

Text: Exodus 32:15-29

Title: "Whom the Lord loves, He disciplines"

Time: 2/11/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The times in which we live have been described as the fulfillment of the predictions of two dystopian novelists, George Orwell and his high school French teacher Aldous Huxley. Huxley published his *Brave New World* in 1939, and Orwell published his *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1949.

While both novels predict the end of our free, civilized society, the men postulated different paths for getting there. Orwell's Oceania oppresses people through fear with an endless war and a technologically advanced surveillance state. Huxley's World State, on the other hand, amuses people into submission with recreational drugs and a culture of free sex.

Huxley believed that his theory was more likely than Orwell's. After reading his former French student's book, he wrote Orwell a letter in which he said: "Whether in actual fact the policy of the boot-on-the-face can go on indefinitely seems doubtful. My own belief is that the ruling oligarchy will find less arduous and wasteful ways of governing and of satisfying its lust for power, and these ways will resemble those which I described in *Brave New World*."

In our chapter, Israel has come under the tyranny of a great sin (Exod. 32:21, 31). The tyrant that has enslaved them is the murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (John 8:44). As Moses and Joshua descend Sinai, Joshua fears that Israel has succumb to a George Orwell scenario, that there was the noise of war in the camp (v. 17).

Moses corrected him, for he knew that the problem was actually singing and dancing (vv. 18-19a). There is a kind of singing and dancing that sounds very much like war, which

pagans have always used to worship their false gods in emotional ecstasy and sexual attraction. Israel joins this chorus. It is an art form that still tempts God's people today. Huxley had it correct when it comes to the tyranny of Exodus 32.

Thus far in our study of this chapter, we have noted the nature of Israel's great sin (vv. 1-10). Israel's great sin was great forgetfulness, great idolatry, and a great offence. Next, we saw how Moses interceded for God's sinning people (vv. 11-14). Now the Lord has told Moses to put feet to his prayers, to descend from Sinai and deal with the problem of sin at hand.

The Bible tells us that God is the Father of His people, that we are His children, and that whom the Lord loves as a Father He chastens. Heb. 12:5-13 is the classic passage on this doctrine:

"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. 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? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

"Furthermore, we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness. 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."

This is what the Lord does for His people who have sinned a great sin in our passage. I want us to see three things about this chastening work of God in the lives of His children.

I. Our Father chastens us because we break His law (vv. 15-20).

Illustration: My brother and I were notorious for breaking some of my Mom's precious possessions. She had a cabinet of beautiful blue Swiss china that came crashing down one day due to our carelessness. Worse yet was the day we were playing football in the living room, where a hand-crafted vase stood, which my grandmother, her mother, had purchased for my mom after she moved to Arizona for health reasons. Her mom was suffering from bone cancer at the time. I tackled my brother, and he went smashing into the vase. We felt awful on these occasions, for we had smashed something precious.

Application: On this occasion Moses smashes something very precious. It is the stone tablets with the law of God on them, the content of chapter 20's Ten Commandments. Our text reminds us that these were the product of God and written with the finger of God (v. 16).

But as we read on in Exodus, we will not find any regret on the part of Moses or any rebuke from the Lord over the smashing of the stone tablets. What the Lord and Moses are upset about instead, is that God's people had smashed to smithereens the words on the tablets, the law of God.

Moses then burns the calf, mixes the remains with water, and has Israel drink the water. This is the bitter beverage they had chosen over the streams of living water, which can quench a person's thirst eternally (John 4:14, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life").

It is God's will that the redeemed life be a lawful life, but Israel decided instead to do to God's law what Moses illustrated by smashing the tablets. They would rather drink down the polluted water of idolatry's pleasures than find satisfaction in the living water of everlasting life.

So, just like a father with his children, the Lord chastened Israel because they broke His law. We do the same. Our God deserves our obedience. He made us; He redeemed us; He sustains us. He is our Father. He sent His Son, Jesus, who was obedient for us, even unto the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8).

How intent are we as God's children to obey Him? Do we see that He will rightly and lovingly discipline us when we break His law and choose the pollution of the world's idolatry?

II. Our Father chastens us with omniscience (vv. 21-24).

Illustration: This past week Abby shared that she had a tough day with some unruly fifth-grade boys in her class. I can only imagine that teaching fifth-grade boys today is a lot harder than it was when I was a fifth-grader. When I was a fifth-grader, teachers and principals had a tool called a *paddle*. And although it was rarely used in those days, it was never deemed unnecessary or obsolete.

I remember what it was like to grab a chair and take your paddling at school. When that happened to me, I always thought somehow that I was more innocent than my teacher did. There is something in a sinner that wants to immediately excuse his sin and deny the justice of an authority's just discipline.

Application: Aaron is an example of us sinners in this regard. In these verses, he tries to deny that he should be chastened by the Lord. The root of Aaron's great sin was the fear of man (v. 21). Moses asks, "What did the people do to you?" Whenever

we are doing something out of the fear of man, it is normally the wrong thing to do.

Jesus told His disciples, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). In that context, Jesus is sending His disciples out as witnesses and preachers. The fear of man is an especially strong temptation when it comes time to witness and preach.

Aaron progresses from the fear of others to blaming others for his great sin (vv. 22-23). Now he claims that it is the people’s fault that he led them wholesale into idolatry, and come to think of it, Moses’s delay on the mountain did not help matters either. Blaming others is the exact opposite of what we must do when confronted with our sin. We must blame ourselves. This is what the Bible calls confession of sin, and it is how we as God’s children make our sin right again.

Prov. 28:13, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” Did you notice that the question raised by that verse is not whether or not we have sin, but whether or not we will cover or confess our sin? The verse assumes that we sinners will have the need to confess our sins as we continue to struggle with our sinful nature and grow in the Lord.

1 John 1:8-10 emphasizes our need for this road to recovery from our sins: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and his word is not in us.” When was the last time you told yourself, “I have not sinned”? When was the last time you admitted, “Lord, I have sinned”? When we admit what we have been and what we have done, we only tell the Lord what He already knows in His omniscience.

One last thing to notice about Aaron's excuses shows its ugly head in verse 24. Aaron tries to justify his sin against the Lord by calling what happened a miracle from the Lord. Back in verse 4, the text tells us about the stylus Aaron used to make the golden calf. He fails to mention that in his claim to this supernatural sign, which he hoped would justify his idolatry.

Even real supernatural signs and wonders never can justify disobedience to God's word. Paul describes the rise of the anti-christ in terms of the supernatural: "Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). And when Jesus was asked by His enemies for a sign, He taught, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:28). Our Father chastens us with omniscience. We cannot hide from Him what we are and what we have done. Let's not try.

III. Our Father chastens us with a choice (vv. 25-29).

Illustration: The choices of sinners are difficult to understand, except for the fact that we too are sinners and have made similar choices. I was at a bank drive-up window, where a nice young lady helped me make a deposit. She saw my dog and kindly offered to give me a dog treat, which I chose to thank her for. Then under the prompting of the Holy Spirit, I returned the favor by giving her a gospel tract to read.

Taken seriously, that little pamphlet could introduce her to the One whom to know is life eternal. Nevertheless, this young lady said she would not take the tract. I had already put it in her drawer, and the Holy Spirit had prompted me to put it there, so I simply told her that I cannot pick it up again, and so it was hers. I am not hopeful about what she chose to do then.

Application: Before the trial of chastening begins, the Lord gives Israel a gracious choice (v. 26). We are told that the Levites, the tribe of Aaron, responded, because it is they whom

Moses calls upon to execute the Lord's chastening judgment, but the text is clear that 3000 Israelites would lose their lives, so all the nation except these likely joined Moses on the side of the Lord along with the Levites. This interpretation best explains how the Levites were able to execute capital punishment on these 3000 from the other tribes without those tribes defending their fellow tribesmen.

So a relatively small minority had carried the day for the enemy of God and His people. A small minority of the nation had intimidated Aaron and had influenced their neighbors to contribute their gold.

If you ask the internet what percentage of American adults identify as transgender, the answer comes back at about 1%. Yet look at what is happening to women's sports and school bathrooms in our nation to accommodate their tragic agenda. In 2022, a Gallup pole concluded that 7.1% of Americans identify with the LGBTQ lifestyle. About 93% of us do not.

Yet we have become a nation that no longer understands the meaning of marriage while our First-Amendment God-given freedoms of worship and conscience are threatened in our courts. Road signs litter yards that tell us that our town is not our home if we disapprove of the LGBTQ sin. Churches that are no longer gospel-preaching or Bible-teaching proudly fly gay-pride flags. The overblown power of the sinful minority is still with us in the continuing war between the Lord and the tyranny of sin.

We know personally what it is to lose battles in this war against sin, but our Father chastens His people with a gracious choice. When we commit worldly sin and idolatry, He asks us, "Are you on the Lord's side?" The goal of His question is stated in verse 29: "For Moses had said, 'Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that He may bestow upon you a blessing this day.'"

Conclusion: Those last two words of our passage this morning are important ones (*this day*). Paul put it this way, “Behold, now is the accepted time; today is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2). If we are ever going to confess our sins, cease with our excuses, and humbly choose to be on the Lord’s side in response to His chastening hand in our lives, it will have to happen in a moment of time called *this day, now, and today*.

Renewed consecration to our mission to win the lost and make disciples and the fullness of the blessings of God’s Holy Spirit at work in our lives await a day in which we humbly bow and tell the Lord, “I was wrong; please forgive me.” Perhaps this day needs to be your day for the blessing of confession of sin. If so, know that His promise to forgive is true: “He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching