

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

A Corrected View of Discipline Hebrews 12:4-11

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; 6 FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. 11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Lord, give us the meaning and spirit of Your Word while it lies open before us;
Apply Your Word with power to our souls, threatening or promise
Doctrine or precept, whatever it may be;
Lead us into the soul and marrow of Your Word.
(adapted from C.H. Spurgeon)

What comes to your mind when you hear the word discipline? Perhaps you think of unruly children running wild; or of a new puppy and a rolled-up newspaper; or even a severe regimen of self-denial. Discipline – we often associate it as a response to some kind of misbehavior – something implemented when a person does something that is outside the bounds of acceptable behavior. Such behavior is corrected through the application of discipline. In this sense, discipline is nothing more than plain ol' punishment. I found it interesting that even Webster's first definition of discipline is "punishment." But is this all that discipline is?

As we come to Hebrews 12:4-11, I would have you note that the word discipline; disciplines; or disciplined was used 9 times. And if, as we read this, we only carry the idea of punishment in our minds, this passage becomes burdensome and one that we might truly desire to avoid rather than to embrace. But I submit to you that the idea of discipline in our text is much fuller and far more encouraging than how we might initially regard it.

So this morning, if you would allow me this opportunity, I would like to begin our examination of this text by first quickly defining this word "discipline," placing this passage along with our definition of "discipline" in its broader context, and then, with these things in mind, look at each verse.

Discipline

Please note again that this word discipline, in its varying forms, is used nine times in our passage (12:5, 6, 7[2x], 8, 9, 10[2x],11). If there is a point the author is seeking to make, it is

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

most assuredly about “discipline.” In our passage, there are three distinct words used for discipline, two nouns, and a verb. Each of these words come from the same root, the Greek word, *pais*, a noun which essential speaks of *any and all members of a household subject to the master’s rule and authority*. A child is a *pais*, along with any other workers or servants under the master’s rule. In Act 3:13 and 26, Jesus, the Son of God, is referred to God’s *pais*, as God’s servant – one who was under God’s authority. In our text, the most prevalent form of discipline is the noun *paideias* – a word that refers to specific training, instruction, guidance or even nurture. This word is used in two familiar passages:

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline [training/nurturing] and instruction of the Lord.

2 Timothy 3:16

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction [training/nurturing] in righteousness:

What I would like you to notice is that while the word “discipline” can and does include the idea of correction, even correction by punishment, the greater emphasis upon the word is loving, nurturing, active training. Now, with this in mind, let me give you the verb form of “discipline” – *paideuei* (12:6,7,10) – always an active verb meaning “*to train; to instruct, to educate*.” It has the idea of being under the authority and direction of someone. Positively then it means to guide or direct. Negatively it means to apply corrective means. Let me give you a couple of other examples of how the verb is used. In Acts 7:22, as Stephen is recounting Israel’s history, he states that “**Moses was educated [not punished] in all the learning of the Egyptians...**” Additionally, we read in Titus 2:11-12 these words:

11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing [not punishing - training, educating] us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age...

So then, if I might give you a very simple, working definition of what discipline is according to the New Testament and specifically our Hebrews 12:4-11 text, it is this – “*active, loving training*.” Sometimes such training may include punitive correction, but more often than not it is the active leading and guidance of one who loves through a particular area or field of life.

Now with this definition of discipline, let us quickly put our passage into its context. Remember that in Hebrews 12:2-3 we have been focusing on Jesus, considering Him who endured great hostility from people and hardship of circumstance. In other words, His circumstances were difficult and trying, but He endured such things even with joy as He knew they were accomplishing God’s greater purpose, the salvation of men. Now, beginning in verse 4, the author, who is very much aware that many to whom he was writing were enduring hard times because of their profession of Christ, is going to answer a seemingly age old question – why is it that God allows suffering and difficulties in the lives of His children? Have

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

you ever been there? Have you ever questioned the goodness of God because of your circumstances? Have you ever thought, particularly with Hebrews 12:4-11 in mind, that perhaps God was punishing you for some sin? To be sure, we ought to continually examine our lives and confess sin, but I submit to you that *the primary focus of our text this morning is not to teach us that God punishes sin in the lives of His children, but rather that God lovingly and actively brings things into the lives of His children to the benefit of their souls and to greater manifestation of His glory.* So, if we view discipline only as punishment, we miss out on the great blessing of growing faith. What the author is reminding his first readers of is this – that while opposition, trials and difficulties often come to the believer by means of sinful men, such things are ultimately from the hand of a gracious loving Father who is actively using such means to bring you into a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. So then, rather than buckling under the hard times, or in the words of Hebrews 12:3, growing weary and losing heart, we are to see the hard times as God’s means of maturing our faith.

Now then, to accomplish this corrected vision of discipline in the lives of the readers, the author takes them through a series of considerations or arguments. I have consolidated these arguments under four headings that will serve as our outline.

I. Two Reproofs (12:4-5a)

To begin with, we see in verses 4 and 5 two reproofs; two calls to correct their faulty way of thinking about their difficulties and hardships.

1. They were reproofed for a **skewed** view of their circumstances (12:4)

You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

[Read Text] Sometimes some of us have a flare for the melodramatic, do we not? How many of us have at least had the attitude of “No body loves me, everybody hates me”? We look at our circumstances and nothing seems to be going right, so we begin to complain and speak against those who are antagonizing us. How quickly we can forget that God loves us and that in the midst of all those things that seem so wrong, God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28). The author reminds his readers that even though things may be bad, even though they are “**striving against sin**” – which is a boxing term that speaks of being hit by the opponent, who, in this case is not just an opponent, but the attitudes and actions of sinful men, they have not lost their lives, they are yet alive and able to see the gracious hand of God behind the actions of sinful men, to be able to say with Joseph when he spoke to his brothers concerning their sinful actions against him –

Genesis 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

The point is, we must remember that in the midst of difficulties, the hand of God is there to guide, instruct and educate us. In fact, all difficulties are to be seen as discipline, as the Father’s loving active nurturing. Why, because “without adversity grace withers.”¹ In other

¹ Mason

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

words, we must see trials and difficulties as God-given means whereby He is accomplishing His good in our lives. For when we see otherwise intolerable trials in this light, they become light, easy and endurable for the joy set before us in Christ. Let us not have a **skewed** view of our trials but know they are from the gracious hand of God.

2. They were reprov'd for **slighted** view of God's Word (12:5a)
and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons

The second reproof was that they had slighted or marginalized the "exhortation" of God. We read at the first of verse five, "**and you have forgotten the exhortation [the word] which is addressed to you as sons...**" For whatever the reasons, several of these first readers were looking upon their difficulties and perceiving them as nothing more than some kind of punishment, forgetting the promises of God's Word, of which a very specific promise is quoted from Proverbs 3:11-12.

Beloved, it is a sin to forget the promises of God. Sadly the modern church is plagued with Biblically illiteracy, where many professing believers slight the Word of God, unable to name the books of the Bible, locate the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes. Is it any wonder that if we don't know the promises of God that in difficulty we would buckle under them? It has been said that "many today do not know enough of God's Word to survive a skinned knee!" Let us know the Word of God and never marginalize or slight it's promises, one of which we are about to look at.

II. Two Reminders (12:5b-6)

Having reprov'd his readers, the author now reminds them of a specific promise of God, a promise that has two parts and of which I have called two reminders.

1. A reminder not to **disdain** discipline (12:5b)
MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD

[Read Text] The first reminder is a call not to "**disdain**" discipline. Here now we have our first use of the word discipline. It is the noun and we might safely translate this, "*do not regard lightly [count as nothing or insignificant] the "active training" of the LORD.*" To be sure, any kind of discipline – that is training can be difficult, can it not? I know that over the past couple of years I have been trying to get into a regular routine, that is a discipline of running in the mornings in order to keep my body physically fit. There is just one problem, my body reacts violently against such discipline, particularly in the morning as my muscles resist waking up, my lungs and heart labor to bring in enough air and pump enough blood. But, if I want to be healthy, if I want to lower my blood pressure and minimize the effects of stress, then I need to exercise, I need to experience the discipline, the training. I must not disdain and disregard it. If I regard it lightly, count it as nothing, and pay no attention to my diet and health, then I am headed for trouble. Often, even as Hebrews 12:11 will remind us, discipline is not easy, but the benefits for enduring through are wonderful.

Spiritually speaking, it is easy for us to blow off the hardships and struggles of life, to not consider them in their proper light as coming from the hand of a gracious God for our good – only making light of the things God brings into our lives for our good at our own detriment. If we disdain and refuse the deep waters of life's experiences, we condemn ourselves only to

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

remain perpetually shallow. So then, when hard times come, do not look upon them with disdain, but with hopeful expectation that the Lord is training you for your good.

2. A reminder not to be **dismayed** by discipline (12:5c)

NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM

[Read Text] The second reminder given is that believers are not to be **dismayed** by discipline. While some on one hand may regard the discipline of the LORD lightly, others are completely overwhelmed by it. They are paralyzed and therefore faint, just like that runner from verse 3 who grows weary and loses heart. Rather than seeing the discipline of the LORD as helpful corrective instruction, some see it as though the fullness of the wrath of God were being poured out on them. We must not forget that our sin has already been paid for by Jesus on the cross – there is no condemnation, rather there is only loving correction. Trials and difficulties are used by God to draw us closer to Him in trust and dependence.

So then beloved, trials are not given to make us sad and despondent, but rather strong and dependent - strong in the strength of the Lord and dependent upon His grace. In fact, in verse 6 we are given what I see as reminders to these reminders. Why is it that we should not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord? Look at the first part of verse 6 – because, **“those whom the Lord loves, he disciplines [actively trains]...”** Thus, the discipline of the Lord reveals to us the affection of God. He loves us – those whom have trusted in His Son. Additionally, why is it that we should not faint when the Lord reproves or corrects us? Looking at the end of verse 6 – because – **“He scourges [brings correction to] every son He receives.”** Thus, the discipline of the Lord reveals to us the acceptance of God.

Let me point out to you that every verb in verses 5-6 is what we call a present active verb except one – we must not presently and continually disregard the Lord’s discipline; nor are we to presently and continually faint when He actively corrects us. The Lord presently and continually loves those He disciplines and presently scourges everyone son He – and here is the one that is different – receives. The verb “receives” is what we call a present middle verb. A present active verb is something done by one thing to another – “I hit the ball.” A present middle verb speaks of something done by one’s self to or for one’s self – i.e. – “I hit myself.” Now, why is this important, because here we see why the LORD discipline His children – He not only does the discipline Himself, but He does for Himself, for His own glory – He is glorified in disciplining, that is training His children. How do we need to be reminded of this! God is glorified when we see our trials and hardships not as simply a means of punishment, but as means to proclaim the glory of God – the working of God – the presence of God in our lives. So then, let us not forget the goodness of the Lord and either **disdain** or be **dismayed** by His discipline, for such is evidence of the Lord’s affection and acceptance of us.

III. Three Revelations (12:7-10)

Beginning in verse 7 now, we come to the first of three significant revelations that we must glean from the discipline of the Lord – revelations of great joy and hope.

1. Discipline reveals our **sonship** (7-8)

First, something that has clearly been suggested already but is now firmly stated, discipline reveals our sonship. Let us read these verses 7-8 again:

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

First, we are reminded that God brings active training and instruction into our lives for the purpose of enduring, of becoming more and more like Jesus Christ, who endured the cross for us. And now, here's the thought, *if God had His only begotten Son endure such hostility and trials, using such things to prove His character, why should we expect anything different?* Remember what was already taught us in Hebrews 2:9-10

9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

If Jesus was perfected through the discipline, the active training of sufferings, should we not in fact expect and welcome the same? And it is interesting to note that Jesus did not suffer because He had sinned, He did not endure hostility and affliction because He had done something wrong. St. Augustine once said, *“God had one Son on the earth without sin – but never one without affliction.* Because God proved and perfected His Son Jesus through difficulties this ought to have us cry out all the more, prove me to be Your son, O God through trials.

Note that the author affirms that all good fathers discipline their sons. In fact, if a “father” or master in the ancient world wanted to slight a son or servant, he would not show him the family ways or business and would treat rather as a stranger, as one who does not belong to him – hence, like an illegitimate child rather than a son. It was inconceivable in the ancient world that a father truly loved a son if he did not discipline him, both punitively as well as educationally. So then, when God allows trials and hardships in our lives, we must see that these prove our sonship as He reveals to us His purposes and plans as His children and as He uses such to reveal our own sins and shortcomings.

2. Discipline reveals our submission (9)

Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

Not only does discipline reveal our sonship, but it also reveals our submission – our trust and willingness to be subjected to whatever our heavenly Father deems best for our souls and for His own glory. [Read Text]. At the time of this letter it was generally understood that respectful submission to a father's attentive and active training would have positive results in the child's life. The point of verse 9 then is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If it can be seen that an earthly father's [that is a father according to the flesh] – if his active training

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

produced positive results, how much more ought our submission to our heavenly and perfect Father's [that is the Father of our spirits] discipline result in something positive for us?

May I suggest to you that when things get hard, when your faith is tried for whatever reason, rather than bucking such things as unfair, too hard and frustrating, to pray that you might be subject to your heavenly Father's instruction through the trial. May we have the mind of the one who said, *"I have never met with a single instance of adversity which I have not afterwards seen to be for my good."*

3. Discipline reveals our **sanctification** (10)

For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.

The final of the three revelations we are to glean from the Lord's discipline in our lives is that it reveals our **sanctification** – that is to say, the active training of the Lord is given so that we might become more and more holy – more and more like Him. [Read Text].

The author is assuming that generally speaking, an earthly father is engaged in the process of discipline for the right reasons – to train his son. Being a fallen earthly man however, the best any father of the flesh could do was, for a period of a few years, actively train **"as seemed best"** to him. Any son, as he matures, comes to know that even the best father was not always right or good in his training of the son, but, as verse 9 reminded us, we respect such fathers anyway, even being able to learn from their mistakes.

But our heavenly Father does not make mistakes – He does not inadvertently allow something that is not meant for our best interest to slip past Him. Rather, we are to see that everything God brings or allows into our lives, be it corrective or instructional discipline, is – literally **"for good"** – God is good and everything He does is good. Therefore every trial, every correction, every allowed antagonism in our lives is ultimately for our good. What makes such times bad is not God, but rather when we fail to properly respond to the discipline. May we never forget God's stated purpose for us – yes to be like Christ, which is another way of saying, **"You shall be holy sanctified] for I am holy"** (1 Peter 1:16 [Leviticus 11:44]). If we do not experience trials, tribulations and adversity, we have no right to say we are being made God's holy children. Remember what Jesus said in John 16:33, **"in this world you will have tribulation..."** And in 1 Peter 4:12 we read that we are not to be surprised by the fiery ordeal among us as though something strange were happening to us. What should surprise us and concern us is if we are not experiencing the hostility of sinners and the adverse effects of sin as we seek to live holy lives.

IV. One Result (12:11)

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Well, we have flown through some very ripe fields of harvest picking only the most surface of fruit available. But we come now to our last point, namely the one result of discipline. [Read Text]. Perhaps it would be better said, the one expectation, but as God allows difficulties in our lives, what is the Lord's expectation as well as what should be our expectation?

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

First, please note that hardships are not to be pursued as if they are fun and games; for all true discipline as you are laboring through it, is not the most joyful experience. The other day Luke was driving the car as I was patiently training [i.e. disciplining] him. Well, my patience wore thin as my technique of training went from lovingly attentive to frantically aversive. It got to a point where Luke stopped the car, frustrated and I frustratingly said to him that he cannot stop being the driver – that circumstances and emotions cannot result in giving up (particularly on a busy street). Well, that discipline was not joyful, it was sorrowful – and while we both handled ourselves incorrectly, it was a great training experience that we later could laugh on.

To be sure, the Lord does not discipline His children out of frustration, but always out of love and purpose. And while it may not be easy at the time, we have a promise here that if we will endure, if we will be **“trained by it”** (trained, that is gymnazo – we get our word “gym” – a place of exercise from it) – if we will exercise ourselves in the discipline, the active training of the Lord – we can know the promised result – **“it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”**

What is the peaceful fruit of righteousness? I would like to call this discernable, experiential righteousness. This is not “justification” which is the pronouncement of God that all who are in Christ are righteous – that is positionally righteous because they have Christ’s righteousness. The **peaceful fruit of righteousness** here is not positional, but experiential and visible. In a world of hostility, hatred and hardship, the believer who endures experiences peace, contentment and joy, knowing that nothing is happening to him that has not first be sifted through the loving hand of his heavenly Father.

Is this your response to hostility and hatred? Do difficulties easily get your proverbial “nose out of whack” or do you thank the Lord for loving and guiding you through such times. Do you think that you are being treated like God’s enemy in such times or do you see that in Christ you are regard as a son? John Bunyan noted, *“In times of affliction we commonly meet with the sweetest experiences of God’s love.”* Is that how you see it? Is this your view of the discipline of the Lord? For those in Christ, for those who have received Him as Lord and Savior, for those who actively seek to live under His guidance and according to His rule, this is how we are to see discipline. Do unbeliever experience hostility and hardships? Most definitely, and if you have not truly come to Jesus as Lord and Savior, it may well be that you are experiencing a small part of the wrath of God that you might turn to Jesus, that you might call upon His name, confessing Him as Lord, asking Him to save you from the wrath to come, to change you from being an enemy of God to a child of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2007 Edward K. Godfrey. This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, 2300 South 13th Street Rogers, AR 72758.

*The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ
Hebrews 12:4-11 – A Corrected View of Discipline
October 28, 2007*