

The Marvelous Privileges of Adoption, Part 5

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Now I ask you to follow with me in your Bibles as I read two portions of the Word of God, and the first is found in the book of Proverbs, Proverbs 3. In this section where the father is instructing his son, we find these words in verses 11 and 12: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His reproof. For whom the Lord loves, He reproveth, even as a father the son in whom he delights." And now over to Hebrews 12 (this is where we will be parking this morning) and beginning with verse 5:

"And you have forgotten [or it could be a question: 'and have you forgotten?'] the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reproveth of Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. It is for chastening that ye endure; God's dealings with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons. Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness. Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees; and make straight paths for your feet, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed."

Let's again seek the face of God, asking the help of the Holy Spirit in the opening up of the Word of God. Let us pray.

Once again, our Father, we come conscious that when our Lord Jesus said, "Without Me, you can do nothing," He meant exactly what He said. If anything of any spiritual profit is to be accomplished in this hour, it will be so because the Lord Jesus, by the Spirit, is present among us. Lord Jesus, come. Come, we pray, speaking to every heart, enabling your servant to open up the Word accurately in the power and grace of the Spirit. Come to us as we look to You in expectation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Apostle John wrote these words: "In this, the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil." In John's reckoning, all men, all women, all girls, and all boys are either children of God or children of the devil. And I want to ask you a very simple question. Sitting in this place this morning, whose child are you? Sitting in this place, in your pew, in your spot, are you a child of God or a child of the devil? There

is no shared spiritual parentage. Children of God or children of the devil. According to the Scriptures, we are all by nature, by birth, and by practice the children of the devil. But blessed be God, according to the Scriptures, there are some who by spiritual birth and by legal action of adoption in the family court of heaven, are the children of God. And we are presently considering this wonderful provision of redemptive grace, whereby we who were natively children of the devil, are taken into the number and given a right to all the privileges of the sons and daughters of God, a redemptive privilege that the Bible calls adoption. And we come this morning to consider together the sixth great privilege of adoption. And what I will attempt to open up in our hearing this morning is this privilege of adoption: our heavenly Father's loving discipline.

As sure as each and every repenting and believing sinner is given an irreversible status as a child of God, Christ is made his elder Brother in the family of God. He is made an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. He's given the Spirit of adoption, enabling him to cry, "Abba, Father." As surely as he is given the promise of the Father's provision, so it is always the case that every adopted child of God becomes the subject of the heavenly Father's loving discipline. It is an inescapable privilege of adoption to have a heavenly Father who loves us with enough principled love that He will discipline us to accomplish His own saving purposes in us.

So I ask you to open up with me, if you've closed your Bibles, to Hebrews 12, as we consider five dimensions of this loving, fatherly discipline that God brings upon each and every one of His children. Let me say a word briefly about the context of this passage. Those of you who were in our public reading of the Scriptures, I hope, that the great concern of the writer to the Hebrews is both to push and to pull tempted believers into the way of ongoing adherence to Christ. These Hebrew Christians had abandoned the old covenant and all of the trappings of Judaism; they placed their faith in Christ. But as a result, they were experiencing tremendous persecution, opposition, hardships. In chapter 10, the writer to the Hebrews could say,

"Call to remembrance the former days in which after you were enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly being made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, and partly by becoming partakers with them that were so used. For you had compassion on them that were in bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your possessions."

Think of all the things they experience as a result of professing attachment to Jesus Christ and the blessings of the new covenant. Conflict of sufferings, a gazing-stock--they were afflicted. They suffered privation of their very possessions. And so some are tempted to go back and to abandon their attachment to Christ. And so the great burden of the writer of this epistle is to urge them to continue to cling to Christ, to continue to lay hold of Christ and all the provisions of the new covenant in persevering faith. And so in doing this, he comes in chapter 12 and exhorts them that the Christian life is like a race and how they are to run. And he's reminding them as they consider their Savior, that unlike Him, they have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And they are being tempted to turn back because they have forgotten a very vital truth embedded in the old covenant documents, a truth which speaks to them. Notice what he says. Verse 4: "You have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." And it could be a question. ("Have you forgotten?") Or it could be an indicative. ("You have forgotten the exhortation [notice carefully] which reasons for you as sons.") Well, wait a minute, I thought the passage I read in your hearing from Proverbs 3 was Solomon speaking to his son and to his pupil saying, "My son,

despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd of Him." And yet here the writer to the Hebrews says, "You have forgotten the exhortation which dialogues [that's a transliteration of the Greek verb] which reasons with you as sons." In other words, the words of Solomon embedded in Proverbs 3 are God's direct word to these Hebrew Christians in the first century, tempted to turn back because of the pressure and the opposition. And he says, "You have forgotten this word which reasons with you."

I must pause by way of application to make this statement. I quote from John Brown:

"There are two very important general remarks suggested by the manner in which the Apostle introduces this quotation. The first is that the Old Testament Scriptures are intended for our instruction as well as the instruction of those to whom they were originally addressed. The exhortation contained in the book of Proverbs speaks to Christians in this apostolic age. 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime,' Paul says in Romans 15, 'were written for our learning.' There is need of wisdom, that drawing from the Old Testament Scriptures the instruction they are intended to give us, but directly or indirectly, every part of those holy writings are intended to instruct us. When Paul said to Timothy, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,' he was speaking primarily and directly of the Old Testament Scriptures. So the writer to the Hebrews (the context of our passage) is bringing to remembrance a passage which these tempted believers ought to have remembered but had forgotten. And now he wants them to call it to mind in the midst of their present trial."

Well, so much then for the context of the passage, that little application with respect to the manner which we read our Old Testament. Now we come, secondly, to the major teaching of the passage in Hebrews. And as I presently understand it, there are five things set before us concerning this particular blessing of adoption, our heavenly Father's loving discipline. Five strands of truth set before us.

Number one: here we see the origin of God's paternal discipline of His children (vv. 4-6). "And you have forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with sons, My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd of Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

You say, "But wait a minute, Pastor, when you read the passage from Proverbs, it says, "the son in whom He delights." This says, "every son whom He receives." How come? Well, the answer's very simple. In the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures done by seventy men 200 years before Christ, the rendering is exactly as we have it here in Hebrews 12. And often you will find the New Testament writers, will quote from the Septuagint since it was their working Bible. And believing that the Holy Spirit is superintending in the inspiration of the Scriptures, we have every confidence that this is the Word of God, though it is not word for word paralleled with the passage in Proverbs 3.

So having dispensed with that for some who may have picked up on that, what does the text tell us? It says, "for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." And both verbs "love" and "receive" are in the present tense. And here we are informed that Almighty God who has taken people into this relationship as sons, He continues to love them, and He continues to receive them.

Or if we take the nuance from the original passage in Proverbs 3, "He delights in them." So what is the origin, then, of God's paternal discipline? It is nothing other than His infinite, eternal, unchangeable love for His own, a love that manifests itself in His receiving them, not simply justifying them, declaring them righteous on the basis of the perfect life and the substitutionary death of His Son, but receiving them to His bosom as His own beloved children.

Remember the teaching of Scripture that we considered way back at the beginning of our study of adoption when we looked at adoption in the whole scheme of redemption. Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "...in love: having [predestined] us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto Himself." You see the emphasis, "unto Himself." In love, He predestined us to adoption. And then we read in the Scriptures that in love, He sent His Son to redeem us in the fullness of the time. "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons." And then He draws us to Himself. "No man comes unto the Father except he is drawn." And God says in Jeremiah 31:3, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore in loving kindness I have drawn you." And then He will keep us in His love. Romans 8:38: "I am persuaded that nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Child of God, settle it in your heart, your Father's love is the origin of every act of discipline in your life. That love may be expressed in a righteous anger toward you for something you have done, but it is the holy and righteous anger of your Father and not your judge. And I have no sympathy for this teaching that says God is never angry with His children. Yes, He is. "You will not keep Your anger forever." "Rebuke me not in Your anger and Your hot displeasure," the psalmist prays. When as an earthly father, a child does something that is off the wall in disobedience, blatant, plain, open, clinched-fist disobedience, for a parent not to feel anger, there's something sick with that parent. Now there is a carnal anger that goes beyond that which is righteous, but our loving heavenly Father has as the origin of all His paternal discipline His eternal love to His people. One writer has captured this beautifully when he wrote,

"But still the displeasure is the displeasure of love. The frown is the frown of love. The correction is the correction of love. And the conviction of this is also necessary to its proving salutatory or helpful and to the prevention of the two extremes, against which the text warns us [and we'll see that in point number 5]. We shall not despise the discipline when we're convinced of it being in love. Nor shall we faint and be weary under the discipline if we are persuaded it is the discipline of our Father's love."

And you see at this point, dear people, some of you need to totally dispossess your minds of the patterns of your own earthly fathers. Get your concepts of God's fatherly dealings out of the Bible, not from the shadows of your experience. And here we are told, "whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." As your loving heavenly Father, He disciplines, He chastens, He reproves His children.

Now secondly, note with me the subjects of God's paternal discipline. Verses 6-8:

"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. It is for chastening that ye endure; God is dealing with you as with sons; for what son

is there whom his father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, whereof all have been made partakers, then are you bastards, and not sons."

So when we ask the question, "Who are the subjects of God's paternal discipline?", the text is clear, abundantly clear that the subjects of God's paternal discipline are each and every one of His adopted children without one exception. "Every son whom He receives" (v. 6). If we are without chastening, we are not true sons, true daughters. God has no undisciplined, unchastened, unreproved brats in His family. He has no such children. As one man put it, "Corrections are pledges of our adoption and badges of our sonship." Another has written,

"God punishes His enemies, but He chastens His children. The one is the judicial infliction of His wrath. The other is the proof of His parental love. The same hand but not the same character gives the stroke to the Godly and the ungodly. The scourge of the judge is widely different from the rod of the Father. Moreover, this fatherly discipline pertains only to the present life. There's no chastisement in heaven nor in hell because there's no amendment. Chastisement is a companion of those who are in the way and of them only. These weary Hebrews might well think that they would not suffer if they were really God's sons. But in fact, the reverse is the case, for if they did not suffer, they would not be God's sons. 'Saints,' says God, 'think not that I hate you because I thus chide you.' He that escapes reprehension may suspect his adoption. God had one Son without corruption, but no son without correction. A gracious soul may look through the darkest cloud and see God smiling at him."

The subjects of God's paternal discipline are all of His children. The general truth is affliction in some form or another is allotted by God to every individual whom He regards with peculiar favor as the necessary means of promoting His spiritual profit. So we've seen the origin of God's paternal discipline, His love; the subjects of God paternal discipline, each and every one of His children without exception.

Now thirdly, consider with me the nature of God's paternal discipline. Look at the text. Here in Hebrews, we have three words. Look at them: "My son, regard not lightly the chastening [noun] of the Lord, nor faint [verb] when you are reprov'd of Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens [the verbal form of the noun chastening], and scourges [verb] every son whom He receives." Now we've got to spend a little time with words. That's the task of a preacher, to take the words of God, to open them up; to persuade your judgment that the meaning attached is the right meaning.

This word "chastening" (the noun) and chasten (the verb) is the family of words that is dominant in this passage. In fact, between verses 5 and 11, you have no fewer than eight uses of the noun and the verb and, I believe, one adverbial construction of the word (?). (?) is the verb. (?) is the noun. It's the dominant word. And it's a word that has a wide, what the theologians call the semantic range; that is, it's got lots of meanings in the New Testament. When you hear semantic range, that's just a fancy way of saying it's got lots of meanings. In secular Greek, it would primarily mean training and instruction. It can mean training and instruction by discipline. It can mean discipline in a more restricted way as it does in Ephesians 6:4: "You fathers, nurture them in the discipline and admonition [the rod and instruction]...." So here in this context, it's probably referring to chastening in its more limited sense. "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd of Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges...." And if we have Hebrew

parallelism, then it is a chastening that issues in scourging. So most likely here the word is referring to God's training and educating enforced by discipline.

And then we have the word "reproved." This is the word that means a verbal rebuke, a clear pointing out of wrong with a call to desist. It is said in Luke 3:19 that John was reproofing or rebuking Herod for his sins. It's used in 2 Timothy 4:2: "I charge you in the sight of God and Christ Jesus, preach the word through rebuke." Here's our word. And then in revelation 3:19, when Jesus speaks to the church at Laodicea, "I'm about to spew you out of My mouth [I'm about to vomit you]," He says, "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten." So the concept is verbal reproof that points out a wrong and calls us to desist.

But now in verse 6, "and He scourges." This verb is found only seven times in the New Testament. Six of them are in the Gospels, and without exception, they refer to Jesus being scourged. So when the writer to the Hebrews picks it up out of the Septuagint ("scourges"), this is talking about giving you a good whipping. ("Your mamma gonna whup you.") That's what the word is here. The passage says He whups, He scourges every son whom He receives. In other words, God will take very severe measures to get our attention about issues that He believes are important in our lives.

So what's the nature of this matter of God's discipline? It is God's dealings with us that become His *paideia*, His chastening, His training of us, but training with discipline; His verbal rebukes, His bringing His strokes upon us. Now follow me closely, this is what broke the passage open for me, and I was ready to dance a little jig in my study. I didn't, but I did in my heart. In the context of the book of Hebrews, what was the discipline? What was the reproof? What was the whupping that the heavenly Father was giving? It was the manifold difficulties arising from their persecution. And the writer brings in the Proverbs passage as a special and specific application of the general truth "My son." The context in Proverbs is very general. But he takes the general directive and applies it very specifically, and he says,

"Look, you Hebrew Christians need to look upon all of this stuff that these people are doing: mean-spirited people taking away your goods, marginalizing you in your place of work and business, blocking your way to progression up the ladder in corporate responsibility. In all the ways you're feeling the pressure, you need to see in all of this, this is your heavenly Father's discipline. These afflictive circumstances that are pressing you; that are galling your flesh; that are disrupting your life, they are your heavenly Father's discipline; they are His training; they are His words of reproof; in some cases, they are His whupping; they are His scourging."

He makes a very specific application of the general principles of Proverbs 3 to their situation. However, we dare not limit the significance of these words to that specific application. For when we see them in their original context, they are much broader and more general. And I'm prepared to assert that the nature of the discipline, the reproof, the scourging of God is any afflictive circumstance that God brings into our lives in His sovereignty. Any afflictive circumstance that robs us of delight ("No chastening for the present seems to be joyous [using the most general word]"). No training, no discipline of your Father makes you dance around with a glory fit. You don't click your heels when God is chastening, when God is reproofing, when God is scourging, when God is giving you a whupping--you don't do it. And so I believe William Arno in his commentary on the Proverbs 3 passage has accurately identified

the nature of chastening. Listen to his words: "Turning now to the matter of this text, understand by chastening in the meantime, any affliction, whatever its form or measure may be. The stroke may fall upon your own persons, your body; your ears go dead on you, your body, your spirit."

When I hear that there were some who sat in the previous hour and dug their heels in. "No way I'm going to buy that stuff. I'll dress the way I want." When that comes back to me, it will be like a knife right here, right there. That will be the Father's discipline. It will be an affliction.

Body, spirit, or your good name. Some of us know well what that is. It may fall on those who are dearest to you and so wound you in the tenderest spot. It may fall upon your substance to sweep it away, or on your country to waste it. Whatever the providence may be that turns your joy into grief, it is a chastening from the Lord. That's it! That's it! "Despise not the chastening of the Lord," an afflictive providence coming from the hand of your sovereign God. "Nor faint when you are reprov'd of Him. For whom the Lord loves He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives." So then, child of God, mark it down that God will discipline, train, reprove, and whup you by one means or another, and all of it in His love to you as His adopted child. That's the nature of God's chastening. It would bring it would it not, then, to James 1:2: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers trials [all kinds of trials and pressured circumstances], knowing [and then he goes on to tell us God's purposes in them]...."

Well, we come quickly, then, to number four. We've looked at the origin, God's love; the subject, each and every one of His children; the nature, afflictive circumstances. Fourthly, what's the goal of God's paternal discipline? What's the goal God has in mind? Well, let's look at the text. Verses 10-11:

"For they [our earthly fathers] indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed good to them; but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields peaceable fruit unto them that have been exercised thereby, even the fruit of righteousness."

Here are the two purposes of God, and they really are one: that we might be partakers of His holiness. I can't improve upon the words of John Owen who commenting on this writes,

"Our profit is that we might be partakers of His holiness, that is, the holiness which He requires of us and approves in us. This holiness consists in the mortification of our lusts and affections, the gradual renovation of our natures and the sanctification of our souls, the carrying on and increase of those things in that which God designs in all chastisements. Next to our participation of Christ by the imputation of His righteousness unto us (that's justification), this is the greatest privilege, honor, glory, and benefit that in this world we can be partakers of. So we have no reason to grow weary of His chastisement."

Do you hear what Owen is saying? Next to having the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, there is no greater privilege, honor, glory, and benefit than to be a partaker of God's holiness. Do you regard that to be true? No greater privilege than that God in His love would be working on you and on me that we might more and more reflect His character as embodied in the person of Christ. "For whom He did

foreknow, He did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son," that He might see more and more of the family likeness of the elder Brother. And He looks at the elder Brother seated at His right hand, and then He looks down at you and me and says, "Ah yes, that afflictive dispensation, that bit of pressure there, that bit of disappointment there, that bit of trial there, it's working in them. And I see, aha, a little more like My Son." And He looks, "aha, a little more like My Son," that we might be partakers of His holiness. That's His purpose. He's not out to make you heel-clicking happy all the time. He wants to make you holy. He wants to make you like His own beloved Son. And He's committed to do it. That's why He chastens and scourges every son whom He receives, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

Then notice, he says that we might yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness, not the right-standing with God that becomes ours in our justification, but the righteousness comprised of growing conformity to God's absolute standard of right, which is His holy law: perfect love to God and to neighbor. Bring the two things together and you say God's goal in His loving, fatherly discipline is to increase the family likeness after the pattern of His beloved Son. Dear brother and sister, the God who is so determined to give us the status of sons and daughters that He sent His Son, in the fullness of the time, He sent forth His Son to redeem us that we might receive adoption as sons. That God so determined to give us that status that He sent His Son, so determined that we might know and enjoy our status. He sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, enabling us to cry, "Abba, Father." He is determined to have the family likeness, and He's going to whup you good to get it. That's what the text is saying. He does this to the end that we might be partakers of His holiness, that we might render the fruit of righteousness.

Then we come fifthly: what's the proper response to God's paternal discipline? What is the response that you and I ought to render to God when He brings upon us those afflictive, negative providences that press us and gall us and stretch us? What's our response to be? Three things: expect it, understand it, and submit to God in the midst of it.

Number one: expect it. Get rid of the idea that God will insulate us and protect us from affliction, from that which galls and disappoints us. Every son loved and received is chastened, is reprov'd, is whupped. He is chastised by His heavenly Father ("whereof all are partakers"). You see, as long as there's sin in you and me; as long as there's any grace not fully developed up to the measure of Christ Himself, God's got work to do in us. Anyone here want to say, "All sin has been extirpated from me--no remaining sin. Every grace has come to its fullest flowering in its conformity to Christ."? As long as there sin to be mortified, graces to be cultivated, then the Father is going to discipline, reprove, and He's going to whup you. And He's going to use these circumstances. He has the whole world at His disposal: all men, all things, all of the atoms and molecules in my body and in the little hairs in my cochlea that pick up the various vibrations and sounds. And He says, "I'm going to kill that one and kill this one." I don't have a clue, except I know my Father wants to make me more like Jesus. And I can embrace it and say, "O God, make me more like Your Son as a result of that affliction." Expect it.

Secondly, understand it. It comes from His heart of love. It is brought to make you more like His Son to bring the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Don't have somebody have to say to you what the writer had to say to these believers:

"Have you forgotten? There's a passage that's reasoning with you, that ought to help you in the midst of your affliction. You have forgotten the passage which reasons with you as with sons. And shame on you. Understand the origin is His heart of love. Understand its goal is to make you like Christ."

Then thirdly--and this is the heart of it--submit to God in the midst of it. Look at verse 9: "Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh chasten us. We gave them reverence."

Let me pause and say, you kids, listen to me. You've got fathers concerned enough to try to form your character by discipline, reproof, the whip, the paddle, the spoon. Then give them reverence. Thank God for it, that you don't have a father that says, "Well, I'll just let you do your own thing and let you end up a hellion."

"The rod and reproof give wisdom [not just reproof, the rod].." There is no child of God in this church family who doesn't need the rod. At what age should the rod be laid aside and what circumstances? Those are matters to work through before God. But don't any of you say, "My child is too sensitive. My child is too this, too that." No, the rod and reproof give wisdom. That's what the Bible says. The wisdom of God has spoken, and the passage says we give such parents reverence. We get old enough to realize what they were doing, and we thank God, and we thank them.

But now the writer to the Hebrews goes on to say, "We gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?" The Greek word "in subjection" is a military term. It means to range yourself under another under authority. He says, "Shall we not range ourselves under the authority of our Father and live." Find true abundant life in the posture of a hearty embrace of the Father's discipline. That's what God calls us to, to submit to God in the discipline. And that will mean going back to verse 5: "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd of Him." The first, insensibility: "O well, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. This is just a problem. This is just a frustration. You expect it. In the world you will have tribulation, so grit your teeth and just ride it out." That's insensibility, indifference to God's chastening. It will never accomplish its purpose if you treat it with insensibility and with indifference.

On the other end of the spectrum is, don't be dispirited by it. Despondency is condemned. Don't be overwhelmed by it, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him. "O, I must be the most miserable..." And you end up being paralyzed. That's what he goes after in verses 12 and 13: "Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees; and make straight paths for your feet, that that which is lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed." He says, "Don't allow yourselves to be paralyzed with despondency." You say, "I must be the worst child God has in His family. He brought this upon me and that upon me. Woe is me! Woe is me!" No, no, he says, "Now stop it. My son don't regard lightly. And on the other hand, don't faint." Don't treat God's discipline with insensibility on the one hand or despondency on the other. But in the language of verses 12 and 13, see what God is doing in the light of His Word; embrace His purposes from the heart: "Lord Jesus, what are the sins You are going after in this difficult circumstance?"

One of our men got stuck in a motel half way across the country this week because of weather problems, and I couldn't help but think of him when I was preparing the

sermon. What's he need to do in a situation like that. Well, he can get mad and get angry and cuss the weather. On the other hand, he can say,

"Lord Jesus, I don't have a clue why I'm out here, but You know what You're doing. Work in me whatever grace You want to work in me. Getting the plane out of here is no big deal for You. But getting some sin out of my heart, that's the big deal. Now Lord, what sin are You going after? What grace do you want to cultivate in me?"

Matt, excuse me for using you, but I couldn't help but think of you when I was sitting at my desk. That's what we do with these things. We don't allow ourselves to get buried by them. We don't treat them with indifference. But we come to our God with a mind instructed by the Word of God, knowing the purpose of our loving heavenly Father. And we submit to God and embrace it. And then we look to Him, that He might go after the sin He's seeking to mortify, the grace He's seeking to cultivate in us. "Shall we not be subjected to the Father of spirits, and live?" This is what God calls us to in the midst of our afflictions. John Brown writes ,

"And here let it be distinctly understood that it is not affliction taken by itself that is represented as producing this effect. It's affliction understood to be and treated as the chastisement of the Lord. The natural effect of affliction on an unsanctified mind is either to irritate or to depress. In either case, instead of promoting, it hinders spiritual improvement. That, however, arises from the ignorance and unbelief and obstinacy of the person afflicted. And even with regard to Christians, it's just as true that in the proportion as they regard and improve affliction as the chastisement of the Lord, that affliction will promote their spiritual well-being."

So my dear fellow child of God, God's going to beat up on you. And this is why there's a lovely little touch in here when it says, "those that are exercised thereby" in verse 11. It's a five syllable Greek word. Transliterated, we get our word gymnasium. He uses the athletic imagery, that there are people who go into the spiritual gymnasium when afflictions come, and there they strengthen spiritual muscles and they're exercised by that affliction. And out of it comes greater likeness to Jesus, greater conformity to the Son of God.

So I say in closing, my adopted brothers and sisters, here's the teaching of the Word of God concerning the sixth great privilege and blessing of adoption: the discipline, the reproof, the scourging of our heavenly Father. Remember its origin: whom He loves, He chastens. The subjects: all of His children. The nature: all of our afflictive circumstances. Its goal: partaker of His holiness, fruits of righteousness. The proper response: expect it, understand it, and submit to God in it.

Now then, coming all the way back to where I started, John said, "In this the children of God are manifested, and the children of the devil." This is stuff for the children of God. You who are the children of the devil, one or two things will happen to you. God may surround you with kindness that will cause you to drop into hell smothered with His goodness. If you don't believe that, read Psalm 73. That's what unstrung the psalmist. He looked at wicked men around him; he said they had no trouble in life; they had no trouble in death. All their bills are paid; their family's all together. Everything looks hunky dory--no problems. But he says, "I'm afflicted everyday. Every time I turn around, I see the rod of God upon me." He said, "I couldn't figure it out until I went into the sanctuary and I understood their latter end."

O my unconverted man, woman, boy, or girl, face your latter end! God may be insulating and protecting you from affliction and trouble and disruption that will only make hell all the hotter, because His goodness is intended to lead you to repentance. And by not leading you to repentance, Paul says you treasure up unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath and the righteous judgment of God, because His goodness leads you to hardness of heart. I beg you, I plead with you, face the latter end, the latter end, the latter end.

Then on the other hand, there may be some of you greatly afflicted. You're not in Christ, but you're greatly afflicted. What do you do with your afflictions? You just tough them out. You just ride them out to no purpose whatsoever. What a wonderful thing to turn to Christ, to turn from running your own life. Throw yourself upon the Savior. And then in Christ, if God continues to choose to afflict you, you will see those afflictions as expressions of His loving, fatherly concern for you as His child. O, that you might go to Christ and find in Him the salvation that has brought us into that place of being His sons and daughters, the objects, the subjects of His loving, fatherly discipline.

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