

Hebrews 12:4-13

God chastises and trains his children by means of the difficulties and hardships of life. This is what we call divine discipline.

When the Lord's hand of chastisement is upon us, Christians greatly need the encouragement and instruction found in this text.

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 & Endured Discipline Revisited vv. 4-8

The author's chief purpose in this letter is to exhort Christians to be steadfast under trial; to hold fast to the faith (**Heb 12:4**). He then 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. There is nothing more perilous in trials than to conclude that God has forgotten or betrayed us.

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. 12:5-8**).

Fatherly love and discipline go together, and this awareness ought to transform the way Christians think about our trials so that they respond with patient endurance.

2. Compared Fathers vv. 9-11

The author next moves to a comparison of the discipline of our earthly fathers to the discipline of our Father in heaven.

First, he makes an argument from the lesser to the greater. If discipline causes us to respect our earthly fathers, then the same should be true with regard to our heavenly Father (**Heb. 12:9**). God trains his children for the enjoyment of life in its fullest sense and Christians ought therefore to respond eagerly, perceiving the dangers of disobedience and the benefits of God's disciplining care (**Deut. 30:15-20**). Even more than our earthly fathers, God in heaven is worthy of our worship and reverence because of his governing influence over our lives.

Secondly, the author compares our earthly discipline which has value for this world, for a short life, with God's discipline which is of eternal value for a life that never ends (**Heb 12:10**).

Thirdly, the author says that our fathers "disciplined us . . . as it seemed best to them." Even an otherwise bad father may have some positive influence on his children by means of the discipline he gives. When it comes to God, we have no such problem to overcome: "[God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness" (**12:10**). What a difference it makes to realize that God, who is good, has only good for us in his manner of discipline (**Rom. 8:28**).

God's love also means that he enters into our afflictions with us (**Isa. 43:2–3**). God disciplines us for our good, and that good is our growth in holiness (**Heb 12:10**). Discipline is painful at the time but the Christian, whose eye is on the horizon of a life to come, perceives a reward at the end of the trial, a great gain from the present pain (**Heb 12:11**).

3. Fervent Exhortation vv. 12-13

Christians should show determination in their struggle and fatigue, understanding the purpose of their trials and God's fatherly care (**Heb 12:12-13**).

Like runners who see the finish line ahead, the readers of Hebrews are to take heart, lifting up their arms and legs to run the race to the end (**Heb 12:12; cf Isa 35:3**).

Christians are to make level paths, not swerving to the right or left and are reminded that our example has an influence on others, especially helping or hindering those who are lame or weak in the faith (**Heb 12:13; cf Prov 4:26-27**).

With these challenges set before them, believers are not to resent the reproofs God gives through Scripture or through other Christians, or his chastisement in circumstances that are hard. Instead, we should receive them with thanksgiving, eagerly repenting and seeking God's grace for power to change.

He is working "for our good, that we may share his holiness" (**Heb 12:10**).

Christians are sons, God's beloved children, through faith in Jesus Christ (**John 1:12**)."

If you have not yet turned to God through faith in Christ, you are not his child.

You do not have the comfort of knowing that your trials are governed by God's loving care. Unless you turn to God through faith in Christ, the wrath of God abides upon you still, and you are alienated from this love.

Your trials are merely the bitter fruit of sins; yours and others, without any saving purpose, until you repent, believe, and come to God as a child through faith in Christ.

If you are a Christian, however, you can fix your eyes on Jesus, glorified now in heaven, and see that God in his love sent a Savior to die for your sins.

For Jesus, there was a cross before the crown. Though his cross took away your sins once for all, his pattern of trial before glory will be your pattern as well.

Are you, Christian, in hardship and toil, difficulty and sorrow?

If not, you may well be in due time.

What a difference it makes to know that God loves us through faith in Christ!

What a joy it is to learn that in our sorrows God is training us 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 running a race with conviction, between darkness of soul and the light of the gospel.