

## OUR TEXT

*You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; 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 reprov’d by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.”*

*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? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 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? 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. 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.*

## INTRODUCTION

Discipline is clearly the subject of today’s Scriptural text; specifically, God’s discipline of us His children. And the example given of a human father’s discipline of his children is easily understood. That discipline was not meant to harm us, but to hopefully mold us into a better person – knowing right from wrong, avoiding the pitfalls of life and making wise choices. In the same way God lovingly disciplines His spiritual children so that we might ultimately turn out right, or “yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”

But many questions emerge from a closer consideration.

Q: Which of the many trials of life are God’s disciplines, and which are only the “stuff” of life – not every hardship is discipline, is it?

Q: Doesn’t God forgive my sin and see me as a “saint” covered by the blood of Jesus? Why then would he discipline me?

Q: Does God really want me to “go to the carpet” to learn His lessons? Hasn’t He instructed me sufficiently in His Word?

Q: Didn’t Jesus go to the cross to keep me from being punished?

Now I have you thinking – yes? I hope so.

**1. PERSEVERANCE THE THEME** As we endeavor to unravel the full meaning of this passage, let us begin by recalling that one of the key themes of the book of Hebrews is “perseverance” – enduring and emerging victorious through the many struggles of life with our faith and confidence in God intact, and growing even stronger by each trial.

**2. DISCIPLINE = DISCIPLING** Secondly, let us note that the root of the word “discipline” is the same as the root of the word “disciple.” You can see that in the very similarity of English spelling. A disciple of Christ is literally a “disciplined learner.” And conversely, one disciplined by the Lord is literally becoming a “disciple.”

**3. PURPOSE, NOT PUNISHMENT** Thirdly, difficult trials in life are often wrongly confused with being punishments from God. “God must be punishing me” is a common, but misguided reaction. This was a mistake that the disciples of Jesus made when they encountered the man blind from birth, in John Chapter 9. They asked: “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” You see, they assumed that the man’s plight must be linked to God’s displeasure. But do you not see, dear listeners, that this is an insipid form of the so-called “prosperity gospel”. This

prosperity gospel claims that the righteous will prosper and the unrighteous will falter. In other words, it claims (wrongly) that you can tell a godly person by his lack of struggles in life, and an ungodly person by his difficulties through life. It boasts that God wants the righteous to be wealthy and prosperous and the unrighteous to be known by their lack of prosperity. Dear listener, by this reasoning Donald Trump is one of the world's most godly people and mother Teresa was one of the most ungodly.

By this reasoning the man blind from birth was indeed being punished by God. Yet Jesus replied to his disciples: "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Jesus' response teaches us at least two things: (1) There is a Godly purpose in each of the struggles of life and (2) physical well-being and spiritual well-being are not necessarily linked together.

**4. SANCTIFICATION** Now fourthly, let us examine God's ultimate purpose for us in this life. You might think this to be a difficult thing to determine. But rather, God has made it quite clear in His Word, our guidebook for life.

**1 Thessalonians 4:3** *For this is the will of God, your sanctification ..."*

**John 17:17** [Jesus to the Father:] *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*

**Romans 8:29** *For those whom He foreknew, He also conformed to be predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son ...*

**1 John 3:2b** *We know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.*

God's purpose for us is that we become more like Jesus every day. The Father, by His indwelling Spirit, is molding us, His children, into the image of Jesus. And this is being done by loving and purposeful DISCIPLINE, which is better understood as DISCIPLINING us through each difficulty of life.

As it says in 12:10: *"He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness."*

In chapter 11 of Hebrews we were encouraged to learn (be disciplined) through trouble and hardship by the example of the saints who have gone before us. At the beginning of chapter 12 we were encouraged to learn (be disciplined) through trouble and hardship by the example of our Lord Jesus, **who endured the cross and despised the shame. Now in today's passage we are further** encouraged be disciplined (disciplined) by God through each trial of life, knowing He has the ultimate purpose of making us more like Jesus through each trial.

**You see, each trial is a "striving against sin"** (12:4) – either a sin that is directly aimed at us by our enemy Satan, by the world or by our own sinful nature. While we are in this world we struggle against the sin of this world. But whoever or whatever the enemy, God wants to use the trial to mold us closer into the image of Jesus. He wants our fear to be overcome by faith. He wants our doubt to be overcome by determination. He wants our timidity to be overcome by trust.

God will mold us into the image of Jesus. That's a given, not a maybe.

**Philippians 1:6** *For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Some of us remember the Christian acronym that was popular a number of decades ago:  
**PBPGINFWMY** = "Please be patient, God is not finished with me yet"

Q: So what is our part in the God-molding, Jesus-becoming process?

A: ATTITUDE

**ATTITUDES UNDER DISCIPLINE**

1. Stoicism - "I can handle it" -
2. Defiance - "Get it over with"
3. Self-pity - "Woe is me"
4. Resentment - "It's not fair"

or 5. Acceptance as God's loving discipline (disciplining)

"How are You going to get me through this?"

"How do You want me to handle this?"

"What do You want me to learn from this?"

**1 Thessalonians 5:18** *In everything [every circumstance] give thanks; for this is God's will [purpose] for you in Christ Jesus.*

So as we conclude, let us come back to those nagging questions I asked at the beginning, and see if we can answer them correctly.

**Q:** *Which of the many trials of life are God's discipline, and which are only the "stuff" of life? Not every hardship is discipline, is it?*

**A:** Yes, in the context of Hebrews 12 all trials are God's discipline, or opportunities for discipleship.

**Q:** *Doesn't God forgive my sin and see me as a "saint" covered by the blood of Jesus? Why then would He discipline me?*

**A:** Yes He does forgive your sin and see you as a "saint", if you are child of God by faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord. He disciplines(disciples) you that you might be conformed to the image of your Savior and Lord – His ultimate purpose for you.

**Q:** *Does God really want me to "go to the carpet" to learn His lessons? Hasn't He instructed me sufficiently in His Word?*

**A:** God will allow you to go through whatever it takes to become more like Jesus. Some instruction comes by words, and some by persevering through trials.

**Q:** *Didn't Jesus go to the cross to keep me from being punished?*

**A:** Yes He did – to keep you from being punished in hell. And think of the trials of life not as a punishment for sin, but as a refinement of your person. **Accept the "stuff" of life as a lesson to be learned and an opportunity to see God work His good through you.**

I close with an appropriate benediction from 2 Thessalonians:

**2 Thessalonians 5:23-24** *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.*

AMEN!