

My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord

“My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:11-12)

There is an oft-quoted saying about the multitude of religions or faiths in the world that goes something like this: “All paths lead to the same destination”. The thought behind the quote is that it doesn’t matter what faith a person chooses in this life because all religions lead to heaven or to some common ending. The Bible, however, teaches quite differently. Jesus said: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6)*. He also taught: *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33)*.

From a Christian standpoint, I think many listeners would raise their hand if I asked how many here have had an experience where a friend or acquaintance asked this type of question: “What’s different about the way you believe compared to the way I believe?” It’s a basic question, but it doesn’t usually seem easy to answer because we tend to feel that our own understanding is lacking, we naturally want to avoid controversy, and we don’t particularly want to offend other people. Yet the Bible itself, regardless of our shallow understanding, does characterize God’s kingdom as spiritually separate and different from all other faiths and groups on earth. For example, in Leviticus, one of the first five books in the Bible, God spoke to Moses this way: *“... I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people... And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine” (Lev 20:24, 26)*. Jesus himself spoke of only one flock, saying: *“And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16)*. This overriding and recurring Biblical theme about God’s Children being separate from all other tribes and nations presents a powerful, long-standing image of the uniqueness and solitary nature of God’s kingdom. The Holy Spirit’s presence teaching and guiding the believers in God’s kingdom makes manifest many differences between the Kingdom and the world. For this introduction, I will mention three basic, scriptural aspects or characteristics that separate God’s kingdom from other faiths:

1. Our comprehension of the nature of God’s kingdom on earth. What is the kingdom like? Where is it found? God’s kingdom on earth and its very nature as a spiritual kingdom can’t be comprehended through human intellect, nor can it be seen with temporal eyesight, but only through the Holy Spirit. Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: *“For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17)*.
2. The preaching of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins – our comprehension of how and by what power the preaching of the living gospel takes place. Apostle John described how the resurrected Jesus conferred on His disciples the power to forgive sins: *“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained” (John 20:21-23)*. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the believer preaches the life-giving gospel to others.
3. Our comprehension that God’s children have a special love and care for each other. Apostle John wrote about the relationship between believers: *“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:11, 16)*. Could there be a loftier description of the love between believers? John further explained: *“My*

little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him” (1 John 3:18-19). In considering the love of Christ “one to another”, the full meaning of a familiar verse is revealed: “... 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).

Of all things that silhouette the difference between God’s kingdom and other faiths, Jesus taught, in the waning moments of His temporal life, that the love between believers is a key characteristic of His followers. This third item noted above – that God’s children have a special love one to another – is the focus of this introduction.

By this shall all men know

As Christians, we endeavor to extend the love of Christ to all, even our enemies. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught: *“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt 5:44).* When Christ teaches to love one another (even our enemies) He is not referring to the natural love that exists, for example, between family members and other loved ones. Jesus explained: *“For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?” (Matt 5:46).* We comprehend therefore, that Jesus is referring to a love and concern especially for the soul of all others. Furthermore, Jesus etched an especially beautiful picture to specifically describe the relationship of one believer to another. He told His own: *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35).* This teaching of Jesus was included in His final words to His disciples before He suffered on the cross.

Watchers on Zion’s Walls

In our time and society, mankind focuses more than ever on individuality – on “doing your own thing”. To a certain extent the modern cultural mindset is basically that it’s nobody else’s business what you or I do in life, or how we conduct ourselves, or what things we become involved in. Large sectors or elements of society have even forgotten the importance, the obligation or even the rights of parents to teach long-standing, Biblically-based moral truths to our children. How much more neglected and overlooked is the Christian obligation to take care of one another in our experiences and phases of life? Furthermore, according to the Bible, it’s not only parents who have an obligation to care for children, but each child of God has an obligation through the love of Christ to care one for another. Consider the Old Testament teaching of God to the prophet Ezekiel: *“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek 3:17-19).*

The Voice of the Good Shepherd

The voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is heard in the love and care extended from one believer to another. Love and care toward another believer through the Holy Spirit is tenderhearted and longsuffering. In a recent Paivamies editorial, the writer related of a friend who had been jogging during a trip in a foreign country. This friend had jogged several times past a field where a flock of sheep grazed and each time the runner had approached this certain pasture, the sheep would hear and see him coming and then quickly move further away and scatter. Then one time the jogger took his run past the same field later in the evening as it became dark, and he was puzzled that the sheep remained calm and held peacefully together. Only as he came very close to the sheep did he realized that nearby, not visible in the dark, but softly singing to the flock in a trusted, familiar voice sat a shepherd. The sheep were comforted

and calm, whereas previously without the reassuring voice of the shepherd they had been frightened even in the daylight. The voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus, likewise is comforting, patient, kind and reassuring. At the same time, however, the Good Shepherd is not *neglectful* to provide care to those he loves. As people we carry corruption. For example, perhaps we feel faulty in ourselves and weak in even approaching another believer to care for their undying soul. But through the Love of Christ, we're constrained to care one for another, and in doing so, pray not only for words, but also for the love and patience of the Good Shepherd.

In His great love Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, which would teach the believers in all things – even until the end of the world. He said ... *"the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you"* (John 14:26). As part of its teaching, the Holy Spirit reveals to the believers those things that are dangerous to our faith life. There's comfort in knowing and in believing that the Holy Spirit will guide even in our time. No wonder Jesus called the Holy Spirit the "Comforter"! It is with great purpose that the Bible doesn't offer salvation based on following a list of do's and don'ts, but rather by faith alone. That is specifically why Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, which teaches in the congregation and guides on the way to heaven.

To show the importance of taking care one of another – in particular where personal offense has occurred – Jesus left touching and clear instruction. He taught: *"... if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican"* (Matt 18:15-17). Even in situations where personal offense has occurred Jesus didn't mandate a set timeframe. We comprehend that Jesus' instruction is based on care, compassion and above all, love in the hope and prayer that the fallen can comprehend his/her condition and take care of the matter. From the standpoint of the caregiver it is good to remember Apostle Paul's teaching where he explains that we don't come with a rule/regulation, or with a heavy hand, but in low esteem. He wrote: *"but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves"* (Phil 2:3). *"Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits"* (Rom 12:16). It is important to mention regarding matters of personal offense that we clearly see from Jesus' teaching that a public forum such as a congregational meeting isn't the first place to approach one who has caused offense, but it's the last place. The overriding issue is that through the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ the caregiver offers to help and free one who has stumbled on the journey.

On the other hand, when something is wrong in the faith life of an individual – when accumulated sin and love of the world have darkened the conscience – one begins to despise the loving instruction of the kingdom. With a hardened conscience and the love of the world the teaching of the Holy Spirit begins to appear as rules or, for example, as a list of man-made "do's and don'ts".

Whom the Lord Loveth He Chasteneth

In the book, The Treasure Hidden in the Field, Juhani Uljas wrote: "Faith is being in the righteousness of Christ and living in forgiveness every moment. We endeavor to preserve this treasure."¹ Nonetheless, in everyday life we experience sin and so often feel it pressing on the conscience. The Bible teaches that, if left uncared for, sin can accumulate and ultimately cause one to lose faith. James wrote this way: *"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"* (James 1:13). For that reason Apostle Paul encouraged a young man named Timothy this way: *"This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck"* (1 Tim 1:18-19). Care and love through the Holy Spirit, like that shown by Paul toward Timothy, is an earmark of living Christianity.

I think you've experienced, as I also have, that when we've received instruction, which often can be difficult to hear, we've had to pray that we would still be able to hearken to the loving voice of the

Good Shepherd. The writer of Hebrews explained this way: *“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. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed”* (Heb 12: 11-13). The writer also said in the same connection: *“My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”* (Heb 12:5-7).

As Many as I Love, I Rebuke and Chasten

Apostle Paul, realizing that his young co-worker Timothy would experience many trials in life as a vineyard-worker gave important and prophetic instruction. He wrote to Timothy: *“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears”* (2 Tim 4:2-3). It’s quite clear what has taken place historically leading all the way up to our own time. We see the results of what occurs when, rather than living faith, man’s own reason governs – a countless multitude of heresies has resulted. In closing, it’s also worth considering what God revealed to Apostle John as part of the final book in the Bible, when John was held prisoner on the island of Patmos: *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”* (Rev 3:19-22).

Discussion Questions:

1. In considering the everyday lives of young believers today, how does the following Bible verse relate to the discussion topic? *“He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray”* (Prov 5:23).
2. Can you think of examples in your life how the love of Christ has helped guide your footsteps?
3. What do you think God wanted to teach about the Kingdom and our responsibilities to other believers, when He spoke to Ezekiel about the importance of being a “watchman”?
“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek 3:17-19).
4. What did Apostle Paul mean in his second letter to Timothy when he wrote:
“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim 4:2-3).

¹ Uljas, Juhani. The Treasure Hidden in a Field, p. 79.