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Introduction

Many Christians today believe that God disciplines His children through sicknesses or negative circumstances either because of some sinful deeds, or in order to make them humble. But this is not true at all in the New Testament. The purpose of this article is to show how does God discipline His children in the era of the New Testament and with what purpose.

The Goodness of God

James 1:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.*

God is a good God and only good gifts come from our heavenly Father. Sicknesses or negative circumstances (i.e. tragic car accidents, work accidents, destruction of goods, etc) would hardly qualify as a gift, not to mention being a good or perfect one. Sickness is from the devil and God doesn't need the devil's tool to fix any good thing for His children. Why would He have to use the instrument of Satan to perform good deeds in our lives? If God put sickness on me to humble me, and then I ran to my doctor, or took drugs to take away what God put on me to make me humble, wouldn't that be hypocrisy? The truth is God never inflicts sickness on any of His children to make them humble, to punish them or to discipline them.

A good earthly father would never like to see his children suffer. Rather, he works hard to ensure they don't suffer. No earthly parent could love or care for his children better than God. No parent could be more willing to do good things for their family than God, the Father. God is the best Daddy there is. He is your Father and He wants the very best for you. Recognize and take full advantage of the Fatherhood of God, knowing that His will is always to bless and not to curse you, because of Jesus Christ.

Let's see what apostle John by the Spirit said about the heart of God towards His children:

3 John 2 (NKJV)

²*Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*

This is God's desire for you. He is more willing to heal you than you are ready to be healed. He is more willing to bless you, to protect you, to

make you prosper, than you are ready to accept and receive.

Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew this about the Father's heart:

Matthew 7:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give *good gifts to your children*, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Jesus Himself shows how good our heavenly Father is. Since earthly fathers do not teach or discipline their children with sickness, disease or poverty, then all the more, our heavenly Father will never teach us by punishing us with bad things.

Explaining Hebrews 12

The main biblical basis for the false assumption that God disciplines us through sickness to humble us is Hebrews chapter 12, where the Bible talks about God disciplining His children. I will insert here a bigger passage that includes the bigger context of the topic, so that we would understand discipline in the right context:

Hebrews 11:32-12:13 (NKJV)

³² And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:

³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.

³⁶ Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.

³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—

³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.

³⁹ And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise,

⁴⁰ God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.

¹ Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.

⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.

⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;

⁶ *For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."*

⁷ *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?*

⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

The Context

The whole context of the passage is Hebrews 11:32 to 12:13. First, the text doesn't say anywhere that the discipline of God is through sickness or poverty. All these are assumptions. Moreover, nowhere in the text it says that the purpose of the discipline is to humble us. Second, if we look carefully at the whole context, we can easily notice that the theme of it is "enduring persecutions because of the gospel", and not "discipline because of sin or immorality". We know that because verse 12:2 tells us to look unto Jesus, Who for the joy that was set before Him ENDURED the cross. The next verse tells us again to consider Him who ENDURED such hostility from sinners against Himself. Immediately after that, the passage talks about our discipline. So, the parallel and the comparison is between Jesus' sufferings and our discipline.

Third, in all this context, there are 3 categories of people:

Other sons (11:32-39) - These represent the cloud of witnesses in verse 12:1, who were persecuted for their faith and endured, and stood firm until the end. Actually, verse 12:1 sets the tone for the whole passage.

Jesus Christ, the Son, who endured the cross

Us, His sons.

The "sinners" from verse 12:3 who came against Jesus weren't sinners in general, or necessarily immoral people. Those who crucified Jesus were Pharisees, priests, legalists, and self-righteous people. Moreover, in verse 12:1, when it talks about laying aside every weight, it refers to the weight of the law, of works, of obedience to the Law, because all verses before this one focus on faith and persecutions, and on how to overcome persecutions through faith. And the word "sin" is in the same context. It refers to our own self-righteousness and unbelief, that clings to us and entangles us. That is true also because the whole context of the book of Hebrews is about the superiority of faith compared to Israel's fathers, to the Law and the prophets, and even to angels.

Then Verse 12:4 is not talking about immoral sin or our individual sins. It rather talks about the sin of other people, the general idea of sin, which is against the gospel, the atmosphere of sin around us. It talks about the sin of the legalists, of their unbelief. We always give in and compromise when we face opposition from sin.

What Is the Discipline?



What is then the discipline this passage talks about? It is two-fold: persecution for the gospel on one hand, and training in righteousness of faith through the word on the other hand. God never brings hardships and persecution on His children, neither He gives them. God doesn't like it when we, as believers, are smashed and broken. He didn't enjoy seeing Jesus crucified. Moreover, these persecutions don't come because of wrong doing or immorality. In fact, they come because we're doing something right. Yes, you read correctly. The discipline in this passage comes when we're doing something right for the kingdom. The persecutions both confirm to us that we are true sons of God, and they train us in how to endure them.

The word "chasten" in verse 12:6 comes from the Greek word *Paideuo*, which means: to train, instruct, teach, or cause one to learn. The same word is used with the meaning of education in: Acts 7:22 (Moses was educated in Egypt), Acts 22:3 (Paul was educated by Gamaliel), 2 Timothy 2:25 (gentle correction of those in opposition), Titus 2:12 (instruction to deny ungodliness).

The word "scourge" in verse 12:6 comes from Greek *Mastigoo*, which means punishment, accusation. The same word is used in: Matthew 10:17, 20:19, 23:34 (all in the context of persecution); Mark 10:34, Luke 18:33, John 19:1 (in the context of Jesus' persecution and suffering). Verses 12:12-13 show us that this whole passage is actually an encouragement from God to not give up and push through when we go through trials and persecutions.

The second type of discipline besides persecution is training in righteousness through the Word of God. Verses 12:9-10 make a comparison between "the fathers of our flesh", or our earthly fathers, and "the Father of spirits", our heavenly Father. The "fathers of our flesh" discipline our flesh, while the "Father of spirits" disciplines us in our spirits, through His Word. This means that as we read the Bible, or as we listen to God's Word being preached, we are being trained, equipped, and being taught by the Lord.

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[God's Way of Disciplining in the New Testament](#)