

Hebrews 12:5 - 13:1 ⁵ And 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. ⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Introduction

No one likes to go to the woodshed for a whipping. No one even likes to think about it. I remember two times to the woodshed: one with my father and one with my mother. The former had the character of rage and fury and the latter was orderly and loving. I recall them both but I benefited only from my mother's spanking, from her loving discipline. Benefit from discipline is what this text (Heb. 12.5-11) is about. It merits a second look beyond what we did with it last week. The theme is "perspective on receiving discipline from our Lord." We need to cover this *serious* matter more fully: **do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord** (12.5b). There are two steps in this second look: 1) we need to review the main emphases of our text, and 2) we need to ask and answer some challenging questions about it.

1A. A review of the main points in our text

We have three main points. They are the form discipline takes, the truth discipline teaches, and the response discipline elicits. Let us briefly recap each.

1B. The form discipline takes

In a word, discipline takes the form of afflictions we experience running the race of the Christian life. We know this because of the refrain regarding weariness that is present in both the context of the race and in the context of discipline. Note verse 3 (**Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted**) and verse 5 (**My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.**). In both contexts, the up-look of the runner comes into play. Therefore, the things that the conjunction "and" (12.5) places together are the Lord's discipline and the afflictions that go with running the race of our lives where sin clings to us and sinners contradict us. **Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,** ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ **In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.** Both sin and sinners bring afflictions and the writer tells us that those afflictions have another dimension to them. *Remarkably, those afflictions that we experience from within and without come from the hand of God as discipline.* You should expect discipline just as the *athlete* (on the *battlefield!*) should expect it.

Thus, when you are miserable because of the battle of sin raging in your heart, more things are at work than one. You struggle with sin and God is guiding your life. Two things are at work at the same time: 1) you may suffer affliction as a sinner-saint seeking to live righteously, and 2) that affliction that causes you pain is a rod in the hand of God. These things are not opposed one to another. Affliction you experience running your race across the battlefield of sin, within and without, is the form that divine discipline takes.

2B. The truth discipline teaches

Although the first glance at the form that discipline takes may be somewhat unsettling, the truth that it teaches is deeply reassuring. Discipline through affliction on the battlefield of sin is an expression of your heavenly Father's love. We have that truth in bold print: **the Lord disciplines**

the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives (Heb. 12.6). Trials and tribulations do not indicate a lack of concern for you on the part of your Father in heaven. Instead, per v. 7, the call to endure afflictions on your journey is "for discipline," that is, it is for your corrective discipline. Marvelously, he says, **God is treating you as sons** (7b). In other words, discipline in this way on the battlefield of sin is a mark of membership in God's family: **For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?** (7c) and emphatically: **If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons** (v. 8). All true sons and daughters of God experience afflictions from within and from without, but, and this is emphatic, *these afflictions ultimately come from above*. This is so much the case, that those who do not receive chastening by these means are not sons or daughters. They may profess to belong to the family of God, but the truth is they do not belong.

Discipline is integral in a process of learning and schooling. When we go through the school of suffering, our Lord is teaching us many things, *but first, He would have us know that discipline is the manifestation of His love*. That is the great lesson that discipline teaches.

3B. The response discipline elicits

Once you remember and do not forget these basics about discipline, then you will respond properly as loving children of your heavenly Father. The loving response that discipline elicits is threefold.

1) First, you will respond with thoughtful reflection

You will heed the fatherly admonition: **My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord** (12.5b). Acknowledgment is a critical beginning. So, do not forget; you need this refresher course on the subject of discipline.

2) Enduring acceptance

The Lord admonishes us further saying, **nor be weary when reproved** [by me]. The idea here is to guard against the quitter syndrome. Under reproof, you may say: "will I ever get it right; I might as well throw in the towel." The right perspective on discipline is to look at Christ and see the rod in *His* hand; that is way to avoid weariness, as we learned in 12.3 (**Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary**).

3) Respectful submission

He says, ⁹ **Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?** ¹⁰ **For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.** If you show respect to earthly fathers how much more ought you to respect the disciple of your Father in heaven who is perfect in His love, power, and wisdom. After all, He is the author of life, body and spirit; He is your life.

Moreover, *you are being trained in holiness by it* (12.10). *So do not rebel against it*. Earthly fathers exercise discipline with mistakes and misjudgment, and even with selfishness. But a wise son or daughter receives the discipline, learns, and profits. As wise reception of discipline pleases an earthly father, likewise, respectful submission pleases your heavenly Father.

In a word, receive discipline from your Lord thoughtfully, enduringly, and respectfully.

2A. Questions about the main points in our text

You may have other questions, but the following are a good beginning.

1) In simple terms, why is it important to learn about discipline with heavy and not with light regard (12.5b)? The better you understand discipline, the better you can profit when you experience it. Furthermore, you may make your trials more complicated and more difficult when you do not learn what they are all about in the big picture; when you do not receive them thoughtfully, enduringly, and submissively from your Father in heaven.

2) If even opposition from enemies of the gospel is a form that discipline may take, do I then suffer for doing good deeds; is that a form of discipline? Yes, the good you do may be in giving the gospel to the lost as best you are able. The good is that you live the gospel before your family, friends, and neighbors. The suffering that the Lord allows in this situation, that strikes you in some painful way, is the hand of your Father in firm discipline.

This is remarkable. We might feel like fighting with this point from the start. I seek to benefit my neighbor by explaining the gospel to him. He turns on me with mockery or disdain and I suffer for doing a good work! Now, I am told that when I suffer in a case like this, the Lord is chastening me. How can that be right? It is right because the fundamental truth is that you are a sinner, a sinner-saint and you are in need of correction in the way of righteousness. If your Lord, who controls all things, allows affliction in this way, then be sure, He does what is right and best.

The writer to the Hebrews gives us encouragement by pointing us to *the goal that our Lord has* in bringing these things upon us. Notably, He allows the painful injustice that we experience. His plan and purpose is coming to realization in all the events of our lives as corrective measures. Enemies oppose and hurt us; right there, our Father has lessons to teach us along the pathway of holiness. No matter what happens, God will keep you on the race track of growth in His image, of growth in godliness.

This leads to the next question.

3) When I am afflicted is it because of my sin?

Yes, but it is not one for one. As we have already seen, we may suffer for righteous actions at the hands of unbelievers. Still, every day we sin; every day we manifest the fruits of sin remaining within us. We need correction. The Lord is patient with us. He may discipline us for a specific infraction. For example, the Lord prevented Moses from entering the Promised Land because of his anger in striking a rock. But clearly (thankfully) *the Lord does not discipline us like that for every infraction*; He is working on our hearts, on the inner man of the heart. *He has goals for each of us that determine how and when He will use the rod.*

In fact, we may enter into disciplinary suffering from the Lord without specific cause. Classic for this point is the suffering of Job. Recall that he was living a righteous life when extreme physical suffering overwhelmed him like a flood. His wife and his friends added to his suffering by afflicting him with words, some of which were attempts to pinpoint some specific sins as the cause of his pain. Now we should note that Job's suffering is nonetheless the rod of God: **Let him take his rod away from me, and let not dread of him terrify me** (Job 9.34; cf. 21.7-9, unbelievers do not feel this rod, **no rod of God is upon them**). Most telling are the words of Eliphaz, which are similar to Proverbs 3 and Hebrews 12: ¹⁷ **Behold, blessed is the one whom God reprove; therefore despise not the discipline of the Almighty.** ¹⁸ **For he wounds, but he binds up; he shatters, but his hands heal** (5.17-18). We know that the friends speak much that is true, but confused because they have the wrong view of sin and suffering: they think it is a one to one ratio as if God is bound by a formula. They do not recognize His fatherly care that involves discipline of His children as sinners being made holy.

Thus, He often spares the rod. But to the point here, He will use the rod of suffering to bring matters of our sinfulness to the surface. Accordingly, Job was a sinner-saint or even a saintly-sinner as a godly man, but he was a work in progress. His sinfulness manifested itself in the great trial even though sin was not the cause of the trial. He did have the rod of the sovereign God upon him, but His rod was not terrifying (as Eliphaz thought). It was the rod of a loving father who has the incomparably valuable goal of using the rod to develop His children in holiness. Moreover, Job's experience under the rod was part of a greater gospel good. His experience became an embodiment of the gospel message. Namely, he anticipates the innocent one who intercedes on behalf of His friends from the depths of His suffering. Job's entire experience is an arrow that points directly to our Lord Jesus Christ interceding for us from the depths of unspeakable and incomparable suffering.

4) How do we know the difference between discipline and punishment in our experience?

To answer this question, we need to restate it because the use of the word punishment needs to be qualified. If we think of punishment as the just judgment of God against us for our sins, then no Christian is ever punished. Let us call that Punishment with a capital P. If we think of punishment as the corrective discipline of the Lord, then we are talking about punishment with a lower case p. Lower case punishment is our subject. We receive discipline not punishment.

5) How does comparing my experience with others often lead into a pit?

With censorious spirits (a sin we need to correct), we may look at others and say to ourselves, "why do they have it so good, why do they have this or that, without suffering; why are they chastened so little if at all?" Well, of course, we do not know the whole story of what others may be suffering and we should check our thoughts along this line for that fact alone. But the reality is that the Lord chooses the how and when of discipline and it is best that we acknowledge that He has the right and that He decides when one saint dies by the edge of the sword (Heb. 11.37) and another escapes the edge of the sword (Heb. 11.34). He is providentially working out His purposes for the good of His church and His glory. If people you might be envious of are truly without disciplinary afflictions then they are to be pitied and not envied.

6) How do we focus our hope in Christ to gain strength on this battlefield with sin and suffering? Answer: look to the harvest fruit that He has for you now and not yet.

a) Look to the harvest fruit that He has for you now

In time, now on this earth, the discipline will yield the fruit of righteousness that comes by training. When you go through it wisely, you come out the other side with joy. As our Lord looked though suffering, for you (in your place), to the joy of saving you! Likewise, look to the good He has in store and rejoice in it. The Psalmist has some powerful words in this regard: ⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. ⁶⁸ You are good and do good; teach me your statutes. ⁶⁹ The insolent smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts; ⁷⁰ their heart is unfeeling like fat, but I delight in your law. ⁷¹ It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. ⁷² The law of your mouth is better to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces. ⁷³ Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. ⁷⁴ Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. ⁷⁵ I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me (Ps. 119.67-75). Discipline by affliction in the battle with sin is the sauce that gives a relish for Christ. In this connection, Hughes says some things worth quoting: "how easily the desire for holiness is set aside when our worldly affairs are proceeding smoothly and comfortably! And how needful, then, is God's fatherly discipline which, when rightly received, teaches us not to rely on ourselves or to seek earthly security but to look trustingly and gratefully to him alone for help and blessing. The strong Christian is the disciplined Christian" (Hughes, 531).

b) Look to the harvest fruit that He has for you that is not yet

In Hebrews 12.11, we read: **For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.** Peace here is the rest and relaxation of the athlete that he enjoys when the victory has been won. You must look through suffering and beyond the unpleasant pain to the eternal weight of glory beyond it (2 Cor. 4.17, ¹⁷ **For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal**). There no real comparison to be made between **this slight momentary affliction** and the glory for which it is preparing us. It is apples and oranges or sawdust and steak for supper. So, with Paul you can say, **For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us** (Rom. 8.18). So do not lose heart and do not let weariness rule your conduct; look to the harvest and the fruit yet to come, now in front of you on the way and in the incomparable glory of the eternal Sabbath yet to come.

May we fall down before the majesty of our loving heavenly Father in heart-felt acknowledgement of our sinfulness and sins; may the Holy Spirit teach us that we are sons and daughters being trained in holiness by corrective discipline; may the Lord Jesus enable us to gain priceless and incomparable wisdom by receiving discipline thoughtfully, enduringly, and respectfully from the hand of our sovereign Lord; to the triune God be all glory, forever, amen.