

Loving Discipline

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 12:4-13

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. 5 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: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. 9 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? 10 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. 11 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. 12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

When the sinner's hand is raised against you and you receive his hostility can you say that his abuse is the chastening or discipline of the Lord? One might respond to my question, "If you did him wrong then, yes, the pain you receive as a consequence is part of God's discipline." But what if I in return tell you that you did him no wrong, but you suffer wrong from his hand only because you are a Christian? His hostilities against you are persecutions against your faith; can we then say this abuse is the discipline of the Lord? Yes!

We find this answer stunning if not wrong. "Yes" surely cannot be the answer! It flies into the face of what we consider equity, fairness, and God's justice. You argue you have not done wrong, and you were in truth being a witness for Christ, therefore, there can be no discipline in this for you. Do you maintain that this is suffering wrongly, unjust suffering and not discipline? But according to the sacred record of Scripture, it is discipline and it is discipline from the hand of God. Look at verses three and four. In verse three the writer of Hebrews is trying to encourage the hearts of people who are hurting. They are suffering hostility and abuse by the hand of sinners because they are Christians.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

What kind of resisting is he talking about? Hebrews chapter ten and verses thirty-two through thirty-four answers.

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

Here we can get some idea of what happened to the Hebrew Christians. Many of them were brought out into the public squares of their communities. There they were under the public shame and ridicule of being discovered as believers of Jesus. So they became a public spectacle, and humiliation was theirs to suffer. The writer of the epistle goes on to list other afflictions they endured. He says some had been imprisoned as the writer of Hebrews had. In that day you did not get three square meals and an air-conditioned cell with a television. You were thrown into a dungeon. If you received any food from the jailor, it was rotten garbage. Most often you wouldn't even receive that. If you were to survive your imprisonment it was because family and friends took mercy and compassion upon you and brought food to you. This is what Jesus was referring to when He said,

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me (Matthew 25:35-36).

Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me (Matthew 25:40).

In the midst of serving their persecuted brethren, the Hebrews, whom the book of Hebrews is addressed to, were also arrested or had their own properties confiscated by the state. Nobody up to this point had become a martyr, but their homes were lost, their properties were seized because they too were Christians. This is the type of resistance or persecution they had received thus far in Hebrews chapter twelve and verse four.

Therefore, in light of this, the writer of Hebrews is saying I know you are suffering and I know you are suffering innocently. But he does not say to them something like "You know He may be allowing it right now, but eventually God is going to bring you through this." Nor does he say that it was the devil's fault that they were receiving this type of grief. Rather he reminds them they have forgotten the word of God that says "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." In other words, this persecution was God's discipline in the Hebrews' life. So the writer of Hebrews answers our question "is innocent suffering God's discipline?" with a resounding yes. Even when, because of your faith in Christ, you suffer innocently, it is chastening or discipline sent by God. That leads us to four questions which we want to tackle in this message. Number one, what is God's discipline? Number two, is God's discipline punishment? Number three, what is the purpose of God's discipline? And number four, what should our response be to God's discipline?

WHAT IS GOD'S DISCIPLINE?

Let's first define what God's discipline really is. The word "chastening" or "discipline" in our text is used six times in the New Testament. It is very important to know that. Four of the six times are in the book of Hebrews and they are all in our text. That leaves us with only two other places the Greek word for "chastening" or "discipline" is found in the New Testament. The word in question is the Greek word, *paideia* "paideia". One verse where it is found is Ephesians chapter six and verse four, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The word "nurture" is from the same Greek word that our word "chastening" is from. But here we get a completely different concept of the word from its use in our text. Here the word is used to describe the whole training and education of children. It doesn't mean just spanking or inflicting corporal punishment. Instead it encompasses every facet of child rearing and instructing. It is the very loving of your children in the ways of God. Nurture is an interesting way to use the word "chastening," isn't it?

The only other place the word is found is in 2 Timothy three and verse sixteen.

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

"Surely," you say, "it is the word 'reproof'." But it isn't; nor is it the word "correction." Surprisingly it is the word "instruction." Again we see it doesn't mean corporal punishment, nor does it mean pain. In 2 Timothy and in Ephesians it is used in a positive way rather than a negative. Therefore, it is not inaccurate for us to say that the word "*paideia*" has a double meaning, or perhaps some would say, application. It means both instruction and correction.

We need to change some of our concepts on child rearing as well as on God's discipline today. When you use the word "discipline" with your children you normally think of corporal punishment. We think of something negative that is inflicted upon a child to teach a lesson. But is corporal punishment the only way you can teach your children lessons? I pray not, for their sake and yours. No, continually you are to be looking for and finding opportunities at any moment, at any time of the day, to take your children and teach them as God does with us.

One day a Christian woman saw a helpless butterfly trapped in a spider's web. She, in pity, picked up the frail butterfly and set it in her backyard flower garden. At that moment the Holy Spirit whispered in her ear that God was more concerned about her than she was the butterfly. If she would take pity and help the lowly creature, how much more would He help her? In the simple act of her compassion on an insect, God gave her instruction. He didn't spank her, He didn't chasten her, he didn't discipline her in the way we would normally think of discipline. Rather, He instructed her and encouraged her. Dear friend, that was as much discipline as correction would have been. The discipline of God is not always corrective. Most often it is not corrective, but rather instructive. At this moment you are hopefully being instructed in the ways of God. Right now, I pray, you are being chastened according to the writer of Hebrews and his use of this word

“chastened.” Now certainly there is reproof. If you go back to our text there is reproof in God’s chastening or discipline. Verse five says as much, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” So we see there is rebuke.

There are also suffering in this word. Verse six says, “and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth.” Certainly correction is involved in this word “discipline,” that is, when correction is needed. Often it does include some type of adversity or suffering. But the encouraging fact of the matter is that the Christian is always under the discipline of God. There is not a moment God is not disciplining you. Life is a discipline and course of instruction. What do we call the twelve men that followed Jesus for three and one half years? Disciples. The word “disciple” means pupil, learner, or student, and it comes from the same word “discipline” comes from. They are forms of the same word.

We are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore we are constant learners and the Master is always teaching His students. At times, when necessary, correction is applied. This is part of it, but it is not the whole. God lovingly disciplines us by instructing us as well. God’s discipline is God’s instruction of His people, which happens all the time.

IS GOD’S DISCIPLINE PUNISHMENT?

Now, the second question, is God’s discipline punishment? Here again we need to do some rethinking of this word “discipline.” Is God’s discipline punishment? Let me make a resounding and unequivocal “no.” God’s discipline is never to be misconstrued or misunderstood as punishment. God doesn’t punish His children. And as parents you ought not to do so either. I think we need to rethink the word “punishment” in relation to our children and especially when it comes to Jesus Christ. Punishment is trying to repay the wrong that was done and impose a deterrent in order to preserve community and order. It is the satisfaction of justice.

As a parent I have never disciplined my children to satisfy justice. I have disciplined my children because I love them and wanted to teach them valuable life lessons. There is a big difference between punishment and discipline. When you punish your children you are causing them to do what Paul said you are not supposed to do, you are causing them to turn to wrath. You are embittering their spirit. A form of discipline that is a type of retribution does not teach a child but drives them further from the truth and from the parent. If you believe a wrong has been committed by your child and it needs to be righted by inflicting pain then you are punishing and not disciplining your child. If this has been your procedure and you have not apologized for it, let me suggest that before this day is over you do so. Repent of it to your children. You should never discipline your children in anger, and there should be no retribution, no punitive sentencing. Discipline should be loving correction.

The same is to be said of our heavenly Father. My, dear friend, God has never punished one of His children, except the only begotten, Jesus. Isaiah fifty-three and verse five says that Christ was “was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our

peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” When Jesus suffered on the cross, He suffered on our behalf. When Jesus died, He took the Father’s punishment for us. It was our punishment that we deserved. It had your name on it; it was my pain for which He was nailed to the cross. Jesus has suffered our punishment. And what is punishment? It is the repaying of a debt that is owed to justice. But today the Christian does not owe a debt to God’s justice. Our debt has been paid and the account was settled long ago. You must not think that when God disciplines you He is punishing you. What is there to punish? Jesus paid it all.

The Apostle Paul assures us of the completed and full work of Christ to atone for our sins. In the epistle to the Romans chapter three and verse twenty-five Paul tells us that Christ is “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation.” What does propitiation mean? It is a sacrifice that appeases or puts off the anger of justice so that God can be merciful. Jesus has been set forth as our punishment bearer who satisfied the justice of God. God can in turn be merciful to us. Paul continues in verse twenty-five “through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”

When Jesus died He received the judgment of God against the believer’s sins, all of them. Romans chapter five and verse nine, Paul goes further in explaining the reason we stand without guilt before God. He says, “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.” The word “wrath” is from the Greek word “orge.” “Orge” is the punishment measured out by a magistrate, a governor, or a judge. The “orge” of God is what Christ received in our stead. Therefore, we, the recipients of His saving grace do not receive the punishment for sin, Jesus did. My Lord does not punish me but disciplines me. Discipline is not punishment; it is love.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S DISCIPLINE?

This leads us to the consideration of our third question, what is the purpose of discipline? In answer, we can first say that it is a proof of God’s love. God has proven to you that He loves you.

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth (Hebrews 12:6).

This is the reasoning that the writer of Hebrews gives us, whomever the Lord loves He disciplines. He compares God’s love for us as the love of a father for his son. He continues this line of reasoning in the next verse.

If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (Hebrews 12:7).

God doesn’t have children that He doesn’t discipline. We must remember discipline doesn’t always mean correction. It also means instruction. God teaches and corrects His children. Are you under His instruction? Are you a receiver of His holy rebuke? All of these are evidences of

His love for you and that you are His child. The opposite is must also be true. If you are not the recipient of these evidences of love, then you are not His child. This is the author's argument in verse eight.

But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons (Hebrews 12:8).

Please listen and beware. If you can read the Bible and it means nothing to you, you receive nothing from your reading, be alarmed. If you can come to church and can listen to preaching and receive nothing, be fearful. You are not receiving instruction from God, and if this be true, you cannot be a child of God. If God does not commune with you from time to time, nor steps down into the midst of your chaos and show up now and then, be petrified. If you sin and God's loving correction is not applied to your life, dear friend, be horrified for you are not a child of God. It matters not how many times you prayed and asked Jesus to come into your heart, because all of those whom are His children, He disciplines.

An example of this is from our childhoods. Have you ever gotten into trouble as a child or young person? Let us say you and several other children had done something mischievous and your father caught you in the very act, how many of the children did your father discipline? Only one. Why is this? Because you alone were the only child that was his. The other children were not his sons. Neither does God discipline those who are not His children. He will punish them. They have rejected the deadly punishment that Jesus suffered.

Are you suffering under the hand of affliction? Rejoice, God loves you. Are you receiving instruction from the Master Discipler? Be glad, God claims you as His own. Have you known adversity that humbled you and made you to depend upon God? If so then exult in divine sonship. I know that sounds so contrary to the convoluted thinking of today. We think of a loving parent as one protecting their children from all harm, all danger. But God, who is more loving and wise than we are, has a better technique of rearing children. We must believe this while suffering hardship for it is only faith in our loving Father that will prevail.

The second purpose of God's discipline is to produce holiness. God is interested in something more than your comfort and ease. He is transforming you to conformity of His dear Son. He is producing holy children. The writer demonstrates this purpose of discipline in verse ten.

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 (Hebrews 12:10).

What is our profit but to be holy. God loves us enough to make sure we walk holy. Here is the distinction or family resemblance that shows that we are children of God. Those who are really saved love holiness, they want to be holy more than they want to be rich. They want to be holy more than they want to be healthy. They want to be holy more than they want to be popular. They love holiness and that is their goal. The child of God can be encouraged if he or she knows

that conformity to Christ is taking place, even in the midst of suffering and hardship. And now you begin to get an idea of why the writer of Hebrews talks this way. The author is communicating to his audience to be encouraged, “God is working holiness in your life.”

Another purpose of discipline is that it produces the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

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 (Hebrews 12:11).

We do not praise the Lord for the pain or the difficult lessons; they are “grievous.” What we rejoice in is the fruit of chastening, which is righteousness. In order for us to be able to produce fruits of righteousness God must discipline us. This chastening is not just when we do things wrong, but is also teaching and instructing us how to do things right. It is this God-sent discipline that produces righteous works that are peaceable. Many Christians are like medicine bottles that read “shake well before using.” God has got to shake some of us before we are worth using, and this He does. He shakes up your world. He shakes up your life so that the peaceable fruits of righteousness can be demonstrated by you. Oh, how often we need God to shake us before we are worth using. In this shaking process God eradicates the things of our lives that entangle us, bind us, and hinder righteousness.

The fruit is peaceable. This is one of the things that distinguish a true from a false Christian. The false Christian likes controversy. They like to argue, they like to fight. You know there are some people who profess to be Christians in Baptist churches that are not happy unless they are fighting. If church is going well and they can’t find anything to be unhappy about, they are the most miserable people in the church house. But God is producing peaceable fruit: lovers of peace, pursuers of peace, and good works.

WHAT SHOULD OUR RESPONSE BE TO GOD’S DISCIPLINE?

God is working in your life, dear friend, and God has a purpose for that adversity. He is developing Christ Jesus in you. What then should our response be to God’s discipline? First, we should not to take it lightly. Again go back to verse five.

My son despise not thou the chastening of the Lord.

Now the word “despise” was used earlier in the second verse of this same chapter. The author uses the word to talk about Jesus despising not the shame that He received. But here in verse five we have a different Greek word for the word “despise.” It means don’t take lightly, don’t overlook this. Our author is telling his readers, “Don’t take God’s discipline lightly.” This is his warning, yet that is exactly what we often do. Let me give you an example. When you are suffering adversity what is the last thing you think of? Isn’t it that God is trying to teach you something? When suffering, we seldom think that God wants to build character into our lives. Truly the first think we think about is of ourselves and how we hurt. Quickly our minds race to how we can change the circumstances that seems to bring our pain. How can we fix this? This is how we think.

The writer of Hebrews says the proper response to God's discipline is not to think lightly. We should stop and see how God is working in our lives. Even though you are suffering innocently and without just cause, God is doing something in you and you are not to miss it.

Our second response is to submit to it. Submission to God's discipline is the biblical response that is being commanded of us in verse nine.

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?

Respect for our Heavenly Father should lead us to submit to His discipline in our lives. Submission to God's discipline would include not trying to tell God how He ought to solve the problem, which is the greatest temptation. We miss what God is doing in our life because we can only see through a narrow tunnel. We envision how God must deliver us. We think that because God loves us He must change our circumstances. But sometimes God doesn't change the circumstances, and He does not do so because He loves us. Therefore, our response must be confidence in God, which means submission to whatever God is doing.

Then, thirdly, our response to discipline is to strengthen those who are enduring God's discipline. This is the command found in the twelfth and thirteenth verse.

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.

I am so glad that God does not allow all of His children to suffer at the same time. He blesses some with great joy so that they can be a blessing to the ones who are wearied by affliction. The strong are to strengthen the feeble handed and the lame of walk. It is our responsibility to speak to the faint of soul that they can, with Christ, overcome. Exhort him that is weak not to give up. Tell him or her not to be faint of heart. This is how a church is to minister one to another. It matters not how big your church is, if this type of strengthening is not taking place, you are not a New Testament Church. A big crowd is not a church.

I want to conclude by sharing with you a story. Dennis Miller always required his little boy to phone home when he arrived at his friend's house that was just a few blocks away. Well, the little boy did this the first few times; but as he became more confident in his ability to get there without a disaster happening, he began to forget to call home. So the first time it happened his dad called him and said, "Son, you didn't call home, are you ok?"

"Yea, I am ok, I am sorry, dad. I forgot." The father warned his son and told him the next time he did this he would have to come back home. It wasn't but a few days later and he got permission to go to his friend's house just a few blocks away and sure enough when he got there, he didn't phone home. Dad began to think about this and said, "I am going to have to call him. I told him what would happen." As he began to dial the number he thought to himself, "I really don't want

to punish my son. Lord, what do I do, because I don't want his fun to be interrupted from the lack of contact with his father. What do I do? Give me wisdom." All of the sudden a thought came into his mind. He understood that it was the voice of the Lord speaking to him. He dialed the neighbor's phone and let it ring one and he hung up the phone immediately. It was a few seconds until the phone was ringing. The father picked up the phone and it was his son, and he said,

"Dad, I am here."

The father didn't let on that he had called and said, "What took you so long to call, son?"

He said, "Well, we got to playing and I forgot, but you know the phone rang once and I remembered that I needed to call you. So I called."

How often do we think of God as one who waits to punish us when we step out of line? We must put an end to this view of God, as some angry dad eager to make His children suffer. It is unbiblical and it is an embarrassment and a shame to our holy God. God does not punish His children for Christ has received the "orge" of God. Instead He deals with those whom He loves in discipline, which includes both correction and instruction. The chastisement of God comes in many forms. It can be simple instruction from the Bible or even a blessing. It can also come in the form of pain that is a result of no fault of the believer, as in the case of the Hebrews. They were being persecuted for their faith in Christ, and the writer reminds them this is God's loving discipline. And yes, it can be correction as a result of disobedience. But no matter the form of discipline, it is the evidence of God's love for us and never to be misconstrued as punishment. I am so thankful that when pain is in my life I know it comes from the hand of a loving father rather than from an angry devil. Ah, dear friend, the suffering you are enduring right now is God's loving evidence of your sonship. It is developing you and it is causing you to walk holy before the Lord. Don't despise the chastening of God. Amen.