

Sermon August 21, 2016 – Pentecost

## Different Perspective

Hebrews 12:4–29



Dear friends in Christ,  
Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior  
Jesus Christ.

Our meditation this Morning is based on the epistle reading of Hebrews chapter 12. Where we are taught that discipline is an elemental part of the Christian life, of being Children of God, the lack of it would mean that we are not God's children yet.

However discipline is something we don't look too keenly on, especially when we understand

discipline as a punishment only.

However the dictionary tells us that discipline is "the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience." So it is not only punishment but it is also training. But still, how much really, do we like the word training?

Discipline is not something we look keenly on, but the consequence is certainly of great importance for us God's children, although depending on our perspective so goes the end result.

Let me illustrate it this way: "A young boy named Johnny is with his mother at the grocery store. As they're in the checkout line, Johnny sees another young boy take some chocolate from the shelf, put it in his pocket, and quietly walk away. Johnny is hungry, and the chocolate looks good, so he follows the other boy's example. It seemed so easy. After Johnny's mom finishes paying, they walk out of the grocery store and to the car. It's there that his mother notices the chocolate. After some direct questioning, his mom gets the truth, and she is not happy. It's one of the worst days of Johnny's young life. His mother scolds him, makes him apologize to the manager, and it's no candy for a month."

Now, if you were Johnny, how would you feel about what just happened, you were hungry needed food, and the store has lots of it, so what's the problem? Besides, the other boy did the same, and it was he who did it first.

But, from John's perspective this is what is happening: When Mom first finds out, Johnny gulps and thinks to himself, Mom is going to kill me. He tries to lie, but he soon realizes that Mom sees through the lie. Now what Johnny might perceive at the moment is the belief that his mom is so disappointed in him that she no longer loves him but rather hates him. Now what about the other boy? Well, what of him? He is not her son so nothing is happening there, the issue is with Johnny her dear son. But Johnny might believe that mom might actually love the other boy instead of her own son.

Now, what about the mom's perspective? Well, mom is terribly disappointed and angry, but only because she loves Johnny so much. She surely doesn't want to kill him, or for him to go hungry, but to protect him. And if her son was going to live long and well, then he needed to be disciplined.

What about the other boy, well he is forgotten because he is not her son whom she loves.

Now what about us, how do we feel or how do we react when God disciplines us? God's words tells us so, we wear in 1 Corinthians these words: "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world." (1 Corinthians 11:32)

Yes God does discipline us, but do we accept it really. I'll be the first one to admit that I don't always accept God's discipline, I don't always like to hear his laws and be judged or suffer the consequence of my sins, but I also admit that God's discipline is for my benefit which I should accept for I know he loves me.

As you see, from our perspective, when we suffer or are dealing with the consequences of our sin, our first thought is that God hates us at best or that is not love at all but a cruel god.

Or it is possible that we believe that God has just been a helicopter parent waiting for us to do something bad so that—"Bam!"—he can catch us in the act, but ready for punishment. We see our suffering and pain, and we think God is cruel because he's putting us through all this affliction. God just wants us to suffer and die.

But, now let's see what God's perspective is: Even though we're disobedient children, and more disobedient than we can imagine!, God loves us more than we can comprehend. Everything he does is guided by his great love for us, as the Scripture tells us: "Behold, blessed is the one whom God reproves..." (Job 5:17a)

Or as 1 Corinthians 11 tells us: "...so that we may not be condemned along with the world." (1 Cor. 11:41)

So when God disciplines us, it's because he's making us holy, just as we are already holy in Christ. He is preparing us for eternal life, just as we already have eternal life in our Baptism. God does not want us to die, but to live.

Now, here is another question, salvation the Scripture tell us is by grace alone, through faith in Christ, I don't have to do anything to receive his grace for it is a gift, God's gift. Now if it is a gift and we don't have to do anything to be saved, then why being disciplined, either why is it that I suffer for what I do, isn't God's forgiveness enough, or why do we have to be trained in spiritual disciplines?

Let me emphasize this wonderful word of the Gospel, God's grace is what saves us, not our actions or our going through discipline. It's is Christ death that pays for the penalty of our sins. But we must remember that is that same grace which has saved us that sustains us, and one of God's methods of sustaining us in his grace is discipline. Yes, in my human mind it is hard to understand this truth, but it is the truth, it is the way how God sustains in this life, it is the way how we grow in his likeness.

And an important way for the writer of Hebrews makes a strong point in this chapter.

The Greek word for discipline here is *paideia*, which is translated training. Used in other scripture in reference to a father training his children, or training in righteousness, or God training His children. Therefore what the writer of Hebrews is saying is that God lovingly disciplines His children to train them in right character, in the way of godliness.

But why, why would God use discipline to grow us in godliness? The answer is in the understanding God's perspective. And God's perspective is one of love.

And his love is in the fact that not only he has saved us but that he has made us into his children

Hear again these words from our epistle reading: “And 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. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” <sup>7</sup> 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?” (Vs. 5-7)

This is great and wonderful news God has made us his sons and daughters. He loves us! It is through the blood of Christ, who cries for forgiveness and reconciliation, not vengeance, is that he has made us into his children. (vv 18–24).

God’s discipline then is not a sign of his disfavor, but a sign of his favor. It is because he loves us, and even when we suffer in that discipline, it is for our own good. If God doesn’t allow us to get away with anything, or turn his face the other way when we do bad stuff or, if his instruction and training seems to complicated or too big and great, it is because he loves us.

As somebody said: “A child who has not been taught the meaning of the word “no” by the time he is 4 years old has spent 4 years in the academic school of crime.” (Survey Bulletin)

So you don’t want to your child to end in the world of crime, don’t you?

It is said that the late Tom Landry, coach of The Dallas Cowboys said these words: “The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don’t want to do, in order to achieve what they’ve always wanted to be.”

Therefore, during times of trial, or hard work in spiritual matters, and when our perspective, like Johnny’s, sees God as the enemy, let us see ourselves as he does—as sons, as sons who the Father is bringing home, Heaven. And it is heaven, where you always want to be in, right? But not only Heaven, not only wanting and desiring to be there, but also it is God’s desire and it should be ours, to be Christ-like even here on earth, in the service to God and one another. But for that we do need discipline, and if discipline is seen as coming from a loving Father to his dear sons, it must be good for us.

Seeing from God’s perspective discipline is good and healthy! We live in the suffering of a sinful world for a very short time. God’s discipline is his way of guiding us, lest we ourselves fall and lose our blessed forever. And what a blessed eternity it will be—a city of feasting with the angels, perfect holiness, with Jesus forever!

So we endure under trial with hope, not despair, with the result that this present suffering will produce a harvest of peaceful fruit (v 11). God is shaping us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament that we might be more like him each passing day. In turn, God wants us to bear fruit, and so he purifies us from all unrighteousness. This is God forming us, not rejecting us, in trial.

From God’s Perspective, You Are His Son . . . and that’s what matters.

Conclusion: Johnny’s mom had a good perspective. But if she, a sinful mother, disciplined her son lovingly according to her best judgment, imagine how wisely and lovingly our heavenly Father is disciplining us! The temporary pain, suffering, we face now does not compare to the glory he will reveal! Therefore, strengthen your hands

and knees and forge ahead, because you are walking to glory (v 12). You are sons, God says, his sons through Christ, and that's the only perspective that matters. Amen.