

What Does Discipline From the Lord Look Like?

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Question: This question comes from Eddie. "Considering Proverbs 3:11-12 and Hebrews 12:5-8, How can you tell if God is disciplining you as a son? What does the discipline of the Lord look like to a true Christian? And how can one know if he is incorrectly discerning his own salvation in this respect?"

Discussion:

Tim: You see what Eddie is assuming here? He's assuming that because illegitimate children, those who are not children of God aren't disciplined, and the true children are disciplined, he's assuming that if you look at your life and you find the discipline there, that's evidence that you are a child of God. But because lost people - those who aren't children of God, likewise have things happen in their life that cause them pain and affliction and difficulty and trial, which in some respects are very similar to the discipline that God brings upon His children. How can we tell them apart? That's a valid question. That's a good question.

So, what do we say to that? Well, he references Hebrews 12. If you've got your Bibles there, let's read it together. I'm going to read about 8 verses. Hebrews 12. I'll start reading in verse 5. Because this is a good thing to know. Listen, we've got a lot of people here that believe they're Christians. So if this is true, that God disciplines His children, and He does discipline and only disciplines them, then if you're a child of God, you better have discipline. Because if you don't have discipline, you're in trouble.

But there are lost people who come along and say, "Well, I have trials in my life." Ok, how do we tell them apart? How do we tell the trial of the lost man from the discipline of the saved man? Hebrews 12:5 "Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. Nor be weary when reproved by Him. For the Lord (now listen to this) The Lord disciplines the one He loves." It's a fact, folks. It's going to happen. "And chastises every son whom He receives." There's a fact. It happens. "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you're left without discipline in which all have participated, (in other words, all sons) then you're illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we've had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them. But He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore, lift your drooping hands, strengthen your weak knees, and make straight your paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed."

So, how can we distinguish this discipline from expressions of God's wrath? Now think with me here. Romans 1 says God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. And it's already revealed. God's wrath is revealed. And I'll tell you this, one of the demonstrations of God's wrath that we see in Romans 8 is the curse. People get sick. People die. Oftentimes from expressions of God's wrath. God's wrath is upon this world in the curse. God's wrath is upon this world in the fact that wicked men die. God's wrath is upon this world, how? Romans 1 says God gives men over to more and more wickedness. Have you ever read that? I'll tell you what - where men ignore God, God gives men over to sin. Ignore God? Unrighteousness comes in because God gives men over. You know one of the ways you can see the wrath of God? Is when people are able to just go deeper and deeper in sin. That's a judgment of God. That's the wrath of God.

Now look, as people get deeper and deeper in this, they get sick. They catch diseases. This cursed world around them bears hard fruit in their lives. How do I tell that from God's discipline on His children? Well, let's think about the nature of God's discipline. Why does God discipline? What is always the issue? Sin. God never disciplines for anything but sin. It's always sin. Listen to Revelation 3:19, the Lord Jesus Christ is speaking, "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." The only thing that needs to be repented of is what? Sin. He says, "those I love, I reprove and discipline, so repent." In other words, I discipline you because of sin in your life.

So you know what? Every child of God gets disciplined when there's sin. Let me ask you this: Can you sin and get away with it? No, I'm asking you. Look, I'll tell you this, if you're a true child of God, you cannot continue in sin and get away with it. God will come for you. He'll come for you, and He'll lay that rod on your back. And I'll tell you what, usually God's discipline is right in the area of the sin. You know what sin a lot of times He comes after us for? Idolatry. A lot of times we begin to treasure something in our lives more than Christ, and I'll tell you what, He'll come to us right at that idol. Oh, a lot of times... But I'll tell you this, if you can sin and He doesn't come for you, you're in trouble. If you can sin and you can just keep on going on in it. Beware. Psalm 119:71 "It is good for me that I was afflicted." Why? "That I might learn your statutes." Have you guys ever heard that before? David says this, it was good that I was afflicted. You know why? When we're afflicted, we learn God's statutes.

Have you guys ever found that out? Have you guys ever found that the greatest growth in your life doesn't come when the sun is shining? The birds are singing? The sky's blue. Everything's good. Bank account's full. Have you ever noticed you don't grow then, typically? It's when it's hard. It's when you're suffering. It's when the trials are upon you. It's when the fire is hot. That's when we grow. Well, Hebrews 12:11, listen to this: We're talking about the nature of discipline, and the fact is discipline revolves around sin. See if you can't hear it in the verses we just read. Hebrews 12:11 For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later, what does it yield? The peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. You know what discipline does? David says it's good I was afflicted - I keep Your statutes. You know

what the writer of Hebrews says? He says it produces the peaceable fruits of righteousness when you're trained by it.

Trained by what? Trained by the discipline. Discipline trains us. That's why it's called discipline. Discipline and training. Discipline in the military, you know, we talk about someone who is very disciplined. They get somewhere on time. He's a disciplined person. So often we think of discipline as a bad thing. It's a good thing. Discipline is good. Training is good. That's what discipline is meant to do. Now did you hear something? For the present, discipline is what? Painful. Listen: Don't think something's discipline in your life if it's not painful. That's another aspect of the nature of discipline. It's painful! It's called affliction - why? Because it afflicts. For the present, it's painful. But, it's an expression of God's blessing and God's love. Psalm 94:12 "Blessed is the man whom You discipline, O Lord." Psalm 119:75 "I know, O Lord, that Your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness, You have afflicted me." God is faithful when He afflicts us. Proverbs 13:24 "Whoever spares the rod, hates his son. He who loves him is diligent to discipline him."

Now that's true of men in general. How much more of the Lord. Here's the thing, discipline is meant to get our attention. And you know what? Sorrow and grief get our attention like nothing else does. God doesn't get our attention when we're happy. God doesn't get our attention typically when the bank account's full. God doesn't get our attention when the car's running good. You know when He gets our attention? Listen. All you have to do is look at your life. When do you pray most? When does a child of God pray like he never prays at another time? When things are hard. When the bottom's falling out. When the ends don't meet.

Now listen to this, 2 Corinthians 7:10, "Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death." Well, here's the thing, Christ says, "I discipline those I love." It's meant to drive us to repentance. Pain is what's produced by discipline. Pain produces sorrow. It produces grief. Godly pain, godly sorrow, results in repentance. See it all ties together. Worldly sorrow leads to death.

Well, here's what I'd ask you. You want to know whether a trial in your life is discipline of your Father versus just a trial of a lost man. All you have to do is ask yourself this, when trial and difficulty comes in your life, what's the fruit? Just ask yourself: what is the fruit? You know what you find? In the parable of the soils, when you've got the person that suddenly starts to experience affliction and persecution, guess what happens? They wither. Ask yourself that, when trial comes in your life, does it make you run under your Father's wing and hold all the more tightly? To pray all the more fervently? And to be drawn to your Scriptures all the more diligently? And I'll tell you this, if you discipline your child right, guess what happens? By the end they're hugging you. Oh, the world doesn't believe such things. They think spanking is cruel, but I'll tell you if you do it right, and you do it in love, your child will cling tightly to you by the end. If you do it wrong, they will go out resenting you. That's the same thing.

And I'll tell you, God knows how to do it right. And if it's not producing the right fruit, it's an evidence that you're not His child. In other words, if hardship and difficulty come in your life, that which causes you pain, that which afflicts you, comes in your life and you find yourself resenting God. You don't like it. You know what? I've heard of people that they came to church and all of a sudden some calamity came into their life or somebody they love died and they never went to church after. You know what that tells me? Lost as anything. That was no affliction and chastising of God. That was a lost person that went through some difficulty. All you have to do is look at it. You know what God's discipline is meant to produce? Holiness. Righteousness. The peaceable fruits of righteousness, that you might share in His holiness. If chastening, if difficulty, if trial doesn't produce that in your life, no good. It's no good, folks.