

RT Kendall: The Double Whammy America Faces

On May 25, 2020, an event took place that may very well live in infamy, like the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941—the evil murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A new crisis emerged overnight, promising possibly to create greater fear and concern than that caused by COVID-19. People across the country protested the killing of a Black man by a white police officer.

People blamed the police. Thousands all over America were now damaging stores, even ruining many small businesses. Some people demanded abolishing the police altogether, while others called for defunding the police in all cities. A few days after the funeral of George Floyd, another white police officer shot and killed a Black man, Rayshard Brooks, in Atlanta. Violence broke out all over again. The chief of police of Atlanta resigned. Renewed calls for the abolishment of police came.

I never dreamed I would see the day that in America there would be vast numbers of people fulfilling Isaiah's warning: people calling evil good and good evil. That is what has been happening before our eyes. The breath of Satan is being felt in nearly every state. There are people in the streets protesting with the threat of violence erupting at any moment. None of us has seen anything like this. It is almost as though we had forgotten about COVID-19, although threats of its second wave are now being voiced. The threat of the coronavirus still looms large.

Is God judging America? Is the double whammy best explained as the judgment of God upon us? Yes.

Why would God bother to judge America? Is it because America

has a special relationship with Him? Are we like Israel—under a divine covenant?

One thing is certain: As a nation, our forefathers chose to bring God into our government. We did not have to call ourselves a nation “under God.” We chose to. Consequently, God has honored us. “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Ps. 33:12). “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34).

The difference between God’s covenant with Israel and America’s relationship with God is simply put: God initiated His covenant with Israel. America chose to be called a nation under God. What is more, without question, God has honored America.

What has worried me most as I have written this book is that many well-meaning white Christians will hastily dismiss any need to sympathize with Black people.

Ask this question: How do you suppose Jesus would feel? If He could have compassion on a multitude “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36b, NIV), how much more would He understand how people feel when they are quickly dismissed because of their skin color or because they have not had the education, the care, the love and acceptance most white people have utterly taken for granted?

“Every person is worth understanding,” said Clyde Narramore (1916-2015). I am pretty sure we would lower our voices and climb down from our lofty pedestals of comfort and pointing the finger if we knew all that was knowable about people we hastily dismiss. The question is: Do we want to know more about them?

This modern example applies to the subject of chastening, or disciplining, following the pattern of the writer of the letter to the Hebrews. As soon as he urges us to focus on

“looking into Jesus,” who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God, he asks a question: “Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb. 12:5-6, ESV).

Going back to the Old Testament verse that inspired this book’s title, Joshua was preparing people to come into their inheritance. They had never been that way before. But first they would need to learn to expect what preceded coming into their inheritance. Similarly, the writer of Hebrews was helping his readers understand what they were going through—as part of their preparation. Strange as it may seem, they were undergoing chastening.

Could this be the explanation for what you are going through now?

It is so easy to forget this. The doctrine of chastening is often neglected when it comes to Christian teaching. And yet it is so comforting when we realize that God’s disciplining us is the explanation of what could be going on in our lives.

I will never forget how I discovered the doctrine of chastening. It was on an August afternoon in 1956. My father virtually rejected me over my new theological understanding. My grandmother had given me a new 1955 Chevrolet when I began pastoring a church in Palmer, Tennessee, but took it back when she could see I would not remain in my old denomination. I was distraught—not so much from handing back the car as from the sense of God deserting me. I honestly thought my dad and grandmother would be thrilled with my new teaching. In prayer that day I cried out to God, “Why?” when unexpectedly “Hebrews 12:6” entered my mind. I had no idea what that verse was. So I turned to it in my little King James New Testament. It read: “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

This was a new concept for me, but instantly I could see that what was going on in my life was God at work in a different kind of way. I was immediately able to see that it was a vital part of my preparation for the future. I could not think of anything I had done that was sinful. Yet I knew God was allowing my family—and many friends—to reject me as part of His preparation for me. It opened up a new world of thought. I went on to explore this teaching in ever-increasing measure. It became integral to my theological understanding generally and the premise interwoven throughout many of the books I have written, beginning with my first book, *Jonah*.

Has it crossed your mind that God might be chastening you? Could it be that God is trying to get your attention? You may say, “God already has my attention.” But is it possible that He wants more from you than you have presumed?

I have personally thought a thousand times that God truly has my attention—only to discover by His grace that He did not have my attention, as I had thought. It is like being asleep; you don’t know you were asleep until you wake up!

God’s chastening is essentially preparation. It is not God getting even with us; He got even at the cross. The blood of Jesus satisfied the justice and wrath of God. This is why David could say, “As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12, ESV). The word *paideuei* in Hebrews 12—chastens, disciplines—means enforced learning. It is when God teaches us a lesson. He can be very strict like a relentless schoolteacher who does what it takes to secure the needed change in us. But God carries this out entirely because He loves us. Indeed, He chastens only those He loves. If we were not disciplined, it would show we are “illegitimate children and not sons” (Heb. 12:8b). We should therefore rejoice when we are chastened; it is a sign we are truly saved.

3 Kinds of Chastening

There are three kinds of chastening: internal, external and terminal.

Internal Chastening

This is God's plan A. It's when God speaks to our hearts through His Word. This can be painful. It operates on us. Sometimes God does not use an anesthetic. It cuts. It hurts. After all, the Word of God is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

As painful as it might be, God dealing with us through His Word is the best way to have our problems solved. If God speaks to you through His Word—even though you see its demands could cost you a lot, take it! Take it with both hands. It will save you incalculable regret down the road.

So when God speaks to you through His Word, my advice to you is to say, "Yes, Lord"—then and there.

External Chastening

This is plan B. God turns to this when plan A does not achieve the change in us that He wanted. God spoke His word to Jonah (plan A): "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it" (Jon. 1:2). God said, "Go," and Jonah said, "No."

If only Jonah had listened to God's Word—the call that went right to his heart. But he did not heed the Word. And God turned to plan B. Because "Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish" (Jon. 1:3) and boarded a ship going there, "the Lord hurled a great wind upon the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea" (Jon. 1:4). Plan B began to work when Jonah was in the belly of a fish: "Then Jonah prayed" (Jon. 2:1).

More often than not, God uses plan B to get our attention because we have not sufficiently prayed. What will it take for

you to pray? God wants your time. He loves your company. Will it take being swallowed up by the equivalent of a big fish to get you to pray? What we know is it worked with Jonah: "Then Jonah prayed." Not only that; God secured the response in Jonah He was after. Enforced learning worked.

After the fish ejected Jonah and God repeated His original order to go to Nineveh, "Jonah arose and went to Nineveh"(Jon. 3:3a). Plan B worked.

Terminal Chastening

What if plan B had failed? Answer: Plan C—terminal chastening—would be put into effect. Pray that God does not resort to this in your case. Terminal chastening means death. It is the "sin that leads to death" (1 John 5:16).

Christians in Corinth had abused the Lord's Supper. Paul answered a question they must have asked: Why are people in our church ill, weak, sickly and some have died? Having pointed out how they had abused the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20-29), he then answers, "This is why many of you are weak and ill [plan B], and some have died [plan C]" (v. 30).

The generation of Israel that did not make it to the promised land were those with whom God was not pleased (1 Cor. 10:5). God swore in His wrath that they would not enter His rest (Heb. 3:11). They died in the wilderness, being an example of terminal chastening.

This also goes to show that God expects us to ask why when extraordinarily bad things happen—such as the coronavirus and the violence we have been seeing in America.

So is our double whammy God's judgment on the United States of America? Yes.

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