

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO
HOW GOD DEALS
WITH THE BELIEVERS' SINS—
DISCIPLINE IN THE KINGDOM

(1)

SUFFERING GOD'S DISCIPLINE IN THE COMING AGE

The Bible tells us that the Lord disciplines us because He loves us (Heb. 12:6). When man loves, he overlooks. But when God loves, He disciplines. When man loves, he is loose. But when God loves, He is serious. If God had not loved us, He would not have sent His Son to die for our sins on the cross. Similarly, if God does not love us, He would not discipline us. God's disciplining love is the same as His saving love, which caused Him to send His Son to die for us on the cross. It was His love that caused His Son to die on our behalf. It is also His love that disciplines us. Every Christian knows that there is no contradiction between God's discipline and God's grace. On the contrary, God's discipline manifests God's grace. Although we have seen that a man cannot perish again after he is saved, we can never say that such a one will never suffer God's discipline. Now the question is whether God's discipline is confined to this age or whether it will be found in the coming age as well. This is a question that many people have never considered. We will take a look at this matter.

The Bible shows us that God's discipline is not restricted to this age only. It is also found in the next age. Many people have confined God's discipline to this age. But you cannot find the basis for such a teaching in the Bible. In terms of the experience of Christians, there is surely the possibility for discipline in the next age. Many have not been disciplined in this age. Although they are God's children, they have not lived a consecrated life in this age. They do whatever they want and do many things in disobedience throughout their lives and until their death. Although some have been zealous for the Lord and have worked and have even experienced many miracles and works of power outwardly, these things are all done according to their own will and contrary to God's purpose. Some even have obvious sins and specific transgressions. But we do not see much discipline in these ones. On the contrary, they live peacefully and depart from this world in peace. However, in addition to losing the reward, these people will be disciplined in the kingdom. They will experience specific discipline from God. Hence, experientially speaking, if a Christian lives on earth today without checking his lust and instead loves the world and walks in his own ways, he will be disciplined in the coming age. We have ample evidence of this from the Bible.

THE PURPOSE OF DISCIPLINE
BEING FOR THE CLEANSING

According to the Word of God, discipline is for cleansing. Man is defiled; therefore, he needs to be cleansed. In the Bible there is not only one kind of cleansing. The first cleansing is the cleansing of the blood, that is, the cleansing by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The Bible mentions the cleansing of the blood over three hundred times. Here we will mention only two verses.

Hebrews 9:22 says, "And almost all things are purified by blood according to the law, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." This verse speaks of the purification by the blood. Hebrews 1:3 says, "Who, being the effulgence of His glory and the impress of His substance and upholding and bearing all things by the word of His power, having made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Here we can translate "having made cleansing of sins." In the Bible we see the cleansing of our sins by the blood of the Lord Jesus. After He cleansed our sins, He ascended to the heights and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high. This is the first kind of cleansing in the Bible.

However, although many people have received the cleansing of the blood of the Lord Jesus, they still have many filthy thoughts while living on earth. They are still very much defiled by the world and have many fleshly sins. Because there are these many other things, God uses other means to cleanse us. This is the way of cleansing by discipline and chastisement which we will now talk about.

In John 15:2 the Lord says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it that it may bear more fruit." The pruning here is a cleansing. God cuts away the unnecessary, unimportant, and hindering elements that the branches may bear more fruit. This is God's discipline. Hence, the purpose of God's discipline is not for destroying us but for perfecting us, so that we may become more worthy of God's glory, of God's holiness, and of the righteousness that is set before us.

Thus, there are two lines and two cleansings in God's Word. One is the cleansing by the blood of the Lord Jesus. The other is the cleansing by God which comes through our environment, our family, our personal health, or our job. If we indulge in what we should not indulge in or refuse to cut off what we should cut off, God's disciplining hand will be upon us in our environment.

THE CLEANSING IN THE COMING AGE

Is this cleansing discipline from God restricted to this age only, or is it found also in the coming age? From the Bible we know that death never changes anyone. Nowhere in the Bible are we shown a case of a man changed by death. We know that in the future we will be with God forever. In eternity we will be the same as the Lord; we will be holy, even as the Lord is holy. But can we say that today we are as holy as the Lord is? Can we say that we are worthy to be with the Lord for eternity? The blood of the Lord Jesus has cleansed us and that the record of our sins has been wiped away. This is a fact. But subjectively speaking, do we have Christ living in us experientially? Have we allowed the resurrected Christ to live out from us? Our walk today is far too different from what our walk must be in eternity; the two are too far apart. Today we come far short of the Lord's holiness, righteousness, and glory. Many Christians today are still full of sins and filth.

So then, we have a problem. If things are so bad today but will be so good in the future, if things are so imperfect today but will be so perfect in the future, when will the change take place? Somewhere along the way there must be a change. If you are not perfect today, but will be perfect in that day, when will such a change take place? In eternity, when we are with God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, we will be in the light as God is in the light. But when will we

become such ones? The human concept is that when we die we will change. But the Bible never tells us that physical death will make a person holy. This was a doctrine that was preached five or six hundred years ago. But the Bible never says that death can change a person. If death could change a Christian, then death could also change an unsaved person. But death never changes anyone. The slothful servant is still slothful when he is resurrected. The foolish virgins are still foolish when they wake up. When they wake up, their slothfulness and foolishness have not gone away. If a man is not changed in this age but will be different in the new heaven and new earth, and if death does not cause a person to change, then when does the change occur? The Bible shows us clearly that in the coming age there will be discipline, and this discipline will prune and cleanse us.

SOME SERVANTS OF GOD TO BE JUDGED IN THE COMING AGE

We need to look at a few verses concerning this future discipline. Luke 12:45-48 says, "But if that slave says in his heart, My master is delaying his coming, and begins to beat the male servants and the female servants and to eat and to drink and become drunk, the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes; but he who did not know, yet did things worthy of stripes, will receive few lashes. But to every one to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more."

The first thing in these verses that we have to decide is whether or not the slave belongs to the Lord. Is he a Christian? Is he saved? Surely the slave is a saved one. How can I say this? First, in the New Testament God never considers those who do not belong to Him as His slaves. In going from the Old Testament to the New Testament age, first, man is a slave and then becomes a son. Thus, in the Old Testament there are many unsaved slaves. But in the New Testament the order is reversed. If a man is not God's son, he is not qualified to be God's slave. All slaves of God are sons in the New Testament. Therefore, the slave spoken of here is surely a saved one.

There is a second proof that the slave in Luke 12:45-48 is saved. The proof is in the previous verses. Verses 42-44 say, "And the Lord said, Who then is the faithful and prudent steward, whom the master will set over his service to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Truly I tell you that he will set him over all his possessions." Is the slave in these verses the same one as the slave in verses 45 and 46? Or are there two slaves? There is only one slave. The slave in verses 43 and 44 is the one in verse 45. The same person can be a good slave as well as a bad slave. This slave can have two different minds. If he is faithful to the charge of the master of the house and would give to the household their portion of food at the proper time, the master will reward him well and will set him over all his possessions. But if the slave says in his heart, "The master is delaying his coming; I can act any way I want," and he begins to beat the male servants and the female servants, the master will come and judge his sins. This proves that a saved person can both be a good slave and a bad slave.

If a saved person has unfortunately become an evil slave, what will his end be? Verse 46 says, "The master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know, and will cut him asunder, and will appoint his portion with the unbelievers." Does this chastisement occur in this age or in the age to come? What does the day and hour which he does not know refer to? They must refer to the time when the Lord will come back. This is something in the future. The Lord says that a slave can be faithful or unfaithful and that an unfaithful slave will not only miss the reward, but will also be condemned and receive a definite punishment. Verses 47 and 48 are based on the words of verse 46. They tell us of the future of those who belong to the Lord and who work for the Lord. "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not prepare or do according to his will, will receive many lashes; but he who did not know, yet did things worthy of stripes, will receive few lashes. But to every one to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more." These verses do not say that those who do not know will not receive any lashes; they only say that they will receive few lashes. There will still be the lashes. God does not let those who do not know get by, because His word is here. Those who know have to be responsible before God; those who do not know and who have done things worthy of lashes will still receive lashes, yet they will receive few lashes. Everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom much has been committed, they will ask of him all the more. This is the principle of God's future chastisement. Luke 12:47-48 settles for us the question of future chastisement of Christians before God.

My friends, I am here preaching the gospel of grace. When a man is saved, he is saved forever. This is an immutable fact. However, after we are saved, if our conduct is unbecoming of Christians, we will be chastised in the future. I am only a preacher of the Word of God. I am responsible to speak only what the Bible says. I am not responsible for what the Bible ought to say. Today some may ask why Christians need to be chastised in the future. I do not know. You can ask the Lord for yourself. I am only saying what the Bible has said. This is the Lord's word.

Let us read Colossians 3:23-25. "Whatever you do, work from the soul as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as recompense. You serve the Lord Christ. For he who does unrighteously will receive what he unrighteously did, and there is no respect of persons." The context of this passage makes it clear that these verses refer to Christians, not to unbelievers. The preceding verses speak of how a Christian should be a wife, a husband, a father or a mother, a son or a daughter, a master or a slave. Then Paul says that if a Christian does unrighteously, he will receive what he unrighteously did, because there is no respect of persons. This shows us clearly that a Christian's recompense comes at the judgment seat of Christ. If he does unrighteously today, he will receive a recompense according to what he has done unrighteously. If he acts righteously, he will receive his recompense according to his righteousness. Hence, we cannot say that Christians will not receive a certain amount of discipline and chastisement.

RECEIVING THE THINGS DONE THROUGH THE BODY

Now let us read 2 Corinthians 5:10. "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad." All Bible readers know that the judgment seat of Christ is in the air. Hence, those standing before the judgment seat are those who have been raptured. And who

can be raptured? The Bible tells us that only Christians can be raptured. Those who are not Christians cannot be raptured. If a man is not saved and is not a child of God, he is not even qualified to be judged at this judgment. This is God's judgment within His own family. Here it tells us what we will be faced with at the future judgment seat of Christ. We will be recompensed for the things done through the body. In other words, we will be recompensed for the things done in the body, that is, for the things we have done while living on earth, whether good or bad. If you do good in the body, you will receive a good reward. If you do evil in the body, you will receive the recompense of evil. The Word of God shows us clearly that at the judgment seat those who do well will receive a reward and that those who do not do well will lose their reward and will be recompensed according to their evil.

Because there is a future judgment, the apostle Paul prayed concerning mercy in the future. Second Timothy 1:18 says, "May the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord in that day. And in how many things he served me in Ephesus, you know best." Paul expressed the wish that Onesiphorus would find mercy from the Lord in that day. If a Christian will at most lose his reward in the future when he stands before the judgment seat and will not be punished or disciplined, then this word is meaningless. Paul hoped that the Lord would be merciful to Onesiphorus at His judgment, because Onesiphorus had helped Paul so much and had propagated the gospel with him. If there were any wrongs that Onesiphorus had done, Paul hoped that the Lord would be merciful to him. Hence, we see that Christians need not only forgiveness, but also God's mercy at the time of judgment at the beginning of the millennium; otherwise, they will fall under God's chastisement.

In 2 Timothy 4 there is another verse which we should read. Verse 16 says, "At my first defense no one was with me to support me, but all abandoned me. May it not be counted against them." This is another prayer. While Paul was in Asia, the whole of Asia abandoned him. While he was before the king being judged, many Christians were fearful of death and hid off to the side. Yet even though they had abandoned him, Paul prayed that this sin would not be counted against them. Hence, we see that in the future God will still judge our sins. Paul prayed here that this sin would not be counted against them. There is enough light in the Bible to show us that if a saved person is not disciplined for his loose conduct in this age, or if he does not repent after discipline, he will not only lose his reward but will also be chastised in a definite way.

In Matthew 12 the Lord Jesus specifically mentions blaspheming the Holy Spirit. All sins can be forgiven. All the words spoken against the Son of Man can be forgiven. But the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven. There will not be forgiveness in this age, and there will not be forgiveness in the next age (v. 32). In the Bible the coming age always refers to the kingdom. In the original language the word for age is *aion*, not *cosmos*. If the word were *cosmos*, it would refer to the organization of the world. But since it is *aion*, it refers to a time span. Hence, it is translated age. Today is the age of grace. The next age is the age when the Lord will come to reign for a thousand years. When you read Matthew 12, you see that the forgiveness of sins is divided into two time periods. Some sins are forgiven in this age, and some sins are forgiven in the coming age. Some people, through discipline, are forgiven in this age. Some people may not have done well today, but they will be forgiven in the kingdom. Some people are forgiven when they are saved, but their subsequent sins will not be forgiven in the kingdom; they will be chastised severely instead. This is the biblical teaching concerning chastisement.

Chastisement for the Christian in this age is clear enough. Some sinning Christians whose problems are not solved before God today will receive chastisement in the future.

THE KINGDOM BEING THE TIME OF THE FUTURE CHASTISEMENT

When exactly will the future chastisement be? It is clear that there will be chastisement in the future after the Lord comes back, but when after the Lord's return will it be? Let us consider three ages in the Bible. The present age can be called the age of grace. It can also be called the age of the gospel or the age of the church. The coming age can be called the age of the kingdom or the millennial age, because that age will only last a thousand years (Rev. 20:6). After that age, there is yet another age, which is an eternal age. It is the age of the new heaven and new earth.

The Bible presents to us these three ages. The age of the church is the age of grace because God's grace and love are manifested in it. In this age God saves the unrighteous ones and causes man to receive the grace of the Lord Jesus. Everything in this age is of grace. The coming age is the age of righteousness. The eternal age is also an age of grace. Today is an age of grace, and the new heaven and new earth is also an age of grace. But the kingdom is all righteousness. If you are not clear about these ages, your reading of the Bible, theology, and biblical understanding will be all wrong. Both the church age and the age of the new heaven and new earth are ages of grace. But the millennial age is a parenthetical age specially prepared by God for the reward of the faithful ones and the chastisement of the sinful ones. That is a special period.

Both the New Testament and the Old Testament tell us that in this period, God deals with man in righteousness (Psa. 72:2; 85:10-13; 96:13; 97:2; Isa. 11:5; 26:9; 33:5; 62:1; Jer. 33:15; Dan. 7:27). We can quote at least two hundred verses from the Old and New Testaments concerning the righteous judgment in the kingdom.

What is the difference between the kingdom and the new heaven and new earth? The Bible makes a clear distinction between the two. Let us consider Revelation 19:6-8. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns." Please notice that here is the beginning of the kingdom. "Let us rejoice and exult, and let us give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints." Here we read that fine linen is given to the bride. But though it is given, it is nevertheless of righteousness. The fine linen is the righteousness in the actions of the believers. In the original language, the righteousnesses mentioned here refer to righteousness in actions. The word has the sense of actions. Hence, it refers to our own righteous acts.

Now let us read 20:4-6. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and of those who had not worshipped the beast nor his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first

resurrection; over these the second death has no authority, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years." These verses tell us who will be the kings who reign with Christ a thousand years. The kingdom is not for everybody. The kingdom is only for the martyrs. It is only for those who reject Satan and Antichrist. Only these ones can reign for a thousand years. Hence, only the martyrs can reign; only those who reject Satan and Antichrist will be kings. This proves to us that the millennial kingdom is not given as a free gift, but is obtained through good works before God. Although in other passages we see other kinds of people reigning, in Revelation we see that there must be specific righteousness before there can be participation in the marriage feast of the Lamb. Only those who are the martyrs can be the kings. Without having the particular righteousness and without being martyred, no one can have a part in the kingship. This is the millennium.

THE AGE OF THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH

Let us now consider Revelation 21. Verses 1 through 7 say, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of the throne, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will tabernacle with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death will be no more, nor will there be sorrow or crying or pain anymore; for the former things have passed away. And He who sits on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said, Write, for these words are faithful and true. And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely. He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be God to him, and he will be a son to Me."

The description of the kingdom in Revelation 19 and 20 is entirely different from the description of the new heaven and new earth in chapter twenty-one. When describing the kingdom, the Bible speaks about what man has done. But when it describes the new heaven and new earth, there is no more mention of what man has done. From chapter twenty-one on, the Bible simply speaks of what God has done. God said that He has made all things new. God said that the first heaven and the first earth have passed away and that the sea is no more. All these are done by God. The tabernacle of God will be with men. He shall tabernacle with men. We are His people; God Himself will dwell with us and will be our God. He will wipe away all our tears, so that we will have no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain, for all the former things will have passed away, and all things will have been made new. God said all these words are faithful. He said that He is the Alpha and the Omega. Man has no place here at all. These verses go on and on, telling us what God has done. There is no condition or demand. If you wish to know how to obtain such a wonderful new heaven and new earth, just listen to His word: "And He said to me, They have come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End" (v. 6a). In other words, everything is done by God. "I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely" (v. 6b). After all these things have been said, everything is summed up in one sentence: "I will give to him who thirsts from the spring of the water of life freely." As long as there is the thirst, as long as there is the need, God will give from the spring of the water of life freely. This is grace. Grace is to give from the spring of the water of life freely. The new heaven and the new

earth is of grace. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. The new heaven and the new earth are absolutely from Him.

The next verse says, "He who overcomes will inherit these things." Who are these overcomers to whom John refers? The overcomers here are different from the overcomers in the epistles to the seven churches at the beginning of Revelation. Here, by the use of the term overcomers, a distinction is being made between the worldly people and the Christians. The distinction here is not between one kind of Christian and another kind of Christian. The overcoming in the first three chapters of Revelation is the overcoming by some Christians among other Christians. But the overcoming in chapter twenty-one is the overcoming by the Christians among the worldly people. How can we drink of the water of life? It is by faith. Those who believe can drink. In order to drink of the water of life freely, we have to believe. It is faith that enables us to overcome the world. Compared to the worldly people, every Christian is an overcomer. But compared to other Christians, many Christians are failing ones. Compared to those in the world, we are all overcomers because we have a faith before God that the worldly people do not have. Those who overcome and those who drink of the water of life will inherit these things, and God will be God to them, and they will be sons to God.

Chapter twenty-two also mentions the new heaven and new earth. Verses 1 through 5 say, "And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the middle of its street. And on this side and on that side of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And there will no longer be a curse. And the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him; and they will see His face, and His name will be on their forehead. And night will be no more; and they have no need of the light of a lamp and of the light of the sun, for the Lord God will shine upon them; and they will reign forever and ever." The main thing in the New Jerusalem is the river of water of life. This river proceeds from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Because it is the river of life, there is the tree of life, with the fruit of life growing. In Revelation 22, after everything has been said, one thing is prominent, the river of life. This river of the water of life flows throughout the city. How can we enjoy the river of the water of life? At the end of Revelation, after the kingdom is over and after the church is over, verse 17 says, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him who hears say, Come! And let him who is thirsty come; let him who wills take the water of life freely." In other words, everyone is welcomed into the new heaven and new earth. In the new heaven and new earth there is a throne, and beneath the throne there is a river. The river comes forth from God and has the throne as its source. The throne is the center of the new heaven and new earth.

Furthermore, the word Lamb is never mentioned related to the kingdom. But in the new heaven and new earth, the Lamb is indeed mentioned. The throne is of God and of the Lamb (22:1); the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of the city (21:22); and the Lamb is the lamp of the city (21:23). That the Lamb is mentioned related to the new heaven and new earth indicates that this will be an age of grace. When we come to the end of Revelation, the church, the kingdom, and the tribulation are no longer mentioned. Instead, we find only that all who are thirsty can come and take of the water of life freely. This means that you are invited to the new

heaven and new earth. Everything is free. And that it is free means that it is of grace. Therefore, the new heaven and new earth are entirely different from the kingdom. The new heaven and new earth are freely given to us. According to the teaching of Revelation, we can say that in the new heaven and new earth God deals with man in grace. In the kingdom, however, He deals with the Christians in righteousness. Therefore, we have to admit that it is in the kingdom that God chastises us. In the new heaven and new earth everything is received freely.

In this we see the relationship between today and the future. If we love the world today, walk by the flesh, and live a loose life, in the age to come we will be chastised by God. But if we love the Lord today and forsake everything for the Lord's sake, we will receive God's grace and His reward. This is the biblical teaching concerning these three ages. I am not responsible for what I am speaking here. I am only speaking God's Word. God's Word says that in the coming age there will be these things. God Himself is responsible for all of His own words. I only know that the Son of God has said these words. It is true that a man can enjoy eternal life today. But the kingdom is the time when God will deal with His children. If you live a loose life today, you will be disciplined in the future. Hence, we have eternal security, but we also have temporary danger. We have the security of the new heaven and new earth. But we also have the peril of the kingdom. In the kingdom we may suffer severe punishment and chastisement. Whereas salvation is settled by the work of the Lord Jesus, reward is judged by one's work. Salvation comes by the work of the Lord Jesus. Reward comes by our own work. We are rewarded because we obey the will of God and walk not according to our own will. May we treasure the grace that we have received, and may we receive the warning from God and pursue after the reward of the kingdom.