

THE GREAT DISCIPLINE OF GOD

HEBREWS 12:05–13

Introduction

God disciplines believers. He chastens, corrects and rebukes believers. But we must always remember this: “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone” (James 1:13). God does not cause temptation, sin, devastation, destruction, accident, sickness, death, sufferings, trials, trouble and problems in people’s lives. These things are caused by man’s own sinful and selfish lusts, by the corruptible world in which he lives, and by that arch-enemy of the spiritual world: Satan. God does not cause bad and evil in life. God loves man and loves this world. Therefore, God’s concern is not to cause problems and pain for us; His concern is to deliver us through all the trouble and pain on earth and to save us for heaven and eternity. How does God do this? By chastising us. What does discipline (paideias) mean? When we think of discipline, we usually think of correction and it does mean this. But it also means to train, teach and instruct a person. Both meanings are included in the Biblical word discipline (cp. A.T. Robertson. *Word Pictures In The New Testament*, Vol. 5, p. 435). God does two things with us:

1. First, when we face some trial and sin in life, God stirs us to stand fast and to conquer the trial or to turn away from the sin. He guides, directs, teaches, trains and instructs us all along the way, making us stronger and stronger in life and drawing us closer and closer to Him. God does not want the trials and sins of life to defeat and engulf us; He wants them to strengthen us. He wants to use them to discipline and teach us more and more endurance. He wants to teach us to trust and depend upon Him more and more. But note this: we have to let God work in our hearts and use the trials to strengthen us. We cannot wallow around in self-pity or react against the trials and problems that attack us. We must turn to God — truly turn to God — and ask Him for help and strength and then let Him help us.

An illustration is this. A small innocent baby who is crippled in an automobile accident by a drunkard is not being chastised or corrected by God. The child has done nothing for which to be disciplined. The child is crippled because of a sinful man who followed the path of Satan. He is crippled because he lives in a corruptible world. God loves the child, and God will look after the child as the child grows if the child will look to God for help. God will use the child’s sufferings...

- God will teach and discipline the *growing child* to endure more and more, making him stronger and stronger.
 - God will teach and discipline the growing child to trust and depend upon Christ more and more and to fellowship and commune with Christ more and more.
 - God will use the endurance and faith of the growing child as a testimony to the love and care of God — as a testimony to the living reality and delivering power of God that can conquer all the trials and sorrows of life, even that of death.
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2. Second, when we fail and cave in to the trial and sin, God lets us reap what we have sown. We bear the results of our sin, but even during sin and failure, God loves us. He loves and works with us, convicting us by His Spirit to repent. He then uses the suffering of the sin to stir us to think of Him and our failure. God takes the sufferings that are caused by trials and sins and uses them to correct and discipline us. This is the key statement, and it is what we must always remember when dealing with all the bad and evil things upon earth. God does not cause them; we cause them, and the corruptible world in which we live causes them, and the arch-enemy Satan causes them. God loves us and has nothing in mind for us except love and the very best of everything. Therefore, God takes all the bad and evil — all the suffering of bad and evil — and He uses it all to make us think about Him and our failure. He uses the suffering caused by sin and trials to correct and discipline us, to stir us to draw near Him in trust, dependence and love, and to live like we should.

This is what discipline is and this is why God disciplines us. This is the great subject of this passage: *The great discipline of God*.

- I. The strong exhortation concerning discipline (v. 5-7).
- II. The purposes of discipline (v. 8-11).
- III. The believer's duty (v. 12-13).

I. *Hebrews 12:05–07 The Exhortation Concerning the Discipline of God*

The exhortation concerning discipline is a threefold exhortation (cp. Prov 3:11-12; 13:24).

1. First, do not make light of (*meoligorei*) discipline (v. 5). The word means to scorn; to make little of; to treat lightly. When we are being taught, disciplined or corrected, there is always the danger of...
 - despising it
 - making light of it
 - scorning it
 - treating it too lightly

Too often, we pay little attention to the discipline and correction of God: to the tug and pull of the Spirit of God, to the little consequences and sufferings of our hearts, to the little things that happen to us. As a result we continue right on in our little irresponsible behaviours and sins. The little flaws and sins get bigger and bigger until finally they are too big to handle. The consequences involve so much destruction and suffering that we can no longer ignore them.

Why do we suffer so much in this life? Because of our irresponsibility and sins — because we do not heed the discipline and correction of God when we first begin to act irresponsibly. If we heeded the discipline of God, then we could correct our small misbehaviour and no big sin would happen. This would mean that much of the great sufferings in the world would never happen.

The point is this: we are not to despise the discipline of God — not to scorn it nor take and treat it lightly. We are to heed it. As we do, life will be much easier and stronger and much more triumphant and victorious.

2 Chr 24:19 Although the LORD sent prophets to the people to bring them back to him, and though they testified against them, they would not listen.

Jer 32:33 They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.

Isa 9:13 But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty.

Jer 2:30 In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravenous lion.

Jer 5:3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.

Zep 3:7 Of Jerusalem I thought, ‘Surely you will fear me and accept correction!’ Then her place of refuge would not be destroyed, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did.

Heb 12:5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you.”

Rev 16:11 And cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

Acts 7:51 “You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!”

Zec 7:11 But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears.

2. Second, do not lose heart or give up when disciplined (v. 5). The words “lose heart” (ekluou) mean to give up; to buckle under; to lose courage; to weaken. The trials and sufferings of this world can become extremely heavy and painful — sometimes almost too much to bear.

⇒ The rebuking hand of God that convicts us to repent and to correct our behaviour becomes almost unbearable.

In either case, we are not to lose heart or give up. We are to turn totally to God in trust and dependence, asking for His help and strength. We have the glorious assurance that He will deliver us victoriously through all. He will make us stronger and make us a much greater witness for Him. God will save us and live within our hearts and lives

— save us both now and eternally — save us even through death itself so that we may live with Him forever and ever in the new heavens and earth (1 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 21:1f).

2 Cor 4:1 Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

2 Cor 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Eph 3:13 I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you, which are your glory.

Heb 12:5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you."

Rev 2:3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Isa 43:1-2 But now, this is what the LORD says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

3. Third, endure the discipline of God (v. 6-7). Note these verses closely: when God receives us as children of His, He disciplines and even whips or spans us. Why? Because He loves us. God disciplines us because we are His sons, that is, His children. We have faults and weaknesses, and we go astray, disobeying, rebelling and acting selfishly. We often hurt and cause pain both for ourselves and for others. But God loves us and wants to stop us from hurting ourselves and from hurting others. He wants us to grow and move through life with as little pain and hurt as possible. He wants us to become stronger and stronger within our inner person. Therefore, every time we go astray or begin to faint under trials, God corrects us.

The point is this: we are to endure the discipline of God. We are to stand fast against all trials and sufferings. We are to become soft to the guidance and urgings of the Spirit of God. We are to follow the Word of God and His Spirit, the urgings and convictions within our hearts when they are of God. God is disciplining us, teaching and correcting us because He loves us as our Father. He is disciplining us just as a loving father upon earth disciplines his child.

Mat 10:22 "All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

Heb 12:7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

James 1:12 *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.*

James 5:11 *As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

1 Pet 2:19 *For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.*

II. **Hebrews 12:08–11** *The Purpose for the Discipline of God*

The purposes for discipline are fourfold.

1. God disciplines us to assure us that we are His children (v. 8). If a person is not disciplined by God, then he knows something: he is not a son of God. He is an illegitimate child; he is only a person who professes to be God's but who is not.

⇒ Unless a person is taught, instructed, disciplined and corrected by the Spirit of God, he is not a son of God.

2 Cor 6:17-18 *"Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty.*

Ga1 4:4-6 *But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

As this verse says (note it carefully), God takes all who are *participants in His nature* — who are children of His — and teaches, instructs, disciplines and corrects them. God disciplines His children, and the fact that we are disciplined by Him shows and assures us that we are not illegitimate children, but true children of God.

John 1:12 *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*

Rom 8:14 *Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

Ga1 4:7 *So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.*

Phil 2:15 *so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.*

1 John 3:1 *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.*

Rom 8:14-16 *Because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit, that we are God's children.*

2. God disciplines us to save us and to stir us to truly live (v. 9). Imagine a world without any discipline, training, instruction and correction. It would be a world of lawlessness, corruption, evil, devastation, destruction, ruin and death. Life within such a world would not be life; in fact, life could not even survive upon earth. It is discipline, training, instruction and correction that gives order and protection to life upon earth. This is the reason earthly fathers who love their children discipline them. The point is this: God's discipline brings more life to man, an abundance of life in this world and an eternal life in the next world. A person who will heed the discipline of God...
- will escape much of the suffering and pain of this life and become a much stronger person as he walks *through the trials* and temptations of life.
 - will be delivered from death the moment he leaves this world and enters the next world.

Prov 11:19 *The truly righteous man attains life, but he who pursues evil goes to his death.*

Prov 12:28 *In the way of righteousness there is life; along that path is immortality.*

Ezek 20:11 *I gave them my decrees and made known to them my laws, by which the person who obeys them will live.*

Ezek 33:19 *And if a wicked person turns away from their wickedness and does what is just and right, they will live by doing so.*

Luke 10:27-28 *He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

3. God disciplines us for our good, to make us partakers of His holiness (v. 10). Remember: holiness means to be different; to be completely and wholly set apart and separated from imperfection and impurity. God is holy, righteous, and pure — perfectly so. Note this:

⇒ The more sin and evil we do, the less like God we become.

⇒ The less sin and evil we do, the more like God we become.

Therefore, God is bound to discipline us when we begin to faint under trials and sufferings and when we begin to move toward sin. God wants us to become more and more like Him. When we first believed and became children of God, God put His divine nature — His Spirit — within us. His Holy Spirit indwells us to make us more

like God. As long as we are on this earth, we shall never become perfectly holy, never be perfectly set apart unto God. But we are to grow more and more like Him. Day by day we are to let His holiness and purity shine through us. The more His holiness shines in our lives, the stronger His witness is and the easier it is for people to believe and surrender themselves to God.

Lev 11:45 *I am the LORD, who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.*

Luke 1:74-75 *“To rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”*

2 Cor 7:1 *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

Heb 12:14 *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

1 Pet 1:16 *For it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

2 Pet 3:11 *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.*

Rom 12:1-2 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

4. God disciplines us so that we can bear the fruit of righteousness and peace (v. 11). This is clearly seen. The less sin and evil there is, the more righteousness and peace there is. If the sin and evil of anger and division do not exist, then peace and righteousness prevail. Therefore, when sin and evil stick their ugly heads up in our lives, God disciplines us. Why? So that we will correct ourselves and do all we can for the sake of righteousness and peace.

The discipline and correction may be unpleasant and painful to bear at first, but it will bring peace and righteousness if we will only bear it.

Mat 13:23 *“But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”*

Eph 2:14 *For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.*

Col 1:20 *And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Col 3:15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Ps.34:14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

Job 22:21 "Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you."

III. Hebrews 12:12–13 The Believer's Duty

The believer's duty is threefold.

1. The believer is to lift up his hands and strengthen his buckling knees. This is the picture of a man discouraged and defeated because of the sufferings of trial or sin. Instead of listening to the voice of God's discipline, he has let his shoulders and hands hang low and his knees buckle. This is not to be so with the Christian believer. The believer is to listen to God and His discipline: strengthen his feeble hands and weak knees.

1 Cor 16:13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong.

Eph 6:10-12 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

2 Tim 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 Chr 15:7 But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded.

Isa 35:3-4 Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you."

2. The believer is to make straight or level paths for his feet. He is to follow the straight course of God's discipline. He is to do exactly what God's Spirit is saying to do, and do nothing that the Spirit is not instructing him to do.

Luke 9:62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

Phil 3:13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead.

Deut 5:32 So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left.

Josh 1:7 Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go.

Prov 4:27 Do not turn to the right or to the left; keep your foot from evil.

Ezek 1:12 Each one went straight ahead. Wherever the spirit would go, they would go, without turning as they went.

3. The believer must heal whatever is lame. This charge can be saying one of two things: that the believer is to heal any lame part of his own behaviour, or that the behaviour is to strengthen his weak grip, his buckling knees, and make straight paths so that he can heal and help other believers who are lame. What a descriptive way to express the duty and witness of the believer!

=> The believer is to receive the discipline of God so that he can be a dynamic witness for God.

Psa 41:4 I said, "O LORD, have mercy on me; heal me, for I have sinned against you."

Prov 4:20-22 My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.

Isa 1:5 Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, your whole heart afflicted.

Isa 53:5 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

Jer 3:22 "Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." "Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God."

Jer 8:22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?

Hosea 6:1 "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds." ■