

Divine Discipline

Hebrews 12:5-13

Introduction

Hebrews chapter 12 begins by describing the Christian life as a race or a contest. We run the race God has marked out for us. Jesus is our role model (vv.1-4). Now the writer speaks of divine discipline, chastening, correction that all children of God experience. Our heavenly Father disciplines us. In the ancient world fathers were expected to discipline their children; and so it should not come as a shock or surprise that our Heavenly Father would discipline us. Now the writer will remind us of God's love (v.5); reasons for discipline (v.6); reactions to that discipline (v.7); our rewards for submitting to divine discipline (v.11) and our renewal in that discipline (vv.12-13).

The Reminder About Discipline (v.5)

Hebrews 12:5–13 (NKJV) *5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;*

The writer quotes Proverbs 3:11-12; "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor detest (be discouraged) His correction; For whom the Lord loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights." The writer is Solomon. David was his father. Solomon was the son in whom David delighted.

The words translated 'chastening' 'chasteneth' 'chastisement' (v.8) in both the noun form and the verb form contain the root word 'pais'—child; verb—paideuo—noun—paideia—and are a reference to child training—or child discipline.

Many of the Hebrew Christians were immature—spiritual babes—and God was allowing tests, trials to work maturity. In verse 9; we have had human fathers who "corrected or disciplined us" (*paideutas—or one who disciplines*).

The reminder comes in the context of verse 4; "you have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin". The persecution has not yet led to martyrdom—the implication being we have not yet had to suffer what Christ suffered.

Why bring up discipline? Because most of our ideas and concepts of discipline do not come from the Scriptures but from our own past experiences.

Some of you read "chastening of the Lord" and think child abuse. You may think—"I'm too old to be spanked by God". Be careful.

The Bible teaches that God has placed us under divine authority—His authority.

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Donald Bloesch writes; “If anything characterizes modern Protestantism, it is the absence of spiritual disciplines or spiritual exercises. Yet such disciplines form the core of the life of devotion. It is not an exaggeration to state that this is the lost dimension in modern Protestantism”.

The goal of discipline is correction and restoration. The purpose of discipline is not to render judgment or condemnation but put us back on the right course. Think of discipline as course correction.

What might happen? We might be tempted to despise the Lord’s discipline; or become discouraged in the discipline.

Andrew Murray wrote; “God has no pleasure in afflicting us, but He will not keep back even the most painful chastisement if He can but thereby guide His beloved child to come home and abide in the beloved Son.”

“ . . .do not despise” (v.5)

“ . . .nor be discouraged” (v.6)

“ . . .but painful” (v.11)

“ . . .let any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled” (v. 15).

We can sometimes have a wounded spirit (or feeling hurt)—Proverbs 18:14; “A wounded spirit who can bear?” We feel hurt. We feel offended. The hurt may be real or imagined. Sometimes this followed by bitterness. We become overwhelmed by anger; stubbornness, and rebellion.

Christian is your life filled with foolishness? In his book *The Heart of Anger* Lou Priolo provides a list he entitles 25 characteristics of a fool (p.23); a fool is not a stupid person—but a person who lacks moral clarity and judgment; the characteristics of a fool are the characteristics of a rebel (p.22). A fool hates wisdom and instruction (Prov.1:7) a fool hates knowledge (Prov. 1:22); grieves his mother (Prov.10:1). In the book of Proverbs we find a list; characteristics of a fool;

Enjoys devising mischief	Proverbs 10:23
Right in his own eyes	Proverbs 12:15
Quick to anger	Proverbs 12:16
Hates to depart from evil	Proverbs 13:19
Deceitful	Proverbs 14:8
Arrogant and Careless	Proverbs 14:16
Does not respond well to discipline	Proverbs 17:10

There are many more characteristics he lists; does not understand wisdom (Prov.17:16); a worldly or carnal focus; grieves his parents; hurts his parents.

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The picture is the picture of someone immature. The fool, the rebel require discipline.

No wonder the writer of Hebrews says; “do not despise it”. That means—resist it—or make light of it—or pay little concern for the discipline and the correction of God. It may begin with a tug of conscience—or a word from the Bible.

The Reasons For Discipline (v.6)

6For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.”

What are the reasons for discipline? They are many. But here we find at least two;

1. **To prove His love.**
2. **To prove we are His children.**

The writer of Hebrews gives powerful encouragement to those who are under trial, pressure, persecution, temptation, doubt, fear. But what about discipline? God’s discipline? We have Jesus as our example (vv.1-4). We have the assurance of God’s love.

We all want God’s love but resist God’s discipline. The irony is that God’s discipline serves as one of the many proofs of God’s love. God sent Jesus as proof of His love.

Satan tells us that God’s discipline is proof that God does not love us. But God’s Word tells us that Satan is both a liar and a deceiver.

C.H. Spurgeon said, “When God chastises his children, he does not punish as a judge does, but chastens as a father.:

The famous Dutch patriot Corrie Ten Boom lamented; “It hurts when God has to PRY things out of our hand.”

Our Relationship With Our Father (vv.7-10)

7If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

illegitimate (nothoi)

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Do you sometimes think you have gotten away with your sin? Discipline brings assurance. Are you taught, instructed, disciplined and corrected by the Spirit of God?

9Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

Not all of us welcomed our parent's instruction or correction or discipline.

The writer assumes that most people who experienced discipline from our human parents or caregivers did not interpret this as a sign that they hated us. We realized at some level that they were interested in our safety—not harm; we paid them respect.

I am willing to concede that not all parents discipline their children with fairness or consistency. Some of us may have grown up in a home—where human fathers did not correct us in fairness or love. They may have disciplined us in anger; being overly legalistic or overly lax; finding fault—but rarely offering forgiveness.

And not all of us welcome God's instruction; God's correction; God's discipline.

Look carefully at the expression; “be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live.” The implication is that for those who refuse submission they may die!

But God's Spirit will stir us and save us—so that we can truly live. Can you imagine a world where a child grows up—absent discipline—absent guidance—absent instruction. That's not life. Think of all the evil, corruption, devastation, ruin and death—that comes from disobedience. Do you think God will allow His children to live in unrepentant rebellion?

Does that surprise you? Does it surprise you that God—patient—and kind—and merciful—may—when He sees fit—deal with His rebellious children in profound discipline.

God may allow His children to die—if He must.

10For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

Parents discipline their children with several goals in mind. We have already seen that earthly discipline by parents may not have always been consistent with the mind of God or the heart of God but what “. . .seemed best to them” (v.10).

God disciplines us for our good and to make us partakers of His holiness.

William MacDonald; “But God's discipline is always perfect. His love is infinite and His wisdom is infallible. His chastening are never the result of whim, but always for our profit. his

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objective is that we may be partakers of his holiness. And godliness can never be produced outside of God's school" (pp.2203-2204).

Jowett calls this chastening "creative" not "punitive". "The phrase "that we may share" has direction in it, and the direction points toward a purified and beautiful life. The fire which is kindled is not a bonfire, blazing heedlessly and unguardedly, and consuming precious things; it is a refiner's fire, and the Refiner sits by it, and He is firmly and patiently and gently bringing holiness out of carelessness and stability out of weakness" (see MacDonald who quotes Jowett on page 2204).

The Lord also has a goal in mind. ". . .that we may be partakers of His holiness".

Jay Adams has written several helpful books. Jay Adams wrote; "Discipline is the secret of godliness. You must learn to discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."

Our Rewards In Submitting To Divine Discipline (vv.11-13)

11Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Sometimes the pressure to submit to God, repent of sin and turn to Him seems unbearable.

Discipline produces peace.

Discipline produces righteousness

The prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon offers this testimony;

"I am afraid that all the grace I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and anvil, the fire and file? Affliction is the best furniture in my house."

12Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

This is an exhortation. We might translate this; "Take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs."

Chin up. Does the writer of Hebrews ask us to put on a brave face for the benefit of others? What if it means way more than that. What if it means lift those hands—those weak hands—that hang down—lift those hands in praise. Lift those hands in service to others. Lift your hands for the task of loving and serving Jesus. Our knees may lack strength—all we can do is kneel. Then

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we will strengthen those knees through persevering prayer (see George MacDonald for that phrase p. 2205).

13and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

“Mark out a straight path for your feet”. Walk straight. Walk the path of Christian discipline and discipleship.

The lame I think is a reference to the cripple—what is lame (crippled) may not be dislocated but rather healed. The revelation of our brokenness brings the opportunity for healing.

G. H. Lang gives this illustration:

A weary traveler, tired of the road and the buffeting of the tempest, stands dispirited and limp. With shoulders bowed, hands hanging slack, knees bent and shaking, he is ready to give up and sink into the ground. Such can God’s pilgrim become, as pictured by our writer.

But one comes to him confident of mien, with kindly smile and firm voice, and says, Cheer up, stand erect, brace your limbs, take heart of grace. You have already come far; throw not away your former toils. A noble home is at the end of the journey. See, yonder is the direct road to it; keep straight on; seek from the great Physician healing for your lameness. . . Your forerunner went this same hard road to the palace of God; others before you won through; others are on the way; you are not alone; only press on! and you too shall reach the goal and win the prize.”

Lang writes; “Happy is he who knows how to sustain with words him that is weary (Isaiah 50:4). Happy is he who accepts exhortation (Hebrews 13:22). And thrice happy is he whose faith is simple and strong so that he finds no occasion of stumbling in the Lord when His discipline is severe”.

Is the path difficult? Then perhaps your walk may make the path less painful for the person who follows. The Christian might be tempted to give up and quit.

Warren Wiersbe writes; “This is the wrong attitude (see vv.3, 12-13). God’s chastening is meant to help us grow, not to beat us down. The correct attitude is that we endure by faith (v.7), allowing God to work out His perfect plan. It is the blessed “afterward” of v.11 that keeps us going! Chastening is for our profit that we might be sharers of His holiness, and our submission brings the most glory to His name” (*Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines of the New Testament; p.711*).

Conclusion

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What have we learned? We are not to take God's discipline lightly. We are not to faint or give up under discipline. We endure discipline—it proves God's love; it proves God's leadership and relationship; it proves His paternity and provides for our maturity.

1. God disciplines us to assure us we are His children (v.8).
2. God disciplines us to save us and stir us up to truly live (v.9).
3. God disciplines us for our good and to make us partakers of His holiness (v.10).
4. God disciplines us so that we can bear the fruit of peace and righteousness (v.11).

What then is our response? The writer of Hebrews uses these descriptive terms—to frame our duty and describe our witness!

1. If we feel discouraged or defeated—because of trial or suffering or sin—we lift up our hands and strengthen our knees. We allow God's discipline—instead of life's discouragement to define our lives.

2. We make straight paths for our feet. We follow the straight course of God's discipline. We do exactly what God's Spirit tells us to do—what the Word of God instructs us to do—and we refuse to do those things that Spirit and the Word have told us are not for us!

3. We submit to God's plan of healing—for those things that are crooked or lame or injured. We strengthen our grip. We strengthen our weak knees. We make straight paths and encourage others who are weak and lame.

“Come, and let us return to the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up” (Hosea 6:1).