Blessed is the man to whom **the Lord will not impute sin**” (Rom. 4:6-8).

God the Father never reckons or “brings up” the sin of His children. He did it once and it “cost” Him His Son. He will never do it again.

Sin in the life of a believer is a failure to believe that God alone is enough. It is still there and nothing we do can make it less than what it is. Sin in the life of the believer fails to appropriate what is already theirs in Christ. Sin is our failure to grab, not God’s failure to give. God has already provided all things in grace. Sin fails to appropriate all things because of greed. One’s obedience no more merits blessing as one’s disobedience merits judgment. Your standing in Christ merits the blessing and sin’s inherent demerit brings the judgment. Neither one is capable of affecting God’s “opinion” of me. Unfortunately, such truth appears startling. Yet, how tragic to continue living in a spiritual state of bondage.

Sin’s inherent demerit is death. I would like to suggest that God has established providential laws concerning the judgment against sin.

And I have come to the place where I acknowledge, almost reluctantly sometimes, that all hardship is God’s discipline, either corrective or remedial. The rub comes in submitting to it.³

Thus, regardless as to whom you are, saved or unsaved, if you sin, there are providential consequences to that sin. Is there a divine judgment against sin? Absolutely. For the believer it took place at Calvary in full. For the unbeliever, there awaits a fearful sentence against sin at the Great White Throne.

How can one come to any other conclusion than the above thought after viewing the power of Romans 8:28-39? The point of the passage is that no one, not even God, will be against us. No charge will ever be brought against God’s elect.

²⁸ “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. ²⁹ For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. ³¹ What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? ³² He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? ³³ Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? *It is* God that justifieth. ³⁴ Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. ³⁷ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:28-39).

Perhaps you are sitting back going, “whoa, slow down, doesn’t this kick open the door to sin? If there is no divine judgment against sin in *this* life in *my* life, then why do right?” Paul’s answer is still my answer; “shall we sin that grace might abound? God Forbid!”

Right now, I am convinced that I will never give an account for any sin before God either now or later. To make such a statement causes consternation and alarm in some. This does not however promote lasciviousness. This leads us to our next question.

V. How Does Grace View Sin?

If God is not judging any of my sins, then can I sin without restraint? Paul anticipates such a charge in Romans 6:1, 2, and 15.

¹ “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? ² God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ¹⁵ What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Rom. 6:1, 2, 15).

Romans 6:1-23 gives the triumph of grace over the power of sin. Verse 1-14 shows the freedom from sin’s tyranny (it is no longer my master) and verses 15-23 give the freedom from sin’s slavery (it is no longer my

motivation). Some feel grace is a license to sin. Verse one asks, “should we sin that grace might abound?” Here the question in verse 15 is, “can we sin since graces abounds?” Paul’s response to each is emphatic. Freedom *from* sin is *not* a freedom *to* sin.

If one claims to be ‘under grace’ and yet lives as a slave to sin, then the claim is nullified by one’s conduct. Those who live under grace show that they are under grace because they have a new master (God) and are liberated from their old master (sin). Paul refuses to accept any abstract understanding of grace separated from concrete daily living. Grace does not merely involve the forgiveness of sins. It also involves power in which the mastery and dominion of sin are broken. ⁴

Paul answers this charge rather strongly in Romans 6:1-8. If any one believes God is most glorified when they sin and thus the expansion of His glory liberates them to sin, then the damnation of such is just. Anyone who thinks grace is a license to sin is theologically amuck.

Titus 2:11,12 shows the instructional aspect to the grace of God.

¹¹ “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11, 12).

When one begins to comprehend the magnitude of God’s grace toward him, it can only result in love. In addition, love always overflows into obedience (John 14:15, 21).

VI. What about the Chastening of the Lord?

How do we handle the chastening passages like Hebrews 12, Acts 5, 1 Corinthians 11, and 1 John 5?

In 1958, a church in Jacksonville, Florida was experiencing a great outpouring of the power of God. Multitudes were being saved. Families were being restored and people were giving large financial gifts to the work of the Lord. One couple in particular brought in a rather large offering. Shortly thereafter, the couple was found dead in their apartment. It was discovered that they had lied about the size of the gift for tax purposes. Great fear gripped the church.

In 1974, a church in Norfolk, Virginia found themselves in an ugly battle with church discipline. Apparently, an older man within

the church family was sexually abusing his granddaughter. The church took immediate action and dismissed him from their fellowship. Shortly thereafter, he turned up missing and within weeks was found dead.

In 1986, a church in Phoenix, Arizona began to experience an unprecedented rate of mortalities within its body of fellowship. As they began to investigate, a link was established between the Lord's Table and patterns of sin in the life of those who were dead or dying. (These three examples are fictitious)

Traditional thought suggests that a believer can sin so grievously against the Lord and his fellow man that his heavenly Father will take him home prematurely. Hence, the sin is so *indefensible* that God is compelled to terminate life. Perhaps the key passage suggesting such a thought is 1 John 5:14-17.

¹⁴ “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: ¹⁵ And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him. ¹⁶ If any man see his brother sin a sin, which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. ¹⁷ All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death” (1 John 5:14-17).

It is here that we find the phrase a “sin that leads to death.” To illustrate this idea some would turn to such passages as Acts 5:3 with Ananias and Sapphira and 1 Timothy 1:20 with Hymeneaus and Alexander. Yet, does this do justice to the larger theological picture found within the New Testament? And if indeed this traditional thought is true, then what are the ramifications flowing from it?



1 JOHN 5:14-17

Let us begin with 1 John 5:16-18. In order to understand the verses under consideration we need to examine them in context. The paragraph containing these verses begins with verse thirteen and runs to the end of the chapter (v.21). Some would end the paragraph with seventeen, but that will have little bearing on its meaning. It is sad because of the theological error that has been promoted due to a mishandling of the text. It is sobering because of the propensity of proof-texting that takes place among Christians in the handling of the biblical text. It is also, in a way, amusing because the answer to the dilemma is actually quite simply. If the issue is looked at in context,

then the answer will be immediately forthcoming.

John's intent is for his audience to "know" (oida) they have eternal life (v.13). One of the ways they can "know" (oida [v.15]) that they have eternal life is through answered prayer; verses fourteen and fifteen use "if" (ean) with a subjunctive. Such a structure leaves one with a certain level of contingency. If the petition we ask is in accordance with His will, then He will answer. There is certainty involved. **First**, we must be true believers. **Second**, we must ask. **Third**, it must be in accordance with His will.

It would appear John is giving his audience a statement about prayer, not about a sin leading to death. *The sin leading to death is a simple illustration of what kind of prayer God does not answer. He will not answer a prayer prayed for those who have sinned a sin that leads to death.* It would appear John's audience was aware of such a sin. Fortunately, we do not. The issue of what this sin is, is irrelevant. The application for us is not found in verses sixteen through eighteen, but rather thirteen through fifteen. God answers the prayer of His children that are prayed in accordance to His will.

If I were to dissect the three verses, I would make these observations"

- **First**, the so-called "brother" of verse sixteen is a habitual sinner. His life is patterned by sin. This flies in the face of 1 John 3:7-9.
- **Second**, the sin leading to death is apparently a capital offense deserving of a capital punishment. What exactly this sin is we do not know. Since all sin leads to death (Romans 6:23), this sin must be of such a nature that death is premature, immediate and connected to a specific sin.
- **Third**, if verse eighteen can be connected to the preceding verses, then true believers do not have to worry about sinning such a sin or the pattern exhibited in the first part of verse sixteen. True believers, being born from above, "sinneth not."

Putting 1 John 5:16-18 aside, we have created a whole "theology of judgment" from the New Testament. I would like to look at this issue in the following comments and see if such a "theology" is found within the biblical record. We need to work systematically through various New Testament passages to determine what exactly is meant and how it applies to us as Christians. I cannot think of a better way then to begin with Mark 3:20.



MARK 3:20

During the days of our Lord there was a sin so insolent in nature that it was identified as being both unforgivable and eternal (Mark 3:20-

30).

The phrase in v.29 literally reads “never have forgiveness in the age/eternal, but (alla) is guilty of eternal judgment.” There is no middle ground in this passage. The sin damned eternally. There was no ground for repentance. It was as if it were signed, sealed, and delivered.

If such passages as Proverbs 29:1 and 2 Chronicles 36:11-17 are invoked, then this is where they are to be placed. It is important to note the historical context of 2 Chronicles 36 because of its national and theocratic flavor. We are not talking of individuals, but a nation and we are not dealing with grace, but law.

In light of Mark 3:20, we must ask ourselves, “What sin was so grievous that no forgiveness would be granted?” Verse 29 tells us, “those who speak evil against the Holy Spirit.” This still does not answer the question, but it does narrow down the transgression. Many suggest the idea in Mark 3 is that our Lord’s work was being attributed to the devil. If that is the sin, then how can we sweep our traditional concepts of mortal sins under that narrow rug?



ACTS 5

I would suggest this is the sin committed by Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Why? Because the sin committed was against the Holy Spirit. If a sin against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable, then what exactly is this sin? If it is attributing to the devil the works of God, then the sin is very narrow. If it is more than that, then I do not know. And if it is more than that, it is conceivably possible that you could commit the sin and not even know you have until it’s too late. Such an event as described in Acts 5 is exceptional and not normative.

Personally, if the unpardonable sin is still capable of being committed, then it is a sin that only the unbeliever could commit.



1 CORINTHIANS 5:5; 1 TIMOTHY 1:19, 20

The key is found in the phrase “may be saved” (1 Cor. 5:5). The verb is in the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood is *the mood of possibility and potentiality*. *The action described may or may not occur, depending upon circumstances.*

In both cases, I believe we are dealing with unsaved people. Apparently, both the incestuous man of 1 Corinthians 5, and Hymenaeus and Alexander of 1 Timothy 1 had not committed either the unpardonable sin or the sin that leads to death. How can such a conclusion be made?

- **First**, in both cases they were being excommunicated from the fold. Separation was taking place for the purpose of personal salvation.
- **Second**, I am going to assume that the church actively prayed for these *unbelievers*. First John 5 does not forbid prayer for those who have committed a sin that leads to death, but neither does it command it.
- **Third**, if these individuals repent, then they will be saved. If they do not repent, then they are lost.

Thus, I do not believe 1 Corinthians 5 and 1 Timothy 1 are in parallel to 1 John 5.



1 CORINTHIANS 11:30

Of all the passages throughout the New Testament the way in which they have traditionally been used can be explained by looking at the verse in the immediate and larger context. There is only one passage I find formidable concerning the area under discussion in 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.



TACKLING THE DIFFICULT PASSAGE . . . 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-34

What about 1 Corinthians 11:30 where some have died because they partook of the Lord's Supper with sin in their life? What about 1 Corinthians 11:32? "When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world." I would simply offer these observations.



A SHORT OUTLINE

- I. The problem of practicing the Table with a factious fellowship (11:17-22)
- II. The picture of what the Table represents (11:23-26)
- III. The penalty for practicing the Table in an unacceptable way (11:27-32)
- IV. The parting exhortation toward unity (11:33-34)



SEVERAL OBSERVATIONS

First, I am not convinced we are practicing the Lord's Table in the same way. The historical context has the Lord's Table being preceded by a meal taken in common. The abuse was in the meal preceding the celebration of the Lord's Table (vv.20-22, 33, 34). Thus, the problem as existing in the first century church was two-fold:

(1) They have quarrels in the worship assembly, and (2) they have not made proper provision for the poor to join in the meal on an equal basis with the well-to-do. ⁵

It is because of this abuse that Paul says, “It is not to eat the Lord’s Supper” (v.20). By seeking to perform the Lord’s Table with body division is not to perform the Lord’s Table at all. It is an action without any significance.

Second, the abuse was in the division of the body. This is apparent from 11:17-22. By their lack of love for the body of Christ they were celebrating the Lord’s Table in an illegitimate way. The table speaks of body unity. We are one because of the cross work of Jesus Christ. To come with bitterness and division toward the body is to desecrate the Lord’s cross work.

Third, what we individualize and isolate, Paul speaks of corporately, collectively, and communally. We have so individualized the text of Scripture that we have lost all sense of community. The Lord’s Table speaks of body unity, of family.

Not that those who suffered or were removed were necessarily the actual delinquents, suffering because of their own misdeeds. The chastisement was inflicted upon the whole company. The guilt of actual offenders affects an assembly as a whole. It is to the whole gathering that the Lord here speaks. ⁶

Fourth, I lean toward the idea of the circumstances being in a period of a dispensational transition. The idea that God is striking people dead for harboring sin in their hearts is a little strong for me. Not repugnant, but difficult to interpret. This does not make it wrong, but I see this as being unique to a dispensational change. The same is seen with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. If God is striking people dead who partake of the table in an unworthy fashion, then why is “regarding iniquity in my heart” (Ps. 66:18) not on the same level? What is the theological distinction in categorizing sins? What constitutes a “sin leading to death” (1 John 5:16-17)? In fact, if one does commit the sin that leads to death, we are told not to pray for them. The question still begging to be answered is this, “is God striking people dead for taking the Lord’s Table with sin in their heart?” If so, who are these people? Is it even identifiable?

There are other passages that are equally difficult to understand.

1 Corinthians 15:29 “Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the

dead?”

Fifth, if the issue is one of *present* sin, then who is worthy to partake of the Table? To believe you can partake only if you have everything “right with the Lord” is to be blinded about the extent of sin in your own life and your ability to live the Christian life.

If such is the case, then one will have to create a “Four step process” whereby all the bases are covered and the individual is safe from divine judgment.

Of course in ourselves we are altogether unworthy, but we have found acceptance in the worthy One, and in Christ every believer is worthy to approach the Table of the Lord. If I truly feel my sinfulness, confess it, and put my trust in the Saviour of sinners, then in Him I find my worthiness. ⁷

Sixth, consider what the Table represents. It is a celebration of God’s work on the cross in my behalf for my sin. The Table says, “You can’t, but God can.” The Table is a celebration of what God did for sinners! Not perfected saints. I come to the Table because *I am not worthy*. I come because He alone is worthy. Can you imagine if the table was only for those who somehow were meeting all of God’s righteous demands? No one would be able to come.

Seventh, the examination of verse twenty-eight can be viewed as determining whether one is in the faith instead of the one who is harboring un-confessed sin (2 Cor. 13:5-7). This is truly a violation of the Lord’s Table — to partake when one is lost. Yet does this not happen every time it is celebrated?

As a fellowship we practice an **open** Communion Service. We recognize that not everyone coming to the table will be a believer (Matt. 26:21-29 [“Judas”]). If you are a believer, we invite you to participate in our Communion Service. If you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, we invite you to observe the body of Christ as His body celebrates His Table as a loving and gracious family.

(4) The New Testament says nothing about any particular conditions for participation in the sacrament beyond a willingness to come to Christ in faith and with love for other believers. The Lord's Supper today should be open to all who wish to feed on Christ and profess faith in him. This implies that unbaptized believers may take part, although it would be normal for such persons to undergo baptism without delay. It also means that there should be no barriers of age; what matters is faith and

an understanding of what is happening appropriate to the age of the participant.

(5) The New Testament welcomes sinners to the Lord's table but also warns against unworthy participation in a spirit of frivolity or lovelessness. The church today in maintaining an "open table" should also remind participants of the solemn implications of the sacrament. ⁸

As an unbeliever we want you to hear the gospel that is in the Communion Service (1 Cor. 11:26). The body that was broken and the blood that was shed are so that the charges brought against you by your sins were addressed and dropped. And the only way this could happen is through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. To participate as an unbeliever is to "be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:27). By not judging the body correctly you are eating and drinking judgment to yourself (1 Cor. 11:29). It is for this reason that we are to examine ourselves to make sure we know the Lord as our Savior (1 Cor. 11:28).

As parents we should not encourage our unbelieving children to partake of the Lord's Table. We should, however, use the Lord's Table as an opportunity to share Christ with them.

In believing this, however, I do not believe we are to physically restrain the unbelieving from the table, but I also do not believe the Communion Service is for the unbelieving no more than I believe our time together on Sunday morning is for the unbelieving. The New Testament does not address what to do with the elements when the unbelieving are present. Some fellowships do believe you are to keep the unbelieving from participating and in order for that to happen they take one of two actions. They practice what is called a **closed** communion whereby only members can participate and to insure that this is followed communion is placed on an off day or during a special service. Another approach is to have a **close** communion whereby those of like faith and practice are invited to participate. Again, we practice an open communion. This means you need not be a member or regular attendee of this church to participate. If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, then we invite you to participate with us at the Table.

- Common view

Before taking part in such a service it is important to conduct a rigorous self-examination (cf. 2 Cor 13:5f), so that we avoid communicating unworthily (v.27).⁹

Before we partake we are to give ourselves a thorough self-

examination, looking honestly at our hearts for anything that should not be there and sifting out all evil. Our motives, our attitudes toward the Lord and His Word, toward His people, and toward the Communion service itself should all come under private scrutiny before the Lord.¹⁰

To partake while in an unspiritual state or while indulging in sin in the private life, or while entertaining bitterness of spirit against a fellow-believer instead of living in brother love, is to partake 'unworthily.'¹¹

- Excellent insight

No matter what he sees in himself of that which is evil and unholy, if he judges himself before God and confesses his own unholiness, he is in a state of soul where he is free to participate in this sacred service.¹²

Eighth, to be judged by the Lord is to accept His evaluation of myself. He judges me a sinner in need of a Savior. The Table communicates this message loud and clear. I judge myself as having embraced His evaluation of me. Not to except this judgment is to be condemned with the world (v.32).

- Key idea

God judges me when I face the consequences of my sinful choices. I can avoid the judgment of God, when through exposure to His Word the Spirit of God makes the necessary application and acts on me in such a way that I put off the deeds of the flesh. It is also through the Word that I learn what is right and can perhaps avoid completely the judgment of God against ingrained sinful actions.

Ninth, the word "unworthily" means "irreverently."

The word **anazios**, *unworthily*, has been explained in a host of ways: with a bad conscience, and without repentance (Theodoret, Olshausen); with contempt of the poor (Chrysostom, Billroth); without faith in the words: *given for you* (Luther); without self-examination (Bengel), etc. etc.¹³

Unworthily, refers to manner or behavior.¹⁴

Unworthy conveys the idea of unacceptable. Irreverent conveys the idea of treating it casually or of having disrespect, of not honoring its importance. This understanding brings a different slant than what we

are accustomed. Traditional thought explains it as such: We think that if we are harboring sin in our life or have sin in our heart that we are not worthy to partake of the Lord's Table. But this would demand sinless perfection or the complete eradication of the old man, both of which are impossible at this time. The Table is for sinners such as you and me. The Table tells me that I am forgiven and now have full access before my heavenly Father. We will never be worthy. Our worth is an imputed worth unmerited and grace given. Such righteousness now makes me worthy to partake and remember the atonement and grace.

The issue is not do I have sin in my life; the issue is how do I view my Lord's death. Am I clinging to Calvary, am I praising His name for a more than abundant grace, am I standing in His Son? This is the issue.

If a person comes without respect to the Table's importance and partakes irreverently, then he is guilty of putting the Lord to death. And my Bible tells me that the Lord smote this person in that context.

Alfred Martin provides an insightful thought.

Distinction must be made between being unworthy and doing something unworthily or in an unworthy manner. We are all unworthy in the sense of undeserving of God's mercies. Grace, as we have seen, is essentially undeserved, unearned, and unrecompensed. If one were to wait to partake until he were worthy, he would never partake.¹⁵

He then speaks of three judgments: (1) self-judgment (1 John 1:9), (2) divine chastening (1 John 5:16), and (3) God's condemnation of the world (1 Cor. 11:29, 32). Concerning divine chastening he adds this qualifier:

Needless to say, we must be extremely cautious about passing judgment on the reasons for the death of believers and professed believers. The seemingly premature death of a believer may have no relationship to the observance of the Lord's Supper. That is something completely in God's control.¹⁶

If the judgment attached to the Lord's Table is "weak, sick, and some sleep [die]," then what do we do with the unbelieving who partake of it on a weekly basis? Is the judgment only attached to the people of God when partaken with a spirit of division?

As to this, while it is true that if an unbeliever partakes he certainly does so unworthily, yet the warning here has to do with the spiritual condition of the believer.¹⁷

Tenth, the issue of God judging His people in verses 30 and 32 is difficult. Is the judgment miraculous or natural? Could the judgment be the inherent demerit due to the sins of factions and divisions? Consider the psychological problems of living in a factious, stress filled family and the manifestation of those issues in physical ailments. Perhaps this is the judgment being addressed in verses 30 and 32.

Consider the thoughts of the following paragraph. What is the conclusion you would come to after reading it?

It was a warning judgment, specially inflicted by God, such as He sends to awaken a man to salvation. The believer ought constantly to judge himself; such is the normal state. If he fails in this task, God reminds him of it by judging him by some chastisement which He sends on him, he is judged; and if he does not profit by this means, nothing remains for him but to suffer in common with the world the final judgment from which God sought to preserve him, to be condemned. The world denotes unconverted and lost humanity.¹⁸

In verses 29 and 34, Paul uses the word **krima** for judgment.

In verses 29 and 31, he uses the word **diakrino** for judged.

In verses 31, and 32, he uses the word **krino** for judged.

In verse 32, he uses the word **katakrino** for condemned.

31 For if we would judge **diakrino** ourselves, we should not be judged **krino**.

All four words come from the same root word, "**Krino**." In Romans 8:1 the word is **katakrima**.

- Hmmmmm . . . ?

God chastens us to keep us from falling from salvation, and will even take our life, if need be, before that could happen.¹⁹

I am equally not sure how those who hold to obedience as being optional in the Christian life do with those who are not totally surrendered to the Lord. Listen to the following quote. What happens when one of these "Non-walking in the Spirit" believers partake of the Lord's Table?

There are eternal consequences for sin. Receiving a free ticket to a sports event guarantees one entrance to the stadium, but it

does not guarantee one a front row seat. Similarly, receiving the free gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ guarantees a person entrance into God's eternal kingdom, but in no way guarantees one an exalted position in that kingdom! Our "position" in heaven and the rewards associated with that position are totally dependent upon the holy life and godly works which we manifest in this life time (1 Cor. 3:11-17; 9:24-27; 2 Cor. 5:10-11). While the pleasures of sin in this life may at times appear more important than some distant hope of future rewards in heaven, scripture teaches that those who barter away their 'inheritance' (their future rewards in heaven) for the pleasures of sin will one day weep uncontrollably when they see the unspeakable rewards which they forfeited when they pursued their own sinful pleasures in this lifetime. (Hebrews 12:14-17, Luke 19:11-27, Matthew 25:14-30)²⁰

Why does God not strike these people dead? Where is the divine chastening in their life?

Eleventh, I believe there is more to the text than I know. If what I have said is not true and we are capable of committing this "sin" today, then the Lord's Table is not necessarily a celebration, but a fearful self-examination. If what is stated is for today, then why are people not falling over dead? I will plead ignorance at this point, and you might wish to continue with the idea that if you have sin in your heart and eat of the Lord's Table the Lord will smite you. But I choose to believe there is more to it than that.

I heard of one church that would not celebrate the Lord's Supper for at least two years because the pastor felt there was sin in the church family.

Consider the upper room scene with Peter and the ten. Why did they not fall over dead? How many people honestly believe their heart is sinless because of something they did (i.e., confession)?



WHAT DOES THE TABLE REPRESENT?

The Table represents the cross work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me" (John 17:23).

²⁶ "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with

Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-28).

“by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace” (Eph. 2:15).

³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. . . ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:3, 13).

“Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (Col. 3:14).

When we come as a fellowship to the Table with open division and a spirit of not loving the brethren, we are something other than Christian.

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8).

“For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

“with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love” (Eph. 4:2).

“and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you” (1 Thess. 3:12).

“Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9).

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater” (2 Thess. 1:3).

“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22).

“Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet. 4:8).

“For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11).

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7).

When we partake of the Lord’s Table let us review why we meet as Christians and then let us celebrate the sufficiency and supremacy of His cross work.



HEBREWS 12:5, 6

This always raises the question as it relates to Hebrews 12:5, 6. If God always sees us in His son and never will bring our sin into account, then how do we answer the issue of chastening in the life of the believer?

Consider this truth in light of Hebrews 9:23-10:4. There are several points needing to be made.

- **First**, the death Christ died paid the penalty for sin in full once and for all (vv. 25-27). No one would dispute this. Jesus paid the penalty against all sin both past, present and future. If Jesus paid the penalty for all sin, then for what sin am I being punished? If I say for the sin I commit today or that which will be committed, then I see the once and for all nature of the sacrifice as being insufficient.
- **Second**, when Christ does appear again, it will not be to deal with our sin (v.28).
- **Third**, the sacrifice Christ offers makes the recipients of it perfect (10:1).
- **Fourth**, those who are the recipients of His finished work have been cleansed once for all and no longer feel guilt before God for their sin (v.2).

I would like us to consider the idea of “The Father’s Love and the Suffering of His People.”

The writer to the Hebrews sets out still another reason why men should cheerfully bear affliction when it comes to them. He has urged them to bear it because the great saints of the past have borne it. He has urged them to bear it because anything they may have to bear is a little thing compared with what Jesus Christ had

to bear. Now he says that they must bear hardship because it is sent as a discipline from God . . . ²¹

So, then, the writer insists that we must look on all the hardships of life as the discipline of God and as sent to work, not for our harm but for our ultimate and highest good. ²²

The main purpose which the sacred writer has here in view is to reconcile the minds of his readers to the sufferings entailed by their Christian profession, that is, the cross in the proper sense of the word. But all sufferings imposed by God upon His children, whether for discipline, trial of faith, or witness for the truth, have this one feature in common, that they are all proofs of divine love, not signs of anger. The Christian in every trial sees a proof of the Father's loving care for his good.²³

The classic treatment of chastisement is found in this portion of Scripture. Chastisement, therefore, involves discipline and correction of the child of God through directive punishment and suffering. It is altogether different from the penal retribution of the unsaved. ²⁴

The point of the statement (12:1) is that the experience of these Old Testament saints testifies to us of the importance of persistent faith (257). The second incentive to encourage faithful persistence in suffering is a reminder of the experience of Jesus (258). The explanation of suffering (12:4-11 [260]). He is not suggesting that God is responsible for the evil which wicked men bring upon believers. He is, however, saying that God has incorporated even these circumstances as instruments to accomplish His will. In times of affliction caused by opponents to their faith, God's people are to realize that persecution is actually overruled by God and used for the training of believers. It is all too common to conclude that sufferings are always sent by God as punishment for sin. It must be remembered that Christ, God's unique Son, learned through His suffering (2:10), and believers should adopt His mind on this matter (261). When believers are confronted with the prospect of enduring hardships, they must understand that it is not as punishment coming from God's wrath, but is a part of the heavenly Father's program of educating His sons (262).²⁵

God's children may go through excruciatingly painful experiences. God has not promised to save His children from the fiery furnace, but He has promised to be with them in their time of need. The chastisement is hard to endure, but God will give the grace of

endurance. The believer knows that God knows what He is doing.

26

Two thoughts are suggested by the consideration of Christ's sufferings (3). The sufferings of the Hebrews were relatively light (4); and all sufferings which come from God are the wise discipline of a Father (5, 6 [p 396]). Sufferings are tempered by the providence of God, and they are a sign of sonship. (399)²⁷

(vv.4-13) This casts a new and a wonderful light on all the persecutions and the hardships the readers are to endure perseveringly, for these inflictions are plain evidence of the sonship of the readers: only a father who is deeply concerned for his sons chastises them. (431, 432). (verse 6) Chastisement in its severest form is thus strong evidence of one's sonship. This casts the clearest light on all persecution that God lets us bear in this life for Christ's sake. It does correct us, drive out the sin that is still in us, but only in order that we may be more truly the sons that God would have us to be (434).²⁸

The persecutions which we endure for the Gospel's sake, are on another account useful to us, even because they are remedies to destroy sin; for in this way God keeps us under the yoke of his discipline, lest our flesh should become wanton; . . . ²⁹

Suffering comes to all; it is part of life, but it is not easy to bear. Yet it is not quite so bad when it can be seen as meaningful. For Christians all suffering is transformed because of the Cross. The writer points to the importance of discipline and proceeds to show that for Christians suffering is rightly understood only when seen as God's fatherly discipline, correcting, and directing us. Suffering is evidence, not that God does not love us, but that he does.³⁰



A SUGGESTED OVERVIEW

- 10:23 Let us hold fast
- 10:32ff Remember you endured a great conflict of suffering being made a public spectacle
- 11:36 Others experienced mockings, scourgings, chains, and imprisonment
- 12:1 Therefore (in light of what has preceded) run the race. Do not give up in the face of persecution. In the midst of our affliction for righteousness' sake, let us "put off" the old man . . .

- 12:2 Fix your eyes on Jesus. Jesus is the perfect example of one who suffered at the hands of sinners, who did nothing wrong.
- 12:3 “So that you will not grow weary and lose heart (This echoes back to 10:23ff).
- 12:4 In your stance for righteousness and against sin, you have not yet been harmed.
- 12:5ff Here begins the exhortation. Why the exhortation? I believe the intent of 12:5ff, is to let the people of God know that what they are currently enduring is coming from the hands of a loving Father.
- 12:12 Therefore, be encouraged

Hebrews 12 has always been looked to as a pivotal passage to “prove” that God will chasten His people for their sins. Yet, in light of all that is found in the doctrines of justification, imputation, etc. and the exchanged life, how can this be? It is maintained that there is perhaps another way of looking at the paragraph of chastening as it is found in Hebrews 12 that is more in keeping with the glorious truth of the believer’s position in Christ.

By looking at the larger context of chapter 11 and 12:1-4 it will be seen that the discipline being referred to is the hardship one will naturally incur by living a godly life in this world (John 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12; Acts 14:22). All of the hardships that I encounter are providential in nature. Why providential versus miraculous? Miraculous means natural laws are being suspended. For example, if you were to jump off of a building only to float in the air that would be a miracle. The natural law of gravity was suspended thus allowing you to float.

Are the various trials encountered by the Christian providentially or supernaturally launched? There are various passages such as James 1:2, 1 Peter 1:6-8 and Acts 5:41 that speak of the believer encountering hardship. I believe they are all providential. But by saying providential, I do not mean random, arbitrary, or pointless. Because of God’s sovereignty, I believe every act is divinely controlled. I believe this is why James can tell us to rejoice in the midst of hardship (James 1:2; Acts 5:41). Does God bring trials into our life? Absolutely! Why? So that our faith is purified and Christ is seen. The hardships He sends are not penal or punitive, but rather the purging of dross.

What about those passages that seem to address the Lord’s discipline of His children? Perhaps we are looking at the Lord’s chastening in a penal way versus a training way. Instead of looking at chastening in the context of punishment, what is keeping us from looking at it in the context of sports? Through exercise, I am “punishing” my body. It has

done nothing wrong to deserve it; I am simply molding it for service. So is God.

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the **nurture** and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

“All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for **instruction** in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the **chastening** of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (Heb. 12:5).

“If ye endure **chastening**, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Heb. 12:7).

“But if ye be without **chastisement**, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons” (Heb. 12:8).

“Now no **chastening** for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11).

The Greek word **paideia** is used six times with four of those times in Hebrews (Eph. 6:4; 2 Tim. 3:16). The Hebrews passage would read dramatically different if instead of the word chastening we used the word instruction or admonition or nurture. Yet, if we note the context in which it is found, the idea of penal judgment seems foreign; especially in light of the previous statement of v.3. I would suggest the hardship/chastening/instruction of vv.5ff is the persecution endured for living a life of faith as noted in chapter 11. This is consistent with the other New Testament passages.

⁸ “*We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8, 9).

⁹ “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:9, 10).

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

¹² “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: ¹³ But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as a thief*, or *as an evildoer*, or as a busybody in other men's matters. ¹⁶ Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

Hebrews 12 is simply noting a truth all of us are aware of that regardless as to the reason or cause God is ultimately behind the scene orchestrating the events to accomplish His purposes (i.e., Job's hardship, Paul's thorn).

If Christians can commit some type of sin that results in the judgment of God against it, then activity becomes subjective (for we never know when we cross the line), then forgiveness is not full and finally, and His death was not sufficient.

If someone is suffering, how do we know it isn't God punishing him or her? If God judges on a physical level, then what sins are punished?



1 PETER 4:17

“For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” This passage is very similar to Hebrews 11 and 12. Again you have the idea of suffering for the sake of righteousness (vv.12, 14, 16, 19). Yet our attitude in the midst of this is to be one of “rejoicing”, “overjoyed” (v.13), “praise God” (v.16), and “according to the will of God” (v.19). All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (John 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12; Acts 14:22).

Is this not the voice of James 1:2 “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds?” As believers we are not under the heavy hand of God against us. When facing difficulties we should rejoice. Why? Because the difficulty will purify our faith. Trials remove dross and cause us to throw ourselves upon our Savior.



REVELATION 2 AND 3

Reigning Grace and Divine Chastisement

Ephesus 2:1-7	Repent v.5a	Remove lamp stand v.5b	Overcomes v.7a	Eat of the tree of life/Paradise of God v.7b
Smyrna 2:8-11			Overcomes v.11a	Not hurt by the second death v.11b
Pergamum 2:12-17	Repent v.16a	Make war against them v.16b	Overcomes v.17a	Give the hidden manna and a new name v.17b
Thyatira 2:18-29	Repent v.22a	Throw into great tribulation vv. 22, 23	Overcomes v.26a	Authority over nations v.26 He shall rule v.27 Given the morning star v.28
Sardis 3:1-6	Repent v.3	Come like a thief vv.3, 4	Overcomes v.5a	Not erase from the book of life and will confess his name v.5b
Philadelphia 3:7-13			Overcomes v.12a	Make him a pillar, not go out, write the name of God v.12b
Laodicea 3:14-22	Repent v.19	Wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked vv. 17, 18	Overcome v.21	Sit w/ Him on His throne v.21

With reference to overcoming and the consequences of not overcoming let us consider the following thoughts. Only seven of the twenty-nine occurrences are found outside of John's writings. Our study will by default focus on John's usage of the word.

First, let us consider the idea of overcoming.

The conditions to being one who overcomes

- Jesus Christ has overcome (John 16:33; 1 Cor. 15:57; Rev. 5:5)
- You know Him / the Father (1 John 2:13, 14)
- Greater is He in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4)
- Born of God (1 John 5:4). Faith is the instrument of being born of God. The same idea appears to be expressed in Revelation 12:10, 11 (The blood and our testimony of faith in that finished work).

- Believes in Jesus as the Son of God (1 John 5:5)
- Sons of God (Rev. 21:7)
- Revelation 2 and 3 leaves me with the impression that the one who repents is the one who overcomes. This same individual appears to be the one who has an ear to hear.

The consequences of being one who overcomes

- Stands in a position of triumph over the wicked one (1 John 2:13, 14)
- Stands in a position of triumph over the world (1 John 5:4, 5)
- Eats of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7)
 - This promise should not be construed as reward for only a special group of Christians but a normal expectation for all Christians.³¹
 - In his commentary on Revelation, Walvoord makes this notation concerning 2:7. . .
 - The promise here mentioned for overcomers is not a message to a special group of Christians distinguished by their spirituality and power in contrast to genuine Christians who lack these qualities; it is rather a general description of that which is normal, to be expected among those who are true followers of the Lord. Those in the Ephesian church who were genuine Christians . . . are promised.³²
- Not hurt by the second death (Rev. 2:11).
 - The second death is a rabbinic term for the death of the wicked in the next world. In Revelation 20:14 it is identified as the lake of fire, and in 21:8 as the final lot of the [unsaved].³³
- Eats of the hidden manna and is given a white stone with a new name written (Rev. 2:17)
- Power over the nations sitting with Him on His throne (2:26, 27; 3:21; 20:4)
- Clothed in white raiment (Rev. 3:5)
- Will not have his name blotted out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5)
- Will be confessed by the Son before the Father (Rev. 3:5)
- Made a pillar in the temple of God (Rev. 3:12)
- Never go out of the temple (Rev. 3:12)
- Shall inherit all things (Rev. 21:7 compare with Romans 8:17)
- He will be their God (Rev. 21:7)
- They shall be His sons (Rev. 21:7)

Second, what happens if you do not repent or overcome? Is this language ever used of a believer?

The consequences of being one who does not overcome

- Stands in a position of defeat under the wicked one (1 John 2:13, 14)
- Stands in a position of defeat under the world (1 John 5:4, 5)
- Will not eat of the tree of life (Rev. 2:7)
- Faces the second death (Rev. 2:11).
- Will not eat of the hidden manna and is not given a white stone with a new name written (Rev. 2:17)
- Has no power over the nations and will not sit with Him on His throne (Rev. 2:26, 27; 3:21; 20:4)
- Is not clothed in white raiment (Rev. 3:5)
- Will have his name blotted out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5)
- Will not be confessed by the Son before the Father (Rev. 3:5)
- Is not made a pillar in the temple of God (Rev. 3:12)
- Will be banished from the temple of God (Rev. 3:12)
- Will not inherit all things (Rev. 21:7 compare with Romans 8:17)
- He will not be their God (Rev. 21:7)
- They will not be His sons (Rev. 21:7)

First, the only condition to be met is having repented of sin and confessed Jesus as Lord. Second, in so doing, the believing one is now identified as one who overcomes. Third, not to be an overcomer is to be lost.

Third, who has the ear to hear (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22)?

The statement is a formula. There is a contrast between those who have ears that hear and those who have ears but do not hear. It is a proverbial saying. It is an appeal for the audience to listen up and take note.

The statement is used by Jesus with regard to His instruction (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43). This is also seen in Mark 4:9, 23 and 7:16 (Luke 8:8; 14:35).

The one who has ears and does not hear is an unbeliever.

Fourth, are believers ever described as being wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev. 3:17, 18)? It would appear that the answer is no.

Because of the length of this chapter we will treat the subject of personal sin and our relationship to it in the next study. In our present study there are several verses that appear not to fit. This is true regardless as to the side you take. The overwhelming body of evidence surely weighs in for the position noted in this chapter. As believers we are to rejoice in all that Christ is for us and we are in Him. We are here to make much of Him. Such a study does just that.

¹ Francis Foulkes, "Death of Christ," *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), p. 158.

² John Gill

³ Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace*, (NavPress:Colorado Springs, 1991), 184.

⁴ Schreiner, *Romans*, 332,333.

⁵ John Ruff, *Paul's First Letter to Corinth*, 113.

⁶ Vine, *First Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids:Zondervan, 1961), 161.

⁷ Ironside, *First Corinthians*, (Lifeline Philippines, 1938), 358.

⁸ http://lords-supper.org/resources/marshall_ls.html

⁹ Leon Morris, *First Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids:Wm B. Eerdmans Publ., 1985), 161.

¹⁰ MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, (Chicago:Moody Press, 1984), 274.

¹¹ Vine, *First Corinthians*, 160.

¹² Ironside, *First Corinthians*, 360.

¹³ Godet, *First Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids:Kregel Publ, 1979), 591.

¹⁴ Ironside, *First Corinthians*, 358.

¹⁵ Alfred Martin, *First Corinthians*, (Neptune NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1989), 106-107.

¹⁶ Martin, *First Corinthians*, 107.

¹⁷ Vine, *First Corinthians*, 160.

¹⁸ Godet, *First Corinthians*, 596, 597.

¹⁹ MacArthur, *First Corinthians*, 275.

²⁰ Ronald R. Shea, "The Gospel," 23 [overall Shea explains well his perspective of the gospel, but this final paragraph has much to be desired]

²¹ Barclay, *Hebrews*, 175.

²² Barclay, *Hebrews*, 177.

²³ Franz Delitzsch, *Hebrews*, 2:312, 313.

²⁴ Gromacki, *Hebrews*, 200.

²⁵ Kent, *Hebrews*

²⁶ Pfeiffer, *Hebrews, Everyman's Bible Commentary*, 111

²⁷ Westcott, *Hebrews*

²⁸ R.C.H. Lenski, *Hebrews, etc.*

²⁹ Calvin, *Hebrews*, 314.

³⁰ Leon Morris, *Hebrews*, Expo Bible Commentary, 12:136

³¹ BKC, NT, John F. Walvoord, Revelation, 934.

³² Walvoord, *Revelation*, 59

³³ Mounce, NICNT, *Revelation*, 94.