



## A Biblical View of Godly Discipline

By Pastor John Patti

It is my observation that discipline has been rejected among many believers today. They may want it for others, but not for themselves. The false teaching that God loves people with no consequences for sinful conduct is pervasive. The truth is that the God of the Bible is a God of love, but He lovingly instructs and disciplines His children. He is not a god of mythology who seeks to punish and must be appeased by our actions to avoid his wrath. Still, some perceive especially the God of the Hebrew Scriptures as a tyrant, punishing the Israelites for their sinful conduct. So, how do we answer them in the light of examples from the Torah? Much of what's written there was instructive for a prosperous life. In Deuteronomy 6:3 and 18, the phrase "that it may be well with

you" is a positive admonition to Israel. Also, Deuteronomy 6:15 is a warning of severe discipline: *(for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.* Is there not blessing and cursing in the law?

Growing up in the Lutheran-Reformed tradition, I was taught that Israel has become the church. Much of the Mosaic Law was transferred into church theology. I was taught that bad things happened to me because I had done something wrong for which God was punishing me. God would punish me if I rebelled. A great fear of God ruled my life. Consequently, like Adam and Eve, I attempted to hide from God. Coming to faith in Messiah has resolved this dilemma. I was unaware of what God had done for me at the cross. His desire was a loving relationship with me. He looked to instruct me through His Word and His Spirit. He was not always looking to chasten me. A loving relationship with God through Messiah

Jesus casts out this mythological fear of God.

There are several ways God corrects behavior. This correction will lead to personal maturity of the one instructed, trained, or disciplined. At times, discipline is achieved in a variety of ways. We train our children to read and have manners and so on, and we correct acts of rebellion. Our guiding principle should be Ephesians 6:4, which says, *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.* Why do we teach our children? We want them to grow and mature into adulthood. We want them to experience a life that is pleasing to God. We want them to enjoy life. In order to achieve this, we build discipline into their character, the godly character of discipline. It is the positive and negative training that builds character and personal discipline into a life. Most instruction for children does not require corrective punishment. But corrective punishment is applied by a wise parent when necessary.



The following two questions are really one: Does the Bible teach different types of discipline when it comes to correcting a believer's understanding and conduct? Secondly, does Scripture use the same Greek word, translated into English, to differentiate between instruction and punishment?

The Greek word *paideias* comes from the root word *pais*, meaning "child." It is used to clarify biblical discipline and is defined as "to train, educate, correct, reprove, or admonish." This word appears eighteen times in the New Testament. It is translated into English differently depending on the context within Scripture. In Luke 23:16 and 22, I Corinthians 11:32, and Hebrews 12:5-10, the NKJV and the ASV translate *paideias* as "chastening," "chastened," "chastise." The same references in the NASV, ESV, NIV, RSV use the word "discipline." These references all pertain to some type of corrective discipline.

The word *paideias* is also translated as "to convey instruction." It appears as "learned" in Acts 7:22, as "taught" in Acts 22:3, as "training" in Ephesians 6:4 and Titus 2:12, as "instructing" in II Timothy 2:25, and as "instruction" in II Timothy 3:16. Hence, *paideias* means "to train" and "to educate." It is not the idea of corrective discipline, but a type of education. It is the maturation of incorporating God's wisdom into one's life.

Now, as God deals with His adoptive children of all ages, He applies the same care in biblical discipline. Believers are disciplined to be conformed to Messiah. One example is found in II Timothy 3:16, which explains that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* In Greek, the word used for "instruction" is *paideias*.

This instruction is in righteousness. It is doctrinal instruction, not discipline as in punishment.

*Paideias* is also used in corrective discipline. God's goal for His children is their spiritual maturity. Providentially, He orders a variety of hardships or afflictions to lead His child to repentance when necessary. In Proverbs 3:11-12, Solomon gave some wise counsel for this type of situation:

<sup>11</sup> My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; <sup>12</sup>For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.

The Hebrew Scriptures primarily use two verbs and one noun when speaking about discipline. The first Hebrew verb is *yakah* (Ps. 141:5). It means "to decide," "to appoint," "to prove," "to correct," and "to rebuke." The second verb is *yasar* (Jer. 10:24; Prov. 9:7), and it means "to discipline," "to chasten," and "to admonish." The noun *musar* comes from the verb *yasar*. The LXX translates *musar* in Proverbs 3:11 as *paideias*, the same word that is used in Hebrews 12:5. Hence, the Hebrew *musar* is the Greek word *paideias*. While the meaning of *musar* ranges from "discipline" and "chastening" to "correction," many English Bibles translate it as "instruction." When reading through the book of Proverbs, instruction is given in a variety of ways. It does not always include punishment, although punishment is sometimes used.

The writer of Hebrews repeated this advice in chapter 12:5-11. Eight times, he used the term *paideias* in these verses. The context of Hebrews 12 talks about Jewish believers returning to faith in Messiah plus law for salvation. The warning was of divine punishment, which came in A.D. 70 by the Romans. There is a place and a time to be "rebuked" (Heb. 12:5) and "scourged" (Heb. 12:6).

Another example is found in I Corinthians 11:32, which reads: *But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.* Some Corinthians were living in sin. Verse 30 explains that God was disciplining them. It states: *many are weak and sick among you and many sleep.* There are other types of sin God corrects with mental or physical afflictions. The sin of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, for example, was so serious that God took them home.

These examples are ample evidence that God orders afflictions and various hardships for His adoptive children living in sin. This type of discipline assures that we are God's legitimate children. Without this discipline, you are an illegitimate child of God, as Hebrews 12:8 points out: *But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

Scripture makes it clear that biblical discipline is twofold, depending on the circumstances. Have you experienced these types of discipline? Have you appreciated it?

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