

Receiving Discipline from Our Lord (Heb.12.5-11)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

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8-2-2009

Hebrews 12:5 - 13:1 <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." <sup>7</sup> 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? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> 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? <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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

The word "lightly" in our text immediately indicates to us that the theme we are now about to consider is serious; it is *not* light but serious. The subject is receiving discipline from the Lord. So, he says, **My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord** (12.5). We need to buckle our seat belts for a fast and somewhat bumpy ride. No one likes to go to the woodshed for a whipping. No one even likes to think about it. With due soberness, we need to study this text to show ourselves approved unto God as workmen without shame. This work has a great goal: to equip ourselves for every good work set before in running the race of our lives from here to glory.

Accordingly, our topic for today is receiving discipline from our Lord, and there are three things in this text to help us gain the right perspective on this *serious* matter. The three things are 1) the form discipline takes, 2) the truth discipline teaches, and 3) response discipline elicits.

### 1A. The form discipline takes

This text opens with a question: **And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?** (12.5a). The exhortation he has in mind comes from the book of Proverbs, which we should read: (Proverbs 3:11-15, <sup>11</sup> My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, <sup>12</sup> for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights. <sup>13</sup> Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, <sup>14</sup> for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. <sup>15</sup> She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her). Notably, in the use of this quote, the writer to the Hebrews shows us that the words of a father to a son in the book of Proverbs are the words of God to us as sons (the readers, then and now). Of course, we know by the implications of the new humanity in Christ that this address is to both sons and daughters, the new family redeemed by the blood of our great high priest.

How does this appeal to the Lord's discipline in the book of Proverbs fit into the flow of thought here in the book of Hebrews? It enters as part of the larger theme of running the race of your life, the race that is your life, the race that is for dear 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 outlook or up-look of the runner comes into play: there is consideration, regard, thinking, and outlook/up-look in running *and* in receiving discipline. Thus, the writer begins verse 5 with "and." He continues his subject in a coordinating way with new elements and emphases.

Therefore, the things that the conjunction "and" places together are the Lord's discipline and the afflictions that go with running the race of the Christian life. This race travels across the battlefield of sin within and without. Thus, we have a profoundly important fact: there is a conjunction of the Lord's discipline and the afflictions of running the race of our lives *where sin*

*clings and sinners contradict*. Sin clings to us and sinners contradict us. Both sin and sinners bring afflictions and the writer tells us, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that those afflictions have another dimension to them. There is more than one way to view them. *Remarkably, those afflictions that we experience from within and without come from the hand of God as discipline*. That is why the transition from running the race in 12.1-4 to receiving discipline in 12.5-11 is so smooth and natural. It is as if the author is simply continuing the theme of the race. Well, in a very real sense, that is exactly what he is doing with changing images and analogies. You can expect discipline just as the *athlete* on the *battlefield* must receive correction.

Thus, when you suffer affliction because of opposition to the gospel that you live and proclaim, two things are at work at once; sinners are against you and God is for you. When you suffer affliction and are miserable because of the battle of sin that is raging within your heart, more things are at work than one. You struggle with sin and God is guiding your life. To be even more precise, two things are at work at the same time: 1) you may suffer trial and affliction as a sinner-saint seeking to live righteously. 2) At the same time, that affliction that causes you pain and grief 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 discipline takes.

## 2A. 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.**<sup>7</sup> **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?**<sup>8</sup> **If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons** (Heb. 12.6-8). Some of the readers of the book of Hebrews may mistakenly assume that trials and tribulations are indicative of a lack of concern for them on the part of their Father in heaven. If we think that way, we have forgotten the lesson that God states in the Proverbs: discipline comes to the sons and daughters that He loves and chastening comes to the children He receives (v. 6).

Thus, in v. 7, when He says, **It is for discipline that you have to endure**, the Lord is teaching this firm truth: the call to endure afflictions on your journey is "**for discipline**," that is, it is for your correction, for your corrective discipline. Clearly, and powerfully, we are to see affliction as designed for discipline from the hand of a loving father. To make this patently clear the writer adds a statement, a question, and another statement in 7b-8.

### 1) Statement

First, he states that **God is treating you as sons** (7b). This means that you are to receive afflictions (on the battlefield within and without) with a view to the role they play in God's providence, namely, the role of disciplinary treatment of a father toward his children. The Lord calls you to receive hardships as signs of His love for you and of your sonship and daughter-ship to Him. That fact needs to ring in your ears at the dawn of tribulations and trials.

### 2) Question

**For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?** (7c). Obviously, the assumption here is that the father is a loving father. In the case of a home with a loving father, what son would there be that lived under his father's loving-care *without* discipline? The nature of children is such and the love of father's is such that no son under the umbrella of such love will be without discipline. All the children who belong to the family of a loving father will receive discipline. It is so vital in the family that corrective discipline is a virtual mark of sonship in that family.

### 3) Statement

The writer goes on to another statement to drive his point home 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 are illegitimate and do not belong to the family of God. They may profess to belong, 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 the love of God. That is the great lesson that discipline teaches. You need this lesson in all the afflictions of life, little and large. You need this truth.

### 3A. 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). When you experience trial, pain, and suffering on your journey through life, it is most important that you *think about it properly and acknowledge what it is*. You are to view these things in truth as discipline from your Father in heaven. That means that you are quick to acknowledge your sinfulness in general and your sins in particular. You are a work in progress, a son or daughter under loving correction. The process is a remedy for sin in heart and life. Acknowledgment is a critical first step. So, do not forget; you need refresher courses in this subject of discipline.

#### 2) Enduring reception

The Lord admonishes us further saying, **nor be weary when reproved [by me]**. The idea here is that we guard against the quitter syndrome. Under reproof, you may say: "here comes another correction, 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, <sup>9</sup> **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?** <sup>10</sup> **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 receive the discipline 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. So do not rebel against it*. This is like the training that children receive: the wise child will learn from the discipline. It is correcting discipline that leads to improvement of life. Earthly fathers exercise this discipline with mistakes and misjudgment, and even with selfishness. But a wise son or daughter receives the discipline, learns, and profits (Prov. 23.13-16, **Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die. <sup>14</sup> If you strike him with the rod, you will save his soul from Sheol. <sup>15</sup> My son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad. <sup>16</sup> My inmost being will exult when your lips speak what is right**). As wise reception of discipline pleases an earthly father, likewise, respectful submission pleases your heavenly Father.

### Conclusion

In a word, receive discipline from your Lord thoughtfully, enduringly, and respectfully. You can do this when you have the right perspective on disciplinary afflictions that you receive from your Lord. This is important so we should review some things that give encouragement in this experience of receiving discipline by affliction.

#### 1) You gain encouragement by considering the Father's goal

Discipline in a "heavy" topic. This text is vitally important. It has many very important lessons for us. It is a firm wake up call, a call to attention; an alert. Mark it down with indelible ink, discipline has the Father's goal of your good, your growth in holiness to image Him more and more: **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 (12.10).** Granted, disciplinary afflictions may hurt: **<sup>11</sup> 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 (12.11).** It hurts for a time but it is for your good. The pain is how it takes hold of you, gains your attention, and does its work. The end is the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Nothing can compare in value to this. Remember the proverb: **<sup>13</sup> Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding, <sup>14</sup> for the gain from her is better than gain from silver and her profit better than gold. <sup>15</sup> She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire can compare with her (Prov. 3.13-14).** The gain from her, that is, from wisdom in receiving discipline from your loving Father is better than silver, gold, and jewels. It is more precious than any of these. Remarkably, nothing you desire in all of life can compare in value with the wisdom and understanding that you gain from discipline.

2) You gain encouragement (to face affliction) by considering the Father's loving-care

The pain is not pleasant, but it is temporary. Amen to the fact that it is selective, planned and proportioned for your good according to the plan of God and your place in it with the gifts He gave you and the good works He has set before you. In other words, your Father is acting in loving-kindness on your behalf in the afflictions that you face on the battlefield with sin. The writer to the Hebrews gives you encouragement by pointing you to the Father's love in bringing these things upon you. Notably, He allows each one; what He allows is His decision to allow it; in other words, it is His plan and purpose that is coming to realization in all the events of your lives: He controls all things (Eph. 1.11) and works all things together for your good (Rom. 8.28).

Part of the way to see this is to note that you *will* learn the lessons He is determined to teach you. Also, note that sometimes you may learn them the hard way as a rebellious child who refuses to be trained by discipline. What you may do is make your life and your trials harder, more intense, and more difficult by failing to receive training from them. Many trials will end as soon as you come to terms with them and learn the lessons the Lord has there for you.

Sanctification, growing in holiness and righteousness is a process that goes hand in hand with the perfecting of your faith (12.2). The Lord authors your faith and perfects it. Both will be accomplished in fulfillment of the Father's plan. As the Lord carries this through to completion, He is showing you His love. You need to learn quickly that the fact of discipline is a sign of your child-ship to God. He loves His sons and daughters and that is why He uses the chastening rod. It is for your good in a way that goes far beyond the good that your earthly fathers gave you through discipline. His love leads to your growth in holiness, peace, and righteousness; each more valuable than all earthly things.

**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.**