

Family Discipline (Hebrews 11:39–12:24)

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Introduction

1. Christ's *church* is pictured under two figures.
 - a. The church is pictured as a *body* having many parts functioning for the benefit of the whole under one head, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:4–7).
 - b. The church is pictured as a *family*, children of one Father (John 1:12, 13; 1 John 3:1).
2. The *family* view of the church focuses on its being community, interdependent (in relationship and function) under the direction of the head, Jesus Christ.
 - a. The church is a new-covenant *assembly* or congregation patterned after the tabernacle/temple of the old covenant to serve as the dwelling place of God on earth, which is to imitate the true tabernacle in heaven.
 - b. Thus, the church is composed of all whom Christ has redeemed. This community is represented on earth by local assemblies. This stands in stark contrast to the view that the church is individual organizations whose differences are designed to meet the preferences and diverse interests of the individual believers it attracts.
3. The identifying features of family members are what we are considering in these messages.
 - a. We have considered the identifying mark of family members—*faith*. They “*walk by faith and not by sight*” (2 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 11).
 - b. We also considered the identifying characteristic of family members—*cross-bearing*, by which they share in the suffering of Christ (Luke 14:27; Philippians 3:8).
4. Today we want to observe a third mark of God's family—*discipline*. What a father does in training his children is discipline (Hebrews 12:7). The Greek *paideia* translates *discipline*, which refers to the upbringing of children who need direction, instruction and a measure of compulsion.

I. Endurance Encouraged

1. Why must we *run* the race?
 - a. The ones honored in God's Hall of Faith (ch. 11) are said not to have received what was promised to them—their being made perfect, complete or fulfilled (11:40). God delayed their fulfillment because He was preparing something better for His new-covenant saints; then all would be complete.
 - b. The obligation of new-covenant saints to live out their faith rests on this future goal of the kingdom of God (Zion) and the New Jerusalem, which they now experience in the church (12:22).
 - c. This kingdom, now but not yet realized, is composed of the church (*ekklesia*) of the firstborn; God, the judge of all; the spirits of just men made *perfect* (complete or fulfilled); and Jesus, mediator of the new covenant (12:23).
 - d. Old-covenant saints (ch. 11) are now observing the church that should be living out the covenant for the glory of God under the better promises (12:1).
2. How, then, are we to *run* the race with *endurance*?
 - a. We are to run with *endurance* (perseverance; 12:1). This requires us to lay aside everything that hinders us, every *weight* (unnecessary things, that, though not sinful in themselves) and the clinging sin—*unbelief*—which destroys the race (3:19).

- b. We are to keep *looking* to Jesus, the greatest example of perseverance (12:2–4). Jesus’ example (enduring the hostility of sinners) must warn the saints against *growing weary* (in body) and becoming *faint-hearted* (in mind)—emotionally worn out.

II. A Truth Forgotten

1. Those addressed in Hebrews 12 were wavering and unfaithful to the new covenant in their struggle against sin (12:4) because they were forgetting an OT *exhortation* (Proverbs 3:11 cited in 12:5).
 - a. Their struggle was the fruit of circumstances out of control, as seen in their condition (12:3). The Word of God should have informed them (vv. 5b, 6) that their struggle was part of the Lord discipline of His sons whom He loves.
 - b. This Scripture assures all believers that there is no son that the Father does not discipline (12:7). If you are not being disciplined in holiness, you are not a son (12:8). If this is what we expect in life from our earthly parent, shall we not find it true of our Heavenly Father also (12:9, 10)?
 - c. Discipline is not pleasant when it is experienced; however, “*it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*” (12:11) because we are to “*share his holiness.*”
2. The Father is committed to the sound instruction of His children for their best interests, and thus they must trust Him. Positive steps for His sons to pursue follow parental discipline (vv. 12–17).
 - a. They are to stop being *discouraged*, abandoning fear and despair; neither are they to become exhausted in the race (v. 12; Isaiah 35:3, 4).
 - b. They are to *follow the way* that God has provided for them. On the way, they are to help others, the spiritually *lame*, to stay on the path and not be permanently *disabled but rather healed*.
 - c. The finish line of the race is *peace* with all men and *holiness* before the Lord, which we are to pursue (like a hunter stalking his prey). (Remember Heb. 7:1, 2).
 - d. To finish the race successfully, the runner needs personal *diligence* and *care* for the spiritual welfare of others, seeing that no one *misses* or falls short of *the grace of God* (4:16; 3:12–14).
3. The example of Esau concludes the section. Isaac, Esau’s father, thought it would be better for Esau to live in subjection to a man of temperance, Jacob.
 - a. Esau failed to appropriate the grace of God, which resulted in a root of bitterness, causing trouble for himself and defiling others (v. 15; Deuteronomy 29:18).
 - b. Esau foolishly despised his birthright, a choice he later regretted and for which there was no repentance. Guard your spiritual rights with great caution.

Conclusion

1. Difficult times are coming, and we are called to face difficulties with faith and determination, persevering in God’s ways and pursuing care (*peace*) for others and *holiness* before God. Those believers who have preceded us did it, and they are looking to us to do it also.
2. Jesus is our great example because He endured His suffering with His eye on the joy set before Him, the redemption of His people. We follow Jesus and joyfully accept whatever trouble He sovereignly permits for our good as He is glorified.
3. This passage presses on us what we are commanded to do in chapter 10, verse 25.
4. We have a kingdom that cannot be shaken, ruled by Jesus and peopled by the righteous made perfect (v. 25).