

Lesson 49
God's Loving Discipline
Hebrews 12:5-11

Why is it that a Christian, one who is a true son or daughter of God, must experience what seems to be underserved hardships? Why does a loving God permit His children to undergo pressures, problems, and persecutions? Why is it that the ungodly often prosper and the godly suffer? Every Christian has asked himself these questions from time to time, and Hebrews 12:5-11 gives an answer to these questions.

We are going to find out that one of the main reasons for suffering is God's divine discipline on His people for unbelief, and how this discipline is designed by God to drive us to Christ that we might mature in our Christian lives.

It is important that we understand the background for Hebrews 12:5-11. These Hebrew-Christians to whom the author was writing were being harassed and persecuted by the unsaved Jewish world. Many of them had been Christians for years but had not matured spiritually so as to be adults in Christ; they were still baby Christians. The social persecutions were so severe that some of these Hebrew-Christians were thinking seriously about leaving Christianity and going back into the Jewish religion from which they had originally come. They were not willing to pay the price to follow Christ, and furthermore, they did not have a good understanding of God's sovereign control over persecutions, or why God allows sufferings to come to a Christian. These Hebrew-Christians were guilty of unbelief, and God permitted these persecutions to discipline them and drive them to Christ that they might grow up unto Christ.

THE REASON FOR DISCIPLINE: A Proof of Sonship - Hebrews 12:5-8

“... and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons ...” -- These Hebrew-Christians had forgotten the clear teaching of the Old Testament that testings and sufferings are designed by God to do them good and not evil.

When persecutions come, we are so quick to forget that God is sovereign and in control of all circumstances. We tend to get discouraged and yield before the pressures of the world, even when the Bible is so clear on the subject.

“MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY (DESPISE) THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD ...” -- This is a direct quote from Proverbs 3:11, 12 to show that divine discipline is taught in the Old Testament. God's discipline is given to His sons because He maintains a father-son relationship with all His children. God does not discipline the unsaved, but He does discipline His own because He loves them. The word “son” means a grown adult son, and this indicates that even the mature, as well as the immature, Christian is disciplined by God. With the privilege of being a son comes the responsibility of acting like a son. God uses discipline to help the Christian act like a son. The believer is not to take the discipline of God lightly or despise it. He is to think seriously about God's discipline and not to reject it. A Christian despises God's

discipline when he says, “I resent the fact that God sent this suffering into my life; I think it is unfair for God to make me suffer!” The word “discipline” actually means a son-training. God, through the sufferings of discipline, is son-training the Christian that he may have moral and spiritual development in Christian living. When the Christian is disciplined, he should realize that God is doing it for his own good.

“... NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM ...” -- The Christian is not to lose heart when he is disciplined. He is not only not to despise discipline, but he is not to despair under it. Even when the Christian knows he is wrong and deserves all God gives him, he sometimes despairs under the discipline. We despair when we say, “I just can’t endure any more suffering. I give up!” The cure for a faint heart is faithful prayer. **“Now He was telling them a parable to show that at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart”** (Luke 18:1). The believer is to endure with a trusting heart this discipline, remembering that God has brought it for his own good.

If you are undergoing discipline, if you are going through trials, struggles and problems, then pray and thank God for the situation.

“... FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES.” -- The Christian is to recall that the Lord disciplines because He loves His children. Sometimes the Lord has “to scourge” His own. “To scourge” means to skin alive, indicating that God’s discipline can at times be very severe.

God disciplines us because of His interest in us, for we are more to Him than all the universe besides, and He wants us to grow up and become spiritual adults.

Discipline is not abnormal, but normal Christian experience, and God brings it because He loves the Christian and wants him to walk a life of faith. God is far more concerned about our Christian walk than we are!

“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?” -- The Christian is to endure hardship and suffering, for these things are the mark or the proof of real son-ship. The believer is to endure patiently when the discipline comes, knowing that this is an indication that he is a true believer in Christ.

For a person to say he is a Christian and yet say he has never known the disciplinary hand of God is tantamount to stating that he is really not a child of God. Divine discipline, in one sense, should comfort a Christian, because it is evidence of his true son-ship.

“But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” -- A person who professes Christ, and knows nothing of God’s disciplinary hand, is merely a hypocritical professor who does not belong to God’s household at all. All Christians are partakers of God’s discipline. If they are not, it is a definite proof that they are illegitimate children and not sons at all.

No Christian can sin and operate in unbelief and not be disciplined for it. If this were possible,

then we would have a Heavenly Father who is not concerned about our spiritual welfare, but God is far more concerned about our spiritual growth than we are!

THE END OF DISCIPLINE: Practical Maturity - Hebrews 12:9-11

“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?” -- The Christian should be in subjection to God when being disciplined, because God is his Father. A contrast is drawn between the actions of our Heavenly Father (Father of spirits) and our earthly fathers (fathers of the flesh) in the areas of discipline. When our earthly fathers corrected us, we respected them for it, and subjected our rebellious wills to them. This attitude and more should be the Christian's when his Heavenly Father disciplines him. God desires the Christian to put his will in subjection to God. Through discipline, God wants to break the Christian's will, not his spirit. The opposite of submission is griping, complaining, and carping about God's unfair dealings with us as His children.

Submission to God in discipline is the evidence that we really have the life of God dwelling in us as Christians. Real living is submission to the Divine will for us.

“For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good ...” -- The Christian is disciplined for his own good. Our earthly fathers disciplined us as it seemed best to them. Sometimes this discipline was administered wisely and well, and sometimes it was administered out of anger, because they were still sinful men. But God's discipline is unchanging and always for the believer's profit. God is never wrong. He is always right. God loves us, and He sends exactly what we need. The rod of God is wielded by infinite goodness and wisdom, and has in view the Christian's well-being. Earthly fathers disciplined “for a short time,” and this brought profit, but God disciplines all the days of our Christian life to bring us real spiritual profit and growth in the Christian life.

“... that we may share His holiness.” -- Holiness is the ultimate end of all discipline. This is God's holiness in the Christian through Jesus Christ. Christians are to be holy, for God is holy. ***“... YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY”*** (1 Peter 1:16). The end of the Christian life is likeness to the person of Jesus Christ. Discipline is God's tool to bring the Christian into a life of progressive holiness and maturity.

When God's rod strikes our life, we must submit to it and remember that this is God's way of making us like Christ in our Christian experience.

“All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful ...” -- It is never a pleasant experience to be under God's discipline, but it is a necessity if fruit in the life is to be manifested. Someone has wisely said that a Christian is “one who is completely fearless, continually cheerful, and constantly in trouble.” Trouble, suffering, and pressures are all part of God's education process for the Christian. God does not ask us to rejoice in the trouble, but in what the trouble does for us. He is not expecting us to screw a smile on our face and go around saying, “Hallelujah, it hurts!” No, for discipline for the moment seems painful rather than pleasant. But God is asking us to rejoice, nevertheless, not saying, “Hallelujah, it hurts,” but, “Hallelujah, it

helps!"

"... yet to those who have been trained by it ..." -- The Christian benefits from discipline only when his attitude is right in the discipline. The word "trained" is the word gymnasmos from which we get the word gymnasium. Divine discipline of sufferings and hardships are to exercise and train Christians in holiness and maturity. Discipline is only beneficial to those who learn from it and are trained by it. Unless the Christian yields to God, the discipline will have no positive effect in his life, and he will stand in line for more discipline.

The same sun melts butter and hardens clay. So the discipline of God melts the heart and the will of those who joyfully yield to it, and it hardens and embitters those who stubbornly resist it.

"... afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." -- The final end of all God's loving discipline is to educate and son-train His children in practical righteousness and bring them to Christian maturity. Let's face it honestly; we would not grow at all in our Christian lives if God did not send trials, testings, problems, and pressures to drive us to Jesus Christ.

When these trials come, instead of saying, "Lord, you are unfair for bringing me these trials," you should get down on your knees and say, "Lord, teach me the lessons you want me to learn from these trials." Maybe this particular form of child-training will last for weeks or months, but when you have learned the lessons God wants you to learn, He will ease the discipline.

Discipline for you will never yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness in you until you believe that God sends trials and testings to you. Perhaps you say, "Satan sends them, not God." No, God sends them, using Satan, perhaps as an instrument, but you have never looked far enough if you look only at the immediate instrument. You must lift your eyes to the One behind it all and see that God sends these things. Therefore, they come for our blessing, and we are to rejoice in that truth.

CONCLUSION

Saved

Christian, do not get discouraged when persecutions, troubles, trials, and problems come, but persevere in your Christian walk. God has not left you or failed you, and He has either directly brought or allowed these pressures to spiritually educate you that you might be more Christ-like in your experience and reach adult maturity in your Christianity.

Unsaved

I want to remind you without Christ that God disciplines Christians, but He judges non-Christians. God's eternal wrath will come down upon all those who have no Savior.

God's wrath burns hot against sin and sinners, and God's wrath will stretch on into eternity unless a sinner gets the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. God's love, mercy, and grace are found in Jesus Christ, and every person who realizes that he is a sinner and turns to Christ and

accepts Him as Savior and Lord will be forgiven his sins and be given eternal life. You must turn to Christ for salvation or face eternal punishment for your sins. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God, for God is a consuming fire!!