**Bethel Christian Fellowship**

**Fair Lawn, NJ**

**Hebrews (41): The Book Of Better Things**

**“The Lord’s Discipline: The Assurance Of His Love”**

**Hebrews 12:3-11**

**April 6, 2025**

The verses before us today always seem to generate a great deal of debate. They are all about the adversities and hardships of the Christian life, which our author views as “the Lord’s discipline.” This naturally leads many Christians to ask: “Is the suffering that’s described here the result of something I’ve done wrong?” Or, “Is God punishing me for some sin I may have committed?” Here’s the simple answer to that question; sometimes God’s discipline *is* punitive, but not always; and certainly not in this context.

The word “discipline” appears no less than nine times in these verses. In the ancient world, it was the word commonly used for training a child through both instruction and correction. Much of this discipline was the responsibility of the father, designed to develop the child’s character so that he or she might become a responsible, mature, right-thinking adult. The same concept holds true today.

All of us had a father, and if he was a faithful father, he disciplined us by *correcting* us (“that’s the wrong way of thinking or behaving”) and by *directing* us (“that’s the right way. . . .”). Why? Because he knew that if left to ourselves, we would “grow up” to be the same selfish, willful, demanding people that we were as children. Some discipline, of course, is painful and hard to accept. But a loving father knows that we need to develop our character, and that by submitting to his correction, he knows we will be the better person because of it.

That’s the reason our author is writing these verses. He is encouraging his readers – including us – to maintain a healthy perspective on their hardships. As we know by now, they were a group of Jewish converts, who, in the words of J. I. Packer, “were being harassed because of their Christian faith. God does not promise to shield them from trouble. Instead, he tells them that they must be ready to shed their blood rather than yield to pressure and renounce their faith. Moreover, they must understand that hardship is the discipline by which their heavenly Father hammers them into shape for a harvest of holiness. If they were not being thus hammered, they would have reason to doubt whether they were his children at all. Strong stuff! – but it makes crystal clear what we need to know: God’s priority in all His dealings with us is to make us holy.” (Rediscovering Holiness)

With this understanding comes an entirely new perspective on hardships. These painful experiences are orchestrated by God Himself as “discipline.” They serve a purpose. In the previous verse (v. 2), our author has just pointed out that the suffering of Christ had meaning. He endured the agonizing pain of the cross because of the joy set before Him. In the verses that follow, he calls on his readers to think about Jesus (vv. 3-4). His suffering served as an example for them, and their experience was not nearly so difficult as His. Then, in verses 5-11, he explains that suffering, when rightly understood, is “God’s fatherly discipline . . . evidence not that God does *not* love us, but that He does. We are God’s children and are treated as such” (Morris).

**A. Consider the Sufferings of Christ (vv. 3-4):** “*Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood*.”

As he has previously done, our author calls upon his readers – including us – to think about Christ (Cf. 3:1). Look to Him, he says, and consider the fact that even though He had never sinned, He endured incredible hostility from those who hated Him. Why point them to Christ? Undoubtedly, it’s because they themselves were also suffering at the hands of hostile non-Christians. Clearly, they weren’t suffering because of anything they had done wrong; they were suffering because the enemies of Christ wanted to destroy them.

Evidently, the ever-increasing hostility from the world had caused some to “grow weary” and “lose heart.” They were exhausted from bearing up under such pressure. The persecution, ridicule and rejection were weakening their spiritual stamina. Some even questioned if it was worth it to follow Christ. Others no doubt thought it would be easier to put their Christian witness on “mute” just in order to survive!

However, they hadn’t suffered as badly as they could have. In their “*struggle against sin*,” they had yet put their lives at risk. **Q.** Why would their determination *not to sin* place them in jeopardy of possible persecution and even martyrdom? **A.** The particular sin in view must have been yielding to the pressures of the world by compromising their convictions and ultimately renouncing their faith: “Caesar is Lord; worship him or die.” In any case, no one in the fellowship had yet been martyred for their testimony. But let’s not forget that this entire letter has been written to remind them (and us) that *whatever* they may lose because of the faith – even their own lives – being with Christ is *better*!

**B. Remember That Suffering is a Sign of Sonship (vv. 5-11).** In the verses that follow, our author is shifting gears. Just as Christ’s suffering had meaning, so also does ours! He begins by establishing this premise from the Old Testament Scriptures (vv. 5-6). Then he applies these verses to his readers – and us – (vv. 7-10). Finally, he reminds us of the immense benefit of enduring the discipline of the Lord (v. 11).

**1. The Scriptural Word of Encouragement (vv. 5-6):** “*And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says ‘My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastens everyone he accepts as his son*” (NIV, 2020).

This “word of encouragement” is from Proverbs 3:11-12, a Scripture which these readers had known but apparently had forgotten. Sadly, this is one of the consequences of growing “*dull of hearing*” (ESV) or “*sluggish*” (NASB) (Cf. Heb. 5:11-12). **Q.** And what had they forgotten? **A.**  They forgot that Scripture links suffering with sonship! It’s the father-son relationship that provides insight into the *necessity* and *certainty*of the Lord’s discipline. Therein lies the encouragement.

Suffering, hardship, and adversity are the means by which our heavenly Father is training us to grow up in the faith. It’s the *evidence* that we are His children, and the *assurance* that He loves us. Far from being a reason for despair, divine discipline is the basis for encouragement. *Knowing* that God, as a loving Father, is in control of our circumstances is designed to comfort us and assure us that He knows what’s best for us. Whatever He sends our way, both good and bad, pleasant and painful, is only designed to train us and equip us to better trust Him and serve Him.

**2. The Application (vv. 7-8):** “*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined – and everyone undergoes discipline – then you are not legitimate, not sons and daughters at all*.” In light of this perspective, no hardship in the Christian life ought ever to be viewed as “happenstance,” or worse, “bad luck.” Rather, it’s the expected means by which our heavenly Father is teaching us important lessons “as His children.”

In the ancient world, it was unthinkable that any father would *not* discipline his children. To grow up in a household, devoid of discipline, would be proof that the father was not the parent of the child. I am hesitant to quote verse 8 from the KJV, but this was the way I first learned to read the verse: “*But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then ye are bastards and not sons*.” Likewise, if anyone is not suffering hardship while living for Christ, he or she is a *spiritual bastard*! Discipline from the Father is proof of our sonship, and the evidence of His great love for those who are His.

There are those times when God does lead us into painful situations. He imposes on us emotional distress, physical discomfort, financial pressures and other such hardships. Why? Not to punish us, but to help us grow up in Christ. These adversities are not expressions of His anger and displeasure, but of His love and affection. Because we are His beloved children, He is deeply committed to our spiritual well-being and development.

**3. The Comparison between Earthly and Heavenly Fatherhood (vv. 9-10):** “*Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness.*”

There is a difference in the quality of discipline we have received from our earthly fathers and that which comes from the “*Father of spirits*,” which means something like our “spiritual Father” (Morris). They disciplined us “*for a little while*,” meaning the relatively brief years of our childhood; and they did so as “*they thought best*” (the implication is that they made mistakes!). Yet we accepted and respected their discipline because we knew that they had our best interests in view.

Therefore, when our heavenly Father imposes discipline on us – in His perfect wisdom and love – “*how much more*” should we accept it from Him (another *a fortiori* argument). His goal is for our supreme good, that we might become more like Him (“*share in His holiness*”). Here’s the point: our heavenly Father *never* disciplines us inappropriately. His correction is *always* timely, just, and perfect. He doesn’t make mistakes; He’s never too heavy-handed or light-handed. We may not always understand what He does, but we can rest assured that He does it out of His boundless, endless love for His children. Once again, therein lies “*the word of encouragement*” (Cf. Prov. 3:11-12).

**4. The Result of Enduring Hardship as Discipline (v. 11):** “*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it*.” When received with submission (v. 9), God’s discipline works for us, not against us. Although painful, it is always profitable. It serves a sanctifying purpose in our lives.

The next time we are troubled by the trials that come our way, or are tempted to question God’s love for us, *let’s remember this verse*! God sends the affliction our way because He is relentlessly committed to molding us into His image. He knows that there are those times when “there is simply no other, or at least no better way of cultivating holiness in the stubborn soil of our souls” (Storms).

There are many today who believe that God wants us to be happy, healthy, and wealthy. They say, in the words of Packer, that “we may confidently look to God here and now to shield us from unpleasantness at every turn, or if unpleasantness breaks in, to deliver us from it immediately because it is never His will that we should have to live with it. This is a basic principle of much contemporary religion. Unhappily, however, it is also a false principle. It loses sight of the place of pain in sanctification whereby God trains His children to share in His holiness. Such oversight can be ruinous” (Hot Tub Religion). The author of Hebrews would heartily agree – and so should we!