

Chastisement from the Lord. “What is it?”

Written by K B Napier

Tuesday, 26 January 2016 22:00

Unfortunately, many teachings from the heretical charismatic movement have filtered through to genuine churches and pastors, changing real biblical teaching for dubious or completely wrong doctrine. (This does not absolve genuine pastors, who should always be vigilant and discerning). For example, the idea that a Christian is ‘chastised’ by God for making mistakes, or for accidents that occur sometime in his life, even before salvation. Such erroneous ideas make Christians anxious and upset, when there is no reason for it. What is ‘chastisement’ from/by God?

Chasten/Chastise/Chastised/chastisement

In Leviticus 26, God gives a chilling warning to the Hebrews:

“And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.”

An even worse judgment comes in verse 29, where Hebrews would eat their own children because of hunger caused by their sin and disobedience. We also see this occurring in 2 Kings. Eating one’s own children is a double judgment. Note that God Himself says He will chastise them seven times (i.e. greatly). Never think that God’s chastisement will be minor!

‘Chastise’, the verb *yacar*, is here used to mean to discipline and instruct, to teach and guide a people back to God. Depending on the reasons, this instruction can involve some very hard lessons. It can even mean physical punishment, such as flogging, but is never apart from verbal chastening. In every case, the people deserved the judgment against them – God sees our failure to obey in *His* light, not in ours. Often, what we see as ‘minor’ is serious to the Lord, for all and any sin is serious. (1 Kings 12:11 and 2 Chronicles 10:11,14. Though *`aqrab* can literally mean ‘scorpions’, here we see ‘scorpions’ referred to as means of physical punishment. It is a figure of whips with knots holding nails or stones).

In Deuteronomy 22, we find the elders of a city chastising a man who ill-treated his wife on a pretence. Not only was the man beaten, but he was ordered to compensate the parents of the wife with silver. Sadly, today, a violent husband is not given an appropriate punishment. So, God can chastise in His own power, but elders (today – magistrates/courts) can deliver

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punishment. It should be noted that when Christ took away the need to follow Mosaic laws, the kind of punishment shown above is now different. This is because then the nation was theocratic. Today, no nation is theocratic (Islamic states are not counted, because they have pagan beliefs), so there have to be amendments. Even so, chastisement by the state must be tough enough to persuade an offender to refrain from his sinfulness. For this reason a nation should not cast away physical means such as flogging, removal of goods, or even burning of their home (as done in Israel today to terrorists).

Thus, when we see Jesus being condemned to chastisement in Luke 23:16,22 it refers to a normal method of punishment. In the text *paideuō* means to punish with a view to change a person's mind, for him to learn the error of his ways. It was, then, usual to scourge men perceived to be criminals, before releasing them. That Jesus had done nothing to deserve chastisement is not the issue in this case.

The reality of this punishment is found in texts such as Job 34:31, where the person chastised promises never to sin again. In such cases chastisement will have done its intended thing – to turn a man from sin to repentance and avoidance of sin. Note that an unbeliever will not respond like this, because he is unable to understand it. Such men are just punished by God, because the unsaved man cannot repent, though he might stop any wrong thing he is doing, so as not to be punished again.

This latter fact is why prisons and courts cannot claim that this or that punishment is “not a deterrent”. If the punishment is appropriate and tough enough, then it WILL deter a wrongdoer! The reason our system does not act as a deterrent is simply because the punishment applied is weak and not hard. Even if a man again does wrong – then repeat the punishment. He will eventually stop.

The chastening of Christ was different, because He did no wrong and so could not repent of it. It was purely a physical punishment in the eyes of men (Isaiah 53:5). A true chastisement of a real wrongdoer must receive *muwcar* – correction. In the case of Jesus, the *muwcar* was unnecessary and unwarranted; He had nothing to learn from the action and could not be corrected, being holy and sinless.

God WILL chasten and scourge ALL those who are saved (Hebrews 12:6). However, this does not mean He automatically does so – we must firstly sin. God will do this when we need to be reminded of our sin and His need to punish, but His aim is always to draw us back to Himself so

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that we will repent and live holy lives. He can only do this with His elect children (verse 8), for their profit (verse 10). It is obvious that God’s chastening of His children is not something to be enjoyed (verse 11), but grievous enough to make us change our ways. After which, we know the joy of our Father’s closeness and peace. Thus, we are healed and will show purity again.

You may have noticed that in 2 Chronicles 10 and 1 Kings, sufferers were only whipped. Therefore, they continued to sin. This is why the next punishment would tear at their flesh and bones – knotted whips with bones, stones or iron nails attached. Where a simple remedy is not heeded, God will apply a greater remedy until we submit to His will and realise the wickedness of our sins. In Jeremiah 31:18 we find a man suitably chastised with a whip, for he turned back to God with gratitude. How many criminals continue in their criminality because their previous punishment was no punishment at all? The “chastisement of men” MUST be strong and hard, so that the wrongdoer does not go back to his sin. Hence: “...if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.” In this case, beaten with sticks and flogged. Too squeamish for you?

The modern view of prison is mostly wrong, as is the refusal to administer physical punishments. Where these are missing there is no chastisement. Solomon in his wiser days warned: “*Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.*” (Proverbs 19:18). In Old Testament terms ‘son’ can also refer to anyone in your nation. We are to punish early, so that men do not feel at ease doing worse things. Thus, a ‘short, sharp shock’ is an excellent idea. Better for a wrongdoer to be absolutely shocked by punishment before he begins a career of sin and crime. Let not the ‘crying’ of liberals prevent us from applying God’s remedies!

Remember – we must *punish* the unsaved, whether criminals or some other kind of wrongdoer. Only those who are saved can be properly *chastened* in order that they may return to God (Revelation 3:19). He only chastens those He loves, and He does not love the unsaved in that way, because they cannot repent.

Conclusion

God only punishes the unsaved. But, He chastises the saved. The important distinction is that whereas the unsaved are incapable of repentance and turning away from their sins, the saved can do so. Yes, the unsaved might turn away from wrongdoing of one kind, but they usually turn instead to another kind of wrongdoing. Even if they abstain from observable wrongdoing, their hearts are dark and sinful, so they cannot repent or enjoy God’s peace.

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God WILL chastise those whom He loves. Not when we do nothing wrong, but when we sin and need His tough hand in order that we might repent and turn away from sin and back towards His mercy, grace and love.

Does God chastise people who are elect, but before they are saved? No, as I have explained above. He only chastises us when we sin, to bring us back to Himself. Logically, this can only happen after we have been saved. Do not listen to teachers who say otherwise, for their idea is one of permanent anxiety upon us for no reason.

Remember, then, that when we are chastised, and even when the penalty applied is particularly hard, causing us real grief, God is doing it to bring us back to Himself a better person, with a changed attitude and heart. He will particularly do this if His previous warnings have gone unheeded. So, learn the signs of our own undoing, our sins, our straying from the true path. It might come from other believers who try to advise us, or from scripture, or from a deeply felt discernment. Bear in mind, too, that God can, at times, administer a final penalty – death, to stop us sinning even more.

Obey and live!

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