

Text: Hebrews 12:7-11

Title: Enduring Divine Discipline

Truth: The Christian must endure divine discipline because of its outcome.

Date/Location: Sunday November 13, 2011

Introduction

Every Christian is called to put off any hindrances and sins and to run with endurance. This “running” is living by faith. The metaphor of running a race conveys focus and effort. Endurance means to keep on running, to maintain belief in the face of opposition (12:1-2). We must hold our confidence in Christ and do the will of God (10:36). Jesus is our ultimate Example, since He endured the cross and its shame, as well as the hostility of sinners.

As with a physical race, in the spiritual race of life we can become weary and discouraged at times. In that case, we should carefully consider what Jesus did, compare our suffering to His, and call to remembrance that God disciplines those He loves (see verses 3-6).

We should also notice that the subject of endurance permeates the first twelve verses of the chapter, and that there are two variations on the theme of endurance. In verses 3 and 4, God focuses our attention on endurance in the face of opposition from sin and sinners. From verse 5 on, the matter of endurance in the midst of divine chastening comes into focus.

This topic of chastening seems to come out of nowhere. What is it all about? And just what do verses 5-12 have to say about the subject of enduring it?

I. The Fact and Definition of Divine Chastening

1. The chastening we are reading about in Hebrews 12:5-11 is from the hand of God, as made clear in v. 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10. So, we have to become accustomed to the fact that God does discipline His children. This rather abrasive conclusion is supported by several passages of Scripture:

1 Peter 4:17 – judgment begins at the household of God.

2 Thess. 1:5 – the righteous judgment of God is exercised on believers.

Prov. 3:11-12 – God chastens those whom He loves.

James 5:15-16 –sometimes acts of sin and sickness are connected.

The book of Job – proves that sickness is not always a result of sin, but also shows that God chastens believers, even allowing Satan to work them over.

2. God’s chastening is defined by the terms we read in these verses:

v. 5a, 6a, 7, 8, 9, 10 - Chastening, discipline: providing guidance for responsible living that is attained by discipline; training; instruction; to help a person make right choices.

v. 5b - Rebuke, reproof: to disapprove of someone’s actions or to bring a person to the point of recognizing wrongdoing.

v. 6b – Scourge: to punish or chastise with a beneficial outcome as the goal. It is not just a “negative” thing.

3. God, in His infinite wisdom and providence, can use all kinds of situations to chasten us:

Illness can be one such situation (James 5:15-16).

Persecution from sinners is another tool God can use (v. 3-4).

Consequences of sins that we have committed is another tool.

Strained relationships.

An accident or injury.

A faithful brother or sister bringing a helpful rebuke.

Guilt of sin and personal knowledge of God’s displeasure at our sin.

4. You can sense when chastening is happening sometimes, but not infallibly so apart from divine revelation.

- a. You can know certainly when you receive a rebuke from the Word of God, perhaps from reading it or through another brother or sister.
- b. It is not possible to say for sure that some trial or testing experience is a chastening from the Lord. In other words, just because you suffer trials does not mean you automatically can have assurance about whether you are saved or not. You may just be experiencing a trial like all people experience at one time or another.
- c. For the believer, every trial or difficult situation that comes into life can be viewed as disciplinary by God. God intends to train us through it.

All of this is background to the main point of verses 5-11, which has to do with endurance of this discipline.

II. Endurance of Divine Chastening as Sons, v. 7-8

1. Part of the race that God sets before us includes divine discipline. If we are to run with endurance, that means we have to not only endure sin and sinners, but also God’s chastening.

There is a textual problem at the beginning of verse 7. The KJV and NKJV are based on Greek texts that have “if” at the beginning of the verse; the other translations use manuscripts that have “unto.”

The preponderance of evidence points to the latter as the proper text. This choice on my part means I will not be dealing with an “if” (if you endure, then you are a son) or with the opposite of the “if” (if you do not endure, then you are not a son).

2. It is for the outcome of instruction and being brought up properly as a believer that we must endure divine chastening. There are no shortcuts or easier ways to get to the end goal.

Comment [MAP1]: I believe from the overall teaching of Scripture that a believer will and must endure, in the end, even if there are lapses along the way. And so, if someone is not at all enduring God’s discipline, then they are not a son. Remember, we must have enduring faith in Jesus. That is the kind of faith that is saving faith. Note carefully that it is not our effort of endurance that saves. It is the kind of faith that God helps us to have initially, the kind that is the real kind, that is saving faith. This kind of faith is regenerating faith, brings us into the family of God, and brings us into a relationship with God by which He guarantees to preserve us. He preserves through endurance in the faith, among other things. But our focus is not on this idea.

3. Just how is it that you must endure discipline? The preceding verses (5-6) gave us a couple of answers:

- a. Do not despise God's chastening. That is, do not treat it with little esteem. It is an important aspect of our life.
- b. Do not be discouraged at God's rebuke. This means to not become weary or give out when God convicts you of wrongdoing or expresses disapproval of your behavior.

4. Now then, how can you endure discipline? The text gives us a reason to endure: because God is dealing with us as His children.

- a. God's chastening is bearable because the believer knows that God loves those He chastens, those who are His children. Divine discipline is not an expression of God's anger or wrath, but of His love!
- b. In other words, enduring discipline as a Christian is one evidence of son-ship. It is not the only evidence, because there has to be true personal faith, sound doctrine, continuance in good works, and so forth. But it is one piece of evidence.

Endurance of chastening actually is another encouragement to us. It may seem backward, but chastening actually becomes a proof of our sonship. It proves our relationship to God the Father is real!

- c. The whole section has an assumption, that we are talking about sons, those who have that persevering kind of faith in Jesus, that are saved. It is these whom the LORD loves in this context, and whom He chastens and scourges. Even the capital-S Son of God was chastened, obviously for sins that He did not commit. Should we expect to avoid such in this life as lowercase-c children of God?
- d. If there is no chastening, then there is no "father" to give the discipline, and thus the people are not in fact children of God at all. All believers have become partakers of God's discipline, so if you don't have that, then you are not a real son but are illegitimate. In other words, you have someone else as father, not God.

III. Endurance for Eternal Profit, v. 9-10

1. An illustration is given in v. 9: our earthly dads corrected us, and we (ought to) respect them for that.

We could travel a rabbit trail here on the whole issue of the need for fathers, for fatherly discipline, the potential failures of that, and so forth.

Their correction was temporary and according to their best judgment.

2. Arguing from lesser (earthly fathers) to greater (God), it is clear then that we should not chafe under God's discipline.

God's discipline is greater because it is not temporary, it is according to His divine wisdom, and with it He wishes to make us holy.

The text indicates that part of enduring in the faith is remaining readily in subjection to the Father.

3. God is called the Father of spirits.

This does not require us to believe God creates each individual spirit and puts it into every new human being. There is another mechanism for that (theologians call it *traducianism*).

This refers to God as the father of believers, the spiritual Father, as opposed to the human father.

4. The end of this endurance in the faith is eternal life. You believe in Christ to be saved; the consequence of such true belief is endurance in the faith; and the final outcome is eternal life, what we call final salvation.

IV. Endurance Despite Temporary Pain, for Righteousness, v. 11

1. Any chastening is temporarily sorrowful, not joyous. Pretty obvious?
2. Joy comes from the fruit of the training, and that is righteousness. God wants us to partake of His holiness (v. 10).
 - a. We are required to be holy like He is (1 Peter 1:16). Without holiness, v. 14 tells us that we will not see the Lord. So, developing holy character and righteous conduct are very important things.
 - b. Note that we are not initiating and carrying on that developmental work. God is!
3. The fruit of holiness and righteousness is an additional reason to be encouraged rather than discouraged and weary in our souls. We should not be discouraged or despise the Lord's chastening because it indicates our sonship and provides righteousness and holiness.

Conclusion

God's discipline is preparatory for what comes ahead in this life and also prepares us for judgment and life in eternity.

As believers, we long for purity. We "hunger and thirst for righteousness." God has ordained several means to that end, and divine discipline is one of them. So, we must endure—because we are God's children, and because we want that outcome, in spite of the temporary pain.

MAP