

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## GOD DISCIPLINES HIS CHILDREN

Hebrews 12:1-3 is the classic Scripture on God's discipline of His children. After quoting Proverbs 3:11,12 "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor faint when you are reproved by Him, for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives", the writer states: "It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as 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, that we may share His holiness" (Heb. 12:7-10). The word for discipline is the Greek word *paideia* which is translated several ways in different versions. In the KJV and NKJV versions it is "chastening"; The NIV, NASV and RSV it is rendered "discipline"; the Living Bible translates it "punishes". Vines *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* states that "The word primarily denotes the training of a child, including instruction; hence, discipline, correction, chastening, suggesting that Christian discipline regulates character." Jesus uses the word when he asks the Apostles: "Children you do not have any fish, do you?" (John 21:5) and in Hebrews 2:13 in a quotation from Isaiah 8:18: "Behold I and the children God has given me." The various translations of the word show that it is rather difficult to find the correct English word to express its meaning. For example it is used to describe the punishment of Jesus when he was *scourged* by Pilate (Luke 23:16) and also in the sufferings of Paul: "...we live as *disciplined* yet not put to death" (II Cor. 6:9). By contrast there is an absence of painful discipline in II Timothy 2:25 which states: "with gentleness *correcting* those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance..." The word is translated "educated" (NASV) and "learned" (KJV) in Acts 7:22 referring to Moses' education in Egypt. It is used to describe the education of Paul at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

The word "scourges" (ver. 6) is *mastigoi*. Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states: "The word is used figuratively in Hebrews 12:6 (quoting Proverbs 3:12) for 'to impart corrective punishment.' As the education of a beloved child may sometimes demand discipline, so God may sometimes smite His children. Suffering will be regarded by the Christian as a proof of God's educative love." However, this word is used of the scourging of Jesus in John 19:1; Matthew 20:19; and Luke 18:33, but in Proverbs 3:12 the Hebrew word is not "scourge" or "whip", as used in Job 9:23 and Isaiah 10:26; 28:15,18, and would describe the scourging of Jesus, but is a word from the root meaning "to decide, adjudge, prove" and is translated "correct", "rebuke" and "reprove". (From *Zondervan: Hebrew-Aramaic Dictionary*). This, then, seems to indicate the definition given above "to impart corrective punishment" is the way the Hebrew writer used the word. Divine discipline is sent for the well-being of the children of God (Heb. 12:9,10).

It is important that we draw a distinction between Divine punishment and Divine discipline. Throughout the Scriptures we find examples of Divine punishment administered upon people for their sins. Some examples: Adam and Eve suffered the punishment of being banished from the garden because of their sin; the whole world suffering the drowning in the flood because "God saw the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was evil continually ...and the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land...'" (Genesis 6: 5, 7). Mankind had sinned beyond the point of discipline so they suffered the punishment of the flood. We can add to this Pharaoh's army; the punishment of a generation of Israelites dying in the wilderness because of their unbelief; King Saul and a host of Israelite kings that were punished for their disobedience; Ananias and Sapphira dying at Peter's feet for lying and King Herod being struck by an angel and eaten by worms and died because he did not give God glory.

We also see the righteous suffering and there is no punishment nor discipline involved, yet God has a purpose in allowing it: "...others experienced mocking and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskin, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill treated, wandering in deserts and mountains, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive the promise, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:36-40). Much of the suffering in the world is neither God's punishment nor His discipline, but is due to man's evil works: "Now there were some present who reported to Jesus about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, were worse culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but, unless you repent, you will likewise perish'" (Luke 13:1,2).

It is a common belief among some Christians that any tragedy or suffering we endure is punishment for sin. This is where we must make a distinction between punishment and discipline. God's people cannot be punished for their sins, for God has already punished them in the death of Christ on the cross. Jesus became our substitute and suffered the full penalty of our guilt: "the blood of Jesus Christ His son cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7) and "surely our griefs he himself bore and our sorrows he carried...he was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities...the Lord laid all our iniquities upon him" (Isaiah 53:4-6). God will not exact payment for what Christ paid for when "he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (I Peter 2:24). This does not mean a Christian doesn't sin or that God simply overlooks his sin. When we sin it is as a child that does wrong and must be disciplined by the parent. (Heb. 12:5-10). So

God does discipline His children when they sin, but in order to correct them, not punish them. When Christians suffer or face tragedy it is not God punishing them, but “He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness” (Heb. 12:10), therefore it is not God *punishing* us for our sin, but He is *correcting* us in love for our own good. On the subject of suffering, my friend, the late Curtis Dickinson wrote in *The Witness*: “Suffering inevitably comes even to those of faith. We might say that it comes *especially* to those of faith, for these are the ones who can profit by it. To understand suffering, we first must understand the purpose of God. ‘And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to His purpose’ (Rom. 8:28). All things! Even suffering? Yes especially suffering. But the key to understanding this bold statement is the word, *purpose*. It is God’s purpose that is to be done. His goal is not to give everyone a paradise on earth, but to prepare us for the eternal paradise to come...Whatever the suffering the Christian must endure, it cannot defeat His purpose to attain this goal.” God always has a purpose in disciplining His people. When God called Abraham and made covenant with Him He said: “Know for a certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years” (Gen. 15:13). Stephen reminds us of this event: “God spoke to this effect, that his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for four hundred years” (Acts 7:6). Why did God allow this people to suffer for four hundred years? The answer is seen in the purpose of God: “And in the fourth generation they will return here *for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete*” (Gen. 15:16). Before God could bring the nation of Israel into the land He had to first judge the heathen in the land. It took four hundred years for them to sin to the extent God could justly bring judgment upon them. Another Old Testament example of suffering bringing out the purpose of God is the life of Joseph. We know well the sufferings of Joseph, He was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery where he spent two years in prison. Yet God’s purpose was worked out in his life. George Matheson in *The Representative Men of the Bible* has this to say about Joseph: “He confronts the facts of his own life and claims absolute good fortune. He does not say that the joy has exceeded the sorrow. He does say that on the whole the lights have outweighed the shadows. He denies the shadows. He refuses to admit the reality of the clouds. He claims his adversaries as his unconscious friends, ‘As for you, you meant it evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive’” (Gen. 50:20). Paul’s thorn in the flesh is a classic New Testament example in God’s purpose in discipline. He calls it “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, to keep me from exalting myself.” After praying three times for its removal God said “My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness” (II Cor. 12:7-9).

God working out His purpose is why the Hebrew writer quotes: “My son, do not regard lightly (“despise not” KJV) the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproved by Him” (Heb. 12: 5). This is the only place in the New Testament the word for “regard lightly” (despise not) is found. It means “to care little for” thus the translation “do not regard lightly”. How do we take lightly the discipline of the Lord? *First*: by failing to see God’s hand in the negative things that enter our lives. Too often we view them as the common and inevitable hardships peculiar to

life and we do not see the hand of God in what is happening. The result of this is callousness instead of humility. *Second*: Complaining. This was one of the things that brought the wrath of God upon Israel in the wilderness: “Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp” (Num. 11:1). It caused disruption in the early church when “...the disciples were increasing, a complaint arose of the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food” (Acts 6:1). When the Psalmist said “I was envious of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked...they are always at ease, they have increased in wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning” (Psalm 73:3, 12-14), it caused his heart to be embittered and he was pierced within. (ver. 21). *Third*: Criticism. When we are continually asking “Why is this happening to me?” as if I will not accept it unless I know, we are in effect criticizing God. Paul asks the question: “Who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ will it?” (Rom. 9:20). Paul is probably thinking of Isaiah 45:9: “Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker—an earthenware vessel among the vessels of the earth! Will the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you doing?’ Or the thing you are making say, ‘He has no hands?’”

There is a reason given for not regarding it lightly: “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines and scourges every son whom He receives” (Heb. 12. 6), that is, discipline proceeds from God’s love. This verse is found in slightly varied form in four different books of the Bible: “Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty” (Job 5:17); “Blessed is the man whom Thou doest chasten, O Lord, and doest teach out of Thy law” (Psalm 94:12); “My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord, or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproves, even as a father, the son in whom He delights” (Prov. 3:11, 12); “Those whom I love I reprove and discipline, be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19).

What is to be our attitude toward God’s discipline when we experience it? The Hebrew writer is careful to remind us that we should “Consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb. 11:3). This is the same word Peter gives us when we “bear up under sorrows when suffering unjustly...if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow” (I Pet. 2:19-21). Further we are to “not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor faint when we are reproved” (ver. 5), which we discussed above. Also discipline gives us assurance we are sons of God (Heb. 12:7). “We suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (Rom. 8:17). As Christ suffered before He was glorified, so His sons are “afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed” (II Cor. 4:8, 9). This is possible because we are suffering “with Him”. He further states that our discipline trains us and “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12: 11). This is the purpose of God’s discipline.

