

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 20, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 515, 532, 381, 523:1-4, 520:11.

Lessons: Proverbs 3:1-12, 1 Peter 1:1-9, Matthew 24:4-14.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 12:4-13.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Two weeks ago you heard about the importance of keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus as we run our earthly race from the verses just before our sermon text. Last week you heard about the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. Today we talk about “God’s discipline”. The English word discipline comes from the English word disciple, which comes from the Latin words related to a pupil learning. And the word “pupil” suggests a young person, a novice, one who needs to learn much. But God’s words today are directed to people of all ages. God’s discipline leads to great, eternal, blessings.

Today we look at

GOD’S DISCIPLINE

- 1. Our human fathers disciplined us for our good.**
- 2. God’s discipline is for our eternal good.**

We have all been disciplined by our “fathers”, that is, by our parents. As adults, we have come to respect them for doing it. In how many Christian families haven’t we heard that adults appreciate their parents – and the discipline their fathers gave them.

The first readers of this letter have by no means tasted the worst form of persecution yet. They haven’t had to shed blood for being followers of Jesus. But they were striving, fighting, struggling against sin. And who among us isn’t striving – fighting – against sin? The sins of the world press on us from outside us, and our own sins trouble us from within us.

Jesus had to shed blood to save mankind. That happened when he ‘died on the cross to save us’.

The previous chapter talked about Old Testament heroes and for some of them there had been a bloody end to their life on earth. The first readers of this letter had had difficult days in the past but had not had to shed blood, to die for their faith. Two chapters ago we read: ***“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.”*** Hebrews 10:32-34 (NIV)

But even now they were struggling as their opponents tried to convince them into abandoning their faith in Jesus. Perhaps the future would even demand their blood. Now was no time to be confused or unclear about the role of affliction or as Scripture calls it here, ***“discipline.”***

Discipline can be defined as the training necessary to lead a child to maturity. It is the instruction and correction, the leading and warnings one receives so that character may be molded and maturity achieved. Discipline includes suffering.

Sometimes discipline comes directly from the hand of God. It should also come from Godly parents, especially fathers, as our text talks about. Sometimes it is a hard lesson from the enemies of the believer. But the child of God will realize that God ultimately permits discipline, which may often be hardship or suffering. We read in Proverbs: ***“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline [instruction, correction, chastening] and***

do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.
Proverbs 3:11-12 (NIV)

Discipline and suffering also give us courage to endure in our fight against sin, against the wicked people of the world, against Satan, and against our own sinful flesh.

But how do we react to discipline? How should we, who are called to be God's children react to discipline? ***"Do not make light of"*** it the Word of God tells us. When God disciplines, we dare not be indifferent. God may be saying something important that his children can hear better when shivering in the storm than when basking in the sunshine. To make light of God's discipline might be to miss the message.

Nor are we to "lose heart" because of it. God never forsakes his own. When he tests, he also toughens. However heavy the discipline, his grace will cover everything. We need to remember that when we are disciplined. Saint Paul comforts us with these words: ***"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*** 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

The right reaction to God's discipline is confidence in God's love. Those whom he loves he disciplines. Sometimes that even includes, in a figurative sense, painful flogging with the whip, as the Greek word translated "punish" indicates. Proper training involves both instruction in the way to go and correction when behavior is wayward, disobedient, and rejecting what is right or proper.

Remember that behind such action is God's love of the highest kind, as measureless as God himself and magnificent in purpose. From such a loving Father never comes more – or less – discipline than is necessary for his children.

Remember, too, that these words are addressed to sons, to children, and that in itself is an important truth: to be called sons of God. The believers should not make light of or despise the discipline of the Lord. The sons of God, his adopted children by faith in Jesus Christ, are special to the Lord. They are to endure, take it patiently and persevere.

God disciplines us in many ways. God trains and educates his children, particularly through the necessary chastising. The discipline which children of God endure is a sign of God's love. Because he loves us, he disciplines us.

As his sons God is dealing with you. The sufferings of Christians are evidence that God considers them his sons and treats them as such. They need such training in order that their sonship may be maintained and should rather be thankful for this evidence of their heavenly Father's regard and loving concern.

Our text reminds us more fully of God's care involved in discipline. 'Keep enduring hardship as discipline,' his readers are urged. Their current troubles were actually for their training and that training was a visible sign that they were God's sons. Aren't fathers supposed to train their sons so they mature instead of remaining childish?

Discipline may be difficult. ***"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."*** Proverbs 13:24 (NIV) Only the illegitimate remain un-disciplined and untrained because they have no father to care for them. The lack of discipline may sound good, but in reality it shows a serious problem. It reveals a lack of sonship and leads to tragic results.

"Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Scripture again uses the example of our earthly family. ***"We have all had human fathers who disciplined us."*** Certainly Christian mothers discipline, too, but fathers as heads of the household are finally responsible to God for such disciplining. We had fathers of our flesh to discipline us, and we gave them reverence; should we not much more subject ourselves to the Father of spirits and live?

To our earthly fathers we gave honor and respect according to the Fourth Commandment. But if we did so much for our earthly fathers, who were, after all, merely human, should we not so much the more give cheerful and obedient submission to God our Father in heaven?

Even when God has to correct us for some fault, it is not to show his anger, but to reclaim and redirect his wayward sons. This Father has a love which cannot fail and a wisdom which cannot make mistakes. To see

his caring hand behind life's trials and to submit to his shaping discipline is to live in the fullest sense of the word.

The Word of God also reminds us more fully of God's purpose involved in discipline. God's discipline is totally and only for our good, ***"that we may share in his holiness."***

Earthly fathers can only discipline ***"for a little while,"*** while their children are growing up. Earthly fathers can only discipline as they think best, and at times make mistakes.

With God's discipline there is no error. It is only and always profitable for his children. The profit he has in mind is ***"that we may share in his holiness."*** The holy God, who is removed from all sin, wants his children to be like him. Jesus explains in the Sermon on the Mount: ***"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*** Matthew 5:48 (NIV) First he makes them holy by leading them to the Savior. Then he leads them to walk more and more in the holy footsteps of that Savior. Finally, in heaven he crowns them with perfect holiness. When we see his gracious purpose, we see how important his discipline becomes.

We know that at the time discipline can be painful, but that is because we seldom see the outcome immediately. Like fruit on a tree, the ripening takes time. Those who view the Lord's discipline as training of their souls will reap a ***"harvest of righteousness and peace."*** Being right with God through faith in Christ's atoning work, they will more and more walk in right conduct toward God and their fellow men. The result is ***"peace,"*** that little word for that big feeling which comes from knowing sins are pardoned for Christ's sake and lives are powered up for his service. Such a view of discipline helps overcome faith's complaining.

God disciplines in order to strengthen. Those who know this are to put forth their best effort for themselves and for others.

Our text concludes with an unusual picture, unless we remember we are running a race toward eternal life with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Any Christian readers who are on the brink of spiritual collapse, are told to reinvigorate limp hands for spiritual battle and lame knees for faith's race. We are told to ***"make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."***

Those who are strengthened by God's discipline are to help clear the track of any obstacles in order to make travel easier for the weak. Weak Christians, not knowing which way to turn and in danger of turning away from Christ, need help from the strong. When the road of faith is rough, the danger that the lame become totally disabled increases. That's why the author urges so strongly ***"Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Make level paths for your feet."*** The power for such spiritual renewal for all who run the course comes from God. The power to keep their eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, comes from God.

We have all experienced God's discipline. Sometimes it comes in sharp and swift doses, almost taking our breath away. Other times it comes in slow and steady waves, almost wearing us out. When it comes, who of us hasn't asked, "Why?" The "Why" is because our Father loves us and wants to mature us for heaven. Through his discipline he strengthens our faith and uses us to strengthen others. His discipline will not go on forever. The day will come when he on whom we fix our eyes in faith will return, and when he does, then we shall see him face to face and receive the end of our faith, eternal life.

What a joyous day that will be, when we are done with all sin, pain, sorrow, sadness and death! Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen.