

Hebrews 12:4-13

God chastises and trains his children by means of the difficulties and hardships of life. When the Lord's hand of chastisement is upon us, Christians greatly need the encouragement and instruction found in this passage.

Summary

In Hebrews 12:4-13, the author addresses his pastoral concern that his readers would fail to think rightly about the troubles they were experiencing.

1. Pastoral Concern vv. 4-6

The author's chief purpose in this letter is to exhort Christians to be steadfast under trial; to hold fast to the faith. **Vv. 1-3** portray the Christian life as a race to be run with perseverance, and now **vs. 4** conceives of it as a boxing contest, in which believers contend through trials against our opponent, sin.

The author moves quickly to his main concern.

Given that his readers were enduring hardship, his principal concern was that they not draw the wrong conclusion from their trials.

How easy it is for us to think we are out of God's favor when circumstances turn against us. There is nothing more perilous in trials than to conclude that God has forgotten or betrayed us.

Believers should not lose heart when God rebukes them through affliction (**12:5-6**).

2. Fatherly Discipline and Correction vv. 6-8

Divine chastisement is a sign of sonship, a term that applies to both male and female Christians and speaks of our adoption into the family of God (**Heb. 12:6-8**).

In the ancient world, discipline was the unquestioned prerogative and duty of a father. It was not a sign of favor when a child was not disciplined by his father, but of neglect or rejection. Fatherly love and discipline go together, and this awareness ought to transform the way Christians think about our trials.

The author tells us two things God does to raise us properly.

He begins with fatherly discipline. Just as a parent trains up a child, subjecting him or her to a process of education and arranging demanding experiences designed to spur development, so God also leads us through this life in preparation for the age of maturity that waits for us in the life to come.

Along with discipline, God employs fatherly correction.

Sometimes, God employs chastising hardships to punish sin in the lives of believers. This is not to be thought of as the damning wrath of God, but rather as the corrective punishment of a parent (**Heb 12:6**).

Many Christians have gratefully testified that the only way God got through to them in their sin and stubbornness was to allow a painful ordeal.

Calvin: “the scourges of God bear witness of His love towards us.”

In the terms of the ancient world, God relates to us specifically the way a father did to his sons—those who would inherit from him, represent him in life, and bear his name in the world. This ought to be the most welcome news, even if coupled with the hardships by which God is raising us as his own.

3. Patient Endurance vv. 5; 7

There are a number of ways Christians can and do respond to God’s discipline when it takes shape in difficult circumstances.

First, there is the response of the stoic, who grimly seeks to accept what he cannot avoid. Such a person responds with defiant resignation, certainly without gratitude, seeking simply to get the struggle over with.

Hence, **Heb 12:5** “Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord”.

Secondly, there is the response of self-pity and anger.

Hence, **Heb 12:5** “Nor be weary when reproved by him”.

Thirdly, there is the response of patient endurance.

Hence, **Heb 12:7** “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons”.

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Similarly, **James 1:2–3, 12** “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness . . . Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

Are you in hardship and toil, difficulty and sorrow?

If you are not now, Christian, you will be in due time.

What a difference it makes to know that God loves believers in Christ!

What a joy it is to learn that in our sorrows God is training believers by His love; that His loving hand is preparing us for an eternity of glory in heaven.

It makes all the difference between wandering aimlessly and resentfully and running a race with conviction.