

BIBLE TRUTHS EXPLAINED

What God's Word teaches about

ADOPTION

Gordon Lyons

KJV Edition

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Adoption

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Adoption

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Part 1

Synopsis: Adoption

Adoption is the placing of a justified sinner into the family of God, and affording to the adoptee all the rights and privileges of sonship. These rights and privileges include full acceptance into covenant relationship with God, together with all its duties and responsibilities, and the full entitlement to the promised inheritance in glory. As the special object of his or her heavenly Father's love, each adopted child becomes subject to the Father's care, preservation, and discipline. Every adopted child becomes a real and permanent member of God's family, and he can never lose his rights and privileges of sonship and inheritance. Only those whom God has called, regenerated and justified can be placed into God's family. God affords to no others the rights or privileges of adoption, nor does he entitle any others to call themselves the children of God.

Note 1

Adoption is by God's Grace

Adoption is a gift of God's sovereign grace. God bestows this gift upon all those whom he has chosen in Christ Jesus from before the creation of the world to inherit the kingdom that he has prepared for them. The Son of God has gone to prepare a place in glory for each and every heir of salvation. To these, and to these alone, is given the right to be called the children of God.

Scripture References

Romans 8:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

⁽¹⁵⁾ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁽⁴⁾ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁽⁵⁾ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

1 John 3:1

⁽¹⁾ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Note 2

Indwelling Holy Spirit is Proof of Adoption

Possession of the indwelling Holy Spirit, together with holiness of life, is proof of adoption. Those only can claim the rights and privileges of adoption or sonship whom the Holy Spirit has graciously and effectually called. Those only can call themselves God's children whom the Spirit is teaching and sanctifying. Those only can say they belong to God's family who have within their lives the pledge and seal of adoption, which is the Holy Spirit of God. Without the indwelling Spirit of holiness, no-one can legitimately claim to be a child of God. (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14)

Scripture References

Romans 8:9

⁽⁹⁾ But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

⁽²¹⁾ Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; ⁽²²⁾ Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

Ephesians 1:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, ⁽¹⁴⁾ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Note 3

Duties and Responsibilities of Adoption

Adoption fully and completely places each son or daughter permanently into God's family. This new standing or relationship brings with it all the duties and responsibilities that we, as God's children, owe to our heavenly Father. These duties and responsibilities include:

- a) separation from the sinful things of the world, and of the mind;
- b) wholehearted love, reverence, trust and obedience toward God as our heavenly Father;
- c) complete and unreserved submission to God's will in all things; and
- d) the desire to honour our heavenly Father in everything we think, say, and do.

Scripture References

Malachi 1:6

⁽⁶⁾ A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where *is* mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?

2 Corinthians 6:17-18

⁽¹⁷⁾ Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you. *{Isaiah 52:11; Ezek. 20:34,41}*

⁽¹⁸⁾ And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. *{2 Samuel 7:14; 7:8}*

2 Corinthians 7:1

⁽¹⁾ Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Ephesians 5:1

⁽¹⁾ Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: (See vv.2-5)

Ephesians 5:6-8

⁽⁶⁾ Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. ⁽⁷⁾ Be not ye therefore partakers with them. ⁽⁸⁾ For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (See vv.9-10)

Ephesians 5:11

⁽¹¹⁾ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. (See vv.12-14)

Note 4

Adopted Children are Heirs of Glory

Each adoptee is made a child of God and an heir of glory. He or she is a joint heir to the Father's inheritance, together with God's only begotten Son. Every child of God shares in the promise of blessings to come, provided they also share in suffering for the sake of Christ. This is another of the responsibilities each child of God must assume as a full member of God's family. (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:26,29; 4:4-7)

Scripture References

Romans 8:17

⁽¹⁷⁾ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

Galatians 3:26

⁽²⁶⁾ For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:29

⁽²⁹⁾ And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 4:4-7

⁽⁴⁾ But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁽⁵⁾ To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁽⁶⁾ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁽⁷⁾ Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

Note 5

Nature of Inheritance Not Yet Fully Revealed

The exact nature of the promised inheritance of the children of God has still to be fully made known. The promise is secure to all the seed. However, the Lord will not fully reveal to us the glories that await us until the day that he calls us into his presence. There, in our Father's house, we will inherit our share in the reward that he has prepared for all his children. On that day, however, there will be no more sin,

sorrow, suffering, pain or death. All these things will have passed away. Then, we will be free to enjoy all the glories of fellowship with a Father who loves us with an everlasting love. We will share true fellowship with his Son who died for us, and who rose triumphantly to secure our justification and glorification. (Rom. 8:18-25; 1 Pet. 1:4-9; 1 John 3:2-3)

Scripture References

Romans 8:18-19

⁽¹⁸⁾ For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy to be *compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. ⁽¹⁹⁾ For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. (See v.20)

Romans 8:21

⁽²¹⁾ Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. (See vv.22-25)

1 Peter 1:3-5

⁽³⁾ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁽⁴⁾ To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁽⁵⁾ Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 John 3:2-3

⁽²⁾ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. ⁽³⁾ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Related Bible Truths

Inseparably linked to the doctrine of adoption are the doctrines of predestination, regeneration, justification, and sanctification. All those whom God has chosen from eternity, and given to his Son, are effectually called by the Holy Spirit to repentance and faith in Christ. All whom the Spirit thus calls, God regenerates, justifies, and adopts into his family as children and heirs.

This great privilege pertains only to the elect. In setting his eternal love upon them from before the creation of the world, God determined that they—and they alone—should become his sons and daughters by the grace of adoption. Everyone whom God thus adopts, the Spirit of grace and of glory seals and sanctifies.¹

¹ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Predestination; Regeneration; Justification; Sanctification*, by the same author.

Part 2

Doctrine of Adoption

The Sonship of Christ, and the Sonship of Believers

In relation to God the Father, a marked distinction exists between the essential and eternal sonship of Christ and the gracious sonship of believers—a sonship that the Father bestows upon them by adoption.

We may express this distinction as follows:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is God's eternal and only begotten Son *by nature*.
2. The believer is God's adopted son or daughter *by grace*.

It is important to remember this distinction.

Meaning of the Word, 'Father'

In modern secular thought, people sometimes limit the term *father* to physical or biological fatherhood. This word, however, has a much more comprehensive meaning. Primarily, the word *father* (noun) means 'one who nourishes, sustains, and preserves'. It refers not only to physical fatherhood, but also to the responsibilities of caring for children and providing for them on a day to day basis.

This is the usage of antiquity, and this is the sense in which God, in his Word, frequently uses this term. This is the sense in which we use the word when we speak of our Father in heaven. Again, this is the sense in which we use the word when we speak of a human father who undertakes the responsibility of nourishing, sustaining, and preserving the children God has given him. This applies irrespective of whether God has entrusted these children to this father (and mother) through natural procreation, or whether the parent(s) has adopted them, or otherwise assumed responsibility for them by becoming their guardian or protector.

The secondary meaning of the word *father* (verb) is to beget. However, a man who begets children, and then fails to nourish, sustain, and preserve them, is not properly a father at all—in the fullest sense of the word. The biological fathering of children can never be detached from the moral and spiritual obligations and responsibilities of fatherhood (or parenthood in general). A man is truly a father when he cares for his children—morally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Similarly, a woman demonstrates her true motherhood (as well as her womanhood) when she loves and cherishes the children whom God has given her or has entrusted to her care, and when she protects them with the whole of her being.

Meaning of the Word, 'Adopt'

In the Bible, *to adopt* means *to place as a son*. It is to take a sinner whom the Spirit of God has effectually called, regenerated and justified, and to afford that newly-born-again person the position of a son of God. What is true of an adopted son is equally true of an adopted daughter. God affords her the position of his very own loved child, and daughter of God.

Regeneration must precede adoption. Regeneration is the gracious creation of a *new nature* or a *new heart*: a person is born again (i.e., born from above). Adoption is the gracious bestowal of a *new position* or a *new relationship*: God places that person into his family as a child and an heir.

Instead of being a child of the devil, and an object of God's righteous wrath, the redeemed sinner now stands in relation to God as his own son or daughter by adoption. In Christ Jesus, he or she is now a child of God's infinite and everlasting love.

To those whom God has chosen and called as his own, the Scripture says:

Isaiah 43:1-4

⁽¹⁾ But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. ⁽²⁾ When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. ⁽³⁾ For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. ⁽⁴⁾ Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life.

Isaiah 43:5-7

⁽⁵⁾ Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; ⁽⁶⁾ I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; ⁽⁷⁾ *Even* every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. (Cf. v.7 with Rom. 9:23-24; Eph. 1:5-6,11-12)

Part 3

Summary of Adoption

We may summarise the principal points of adoption thus:

1. Proof of Adoption

God acknowledges every regenerated and adopted child to be his own son or daughter. This is attested to, and verified, by the inward witness of the Holy Spirit. Whoever has the Spirit of God, is a child of God. Just as a legally ratified certificate of adoption is the indisputable testimony and proof of adoption in the civil realm, so the indwelling Holy Spirit is the indisputable testimony and proof of adoption by God.

(Rom. 8:14-16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:11,13-14)

Romans 8:14-16

⁽¹⁴⁾ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

⁽¹⁵⁾ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.

⁽¹⁶⁾ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: (See vv.8-13)

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

⁽²¹⁾ Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; ⁽²²⁾ Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts. (See vv.19-20)

Ephesians 1:11-14

⁽¹¹⁾ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ⁽¹²⁾ That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. ⁽¹³⁾ In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, ⁽¹⁴⁾ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (See vv.4-10)

2. Children of God

God brings every regenerated and adopted child into the full relationship of his own son or daughter; i.e. he calls them the children of God. The Scriptures clearly attest to this fact. God's Word frequently encourages and exhorts believers to call upon God as their Father. The Bible also assures believers repeatedly that—as those whom the Father has called and redeemed—they are the children, sons, or people of God. As such, they are the objects of God's never-ending love, mercy, and compassion.

(Matt. 6:5-15,25-34; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 John 3:1-2)

Matthew 6:6

⁽⁶⁾ But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (See v.5)

Matthew 6:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. ⁽⁸⁾ Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

Matthew 6:9

⁽⁹⁾ After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. (See vv.10-13)

Matthew 6:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ⁽¹⁵⁾ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (See vv.16-18)

Matthew 6:26

⁽²⁶⁾ Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? (See vv.24-30)

Matthew 6:31-34

⁽³¹⁾ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ⁽³²⁾ (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ⁽³³⁾ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ⁽³⁴⁾ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day *is* the evil thereof.

2 Corinthians 6:17-18

⁽¹⁷⁾ Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you. *{Isaiah 52:11; Ezek. 20:34,41}*

⁽¹⁸⁾ And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. *{2 Samuel 7:14; 7:8; Jer. 31:1,9}* (See 2 Cor. 6:14-16)

1 John 3:1-2

⁽¹⁾ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. ⁽²⁾ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (See v.3)

3. Rights, Privileges and Responsibilities

God affords to every regenerated and adopted child all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities that pertain to the children of God. This includes all the promised blessings of the covenant relationship in their everyday lives. It includes all the duties required of God's children as they seek to honour their heavenly Father. It includes all the responsibilities incumbent upon those who are members of God's household, and whom the Father expects to honour his name by speech, life, and conduct. It includes the full rights of inheritance as joint heirs with God's only begotten and well beloved Son—provided we also share in suffering for Christ.

(Deut. 10:12-21; 26:16-19; Rom. 8:16-17)

Deuteronomy 10:12

⁽¹²⁾ And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, (See vv.13-18)

Deuteronomy 10:20-21

⁽²⁰⁾ Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. ⁽²¹⁾ He *is* thy praise, and he *is* thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. (See v.22)

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

⁽¹⁶⁾ This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. ⁽¹⁷⁾ Thou hast avouched the LORD this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: ⁽¹⁸⁾ And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that *thou* shouldst keep all his commandments; ⁽¹⁹⁾ And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be a holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken. (See vv.1-15)

Romans 8:16-17

⁽¹⁶⁾ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ⁽¹⁷⁾ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together. (See vv.18-25)

4. Training Through Discipline

Every adopted child of God receives discipline in various ways and in differing degrees. This is to confirm them in their status as true children of God, and to train each child diligently in all the ways of the Lord. This is particularly true in relation to holiness (without which no-one will see the Lord). God disciplines us for our good, that he may train us to become holy in all manner of life. Ultimately, this means that—one day—he will fit us to share in his heavenly and eternal glory.

(Deut. 8:5; Job 5:17-18; Heb. 12:4-14)

Deuteronomy 8:5

- ⁽⁵⁾ Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. (See vv.1-20)

Job 5:17-18

- ⁽¹⁷⁾ Behold, happy *is* the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: ⁽¹⁸⁾ For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole. (See vv.19-21)

Hebrews 12:4-6

- ⁽⁴⁾ Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. ⁽⁵⁾ And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children,

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

- ⁽⁶⁾ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. {*Prov. 3:11,12*} (See Heb. 12:1-3)

Hebrews 12:7-10

- ⁽⁷⁾ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

- ⁽⁸⁾ But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

- ⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

- ⁽¹⁰⁾ For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness. (See vv.11-13)

Hebrews 12:14

- ⁽¹⁴⁾ Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: (See vv.15-17)

On the following pages, we will consider the principal points mentioned above in more detail. Firstly, however, we will look at the nature of adoption.

Part 4

Adoption Involves Deliberate Choice

It is inherent in the nature of the case that adoption usually involves the deliberate choice or selection of the person adopted. In practice, there may be some exceptions to this rule—insofar as it concerns legal adoption. For instance, people may adopt a child—not so much out of deliberate choice—as out of a sense of duty and responsibility, which they are prepared to assume on behalf of someone else. For example, a relative may be prepared to adopt a child belonging to another member of their family. They may do this to relieve the natural parent(s) of a responsibility that they are unable or unwilling to assume.

However, situations of this nature do not arise with God. Every adoption by God is a planned adoption. It is the result of a deliberate purpose in the mind and will of God to choose that particular person for himself. God made this choice from before the beginning of the world, and therefore long before the conception or birth of the person selected for adoption. There are no ‘necessary’ or ‘expedient’ adoptions with God. God chooses each person individually—not because of anything commendable or worthy in him or her—but because of his gracious and merciful purposes toward them. Each one is special to him and loved by him; and, in Christ Jesus, God sets each one apart for himself.

Adoption is Not Based on Worth

God predestines a person for adoption from before the creation of the world.

As the Scripture says:

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁽⁴⁾ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁽⁵⁾ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (See v.6)

Adoption, therefore, is not based on anything meritorious done by the person. From eternity, God has already chosen that person for himself—before the person has been able to do anything good or bad. (Cf. Rom. 9:11-16.) Again, adoption is not based on anything of worth that the Lord foreknows that person will accomplish. Adoption is entirely of grace, and it has its foundation in the immutable and sovereign purposes of God in redemption.

Similarly, when God’s Spirit calls a person to faith in Christ, and when God adopts that person as his own, it is not because that person is more righteous and more deserving than others. In the sight of God, no-one is righteous. No-one deserves God’s love. Everyone is unrighteous, and deserves only the wrath of God as the due punishment for their sin. However, in his grace and mercy, God determines to redeem such as these.

To this end, therefore, God sets his eternal love upon every sinner whom he has chosen. By the work of the Holy Spirit in effectual calling, God draws these sinners to repentance and faith in Christ. He regenerates and justifies them, and he adopts them into his own family as children and heirs—purely by his own sovereign grace and mercy.

Regarding the fact that God’s choice in election is based on his eternal love, the Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people:

⁽⁸⁾ But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (See vv.3-11)

God's Sovereign Choice

Adoption, therefore, is not founded on a person's inherent worth or desert. It is founded in the sovereignty of God, and in God's boundless love, mercy and grace toward individual members of fallen mankind. Adoption is part of God's plan of redemption for all his elect people, and is according to his immutable purposes that he decreed in Christ Jesus from before the beginning of time. Thus, God's Word says:

Ephesians 1:4-5

⁽⁴⁾ According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁽⁵⁾ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (See v.6)

Ephesians 1:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: ⁽¹¹⁾ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ⁽¹²⁾ That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (See vv.7-9; cf. v.10 with Col. 1:20; cf. v.11b with Isa. 46:10-11)

Though a person is not worthy of redemption, yet God will redeem him because he will show mercy to whom he will. Though a person is not worthy of adoption, yet God will adopt him because he loves him with an everlasting and measureless love. All this, however, is entirely a matter of God's grace. It owes nothing to the person to whom God shows that grace. As with every other aspect of our salvation, adoption is a free and unmerited gift.²

Concerning the fact that God shows mercy to whom he will, the Scripture says:

Romans 9:15-18

⁽¹⁵⁾ For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. {*Exodus 33:19*}

⁽¹⁶⁾ So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.

⁽¹⁷⁾ For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. {*Exodus 9:16*}

⁽¹⁸⁾ Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will *have mercy*, and whom he will he hardeneth. (See vv.6-24)

² See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sovereignty of God; Predestination*, by the same author.

Precious in the Sight of God

Adoption is entirely of God's grace, and owes nothing to the character—or to the desires or efforts—of the person adopted. Even so, it remains true that every person whom God calls to himself in Christ Jesus is precious in his sight, and of inestimable value. This value derives from the intrinsic worth of God's one and only Son who died to be that person's Saviour. It derives, too, from the fact that God has imputed Christ's perfect righteousness to that person's account.

God loves each adopted child because he sees in each child the image of his own dear Son. This image—the image of God in the likeness of Christ—is not yet fully or perfectly formed in the believer's life. By the work of the Holy Spirit, however, each child of God is being transformed gradually into the likeness of God's Son, in true righteousness, holiness and knowledge. (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10.) This work of grace in the believer's heart and life represents the ongoing, lifelong process of sanctification: a process that the Lord will finally complete in glory.³

Children of God

All those whom God has called into the fellowship of his Son, and to personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, are the children of God. They are children born of the Holy Spirit, and therefore born of God. Thus, the Scripture says:

John 1:11-13

⁽¹¹⁾ He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ⁽¹²⁾ But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: ⁽¹³⁾ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (See vv.6-14)

Everyone, therefore, who by faith receives the Lord Jesus Christ, is received by God, and is placed as a son or daughter into his family. Each child of God has been born spiritually (born again, from above) into God's family. He or she has been born of God.

Such is the expression of God's love for us in Christ Jesus. It is an unremitting love—a love that knows no bounds, and that will know no end. Such is the measure of the affection that our heavenly Father has for us, that he should call us his children. Thus, the apostle John declares:

1 John 3:1

⁽¹⁾ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Again, John assures us:

1 John 3:2

⁽²⁾ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (See v.3)

Such is the glorious prospect of all those who are the children of God by new spiritual birth and by adoption.

³ See further on *Bible Truths Explained: Sanctification*, by the same author.

Part 5

Evidence of Adoption

When a child (or adult) is legally adopted into a family, that person is furnished with an official document known as a *Certificate of Adoption*. This document shows clearly to whom the adopted person now belongs, and to whom he can rightfully refer as his own father and mother. The certificate of adoption bears the official signatures and seal of the court of law that sanctioned his adoption, ratified it, and declared it legally binding. For the rest of his life, that person is able to refer to his adoption certificate as proof—if any were needed—that he is the son and heir of his adoptive parents.

In a similar way, God provides all his adopted children with evidence of their adoption into his family. Documentary evidence is provided by the testimony of the Bible, which declares that every redeemed and regenerated sinner is a child of God. This written evidence is valid and authoritative, because it is the testimony or word of the living God.

Thus, God's Word says:

John 1:12-13

⁽¹²⁾ But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name: ⁽¹³⁾ Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

Galatians 4:4-7

⁽⁴⁾ But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁽⁵⁾ To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁽⁶⁾ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁽⁷⁾ Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (See vv.1-3)

1 John 3:1-3

⁽¹⁾ Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. ⁽²⁾ Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. ⁽³⁾ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

1 John 5:1

⁽¹⁾ Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. (See vv.2-5)

1 John 5:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ *And* we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. (See v.18)

Besides the written testimony provided by God's infallible Word, the Father confirms and authenticates every believer's adoption by identifying and sealing him with the indwelling Holy Spirit. Everyone who

possesses the Spirit of God belongs to God; and those who belong to God are loved by the Father and the Son.

Concerning these things, God's Word says:

John 14:15-18

⁽¹⁵⁾ If ye love me, keep my commandments. ⁽¹⁶⁾ And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever; ⁽¹⁷⁾ *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. ⁽¹⁸⁾ I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. (See vv.19-21)

John 14:23

⁽²³⁾ Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. (See vv.22-24)

2 Corinthians 1:21-22

⁽²¹⁾ Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, *is* God; ⁽²²⁾ Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.

Ephesians 1:12-14

⁽¹²⁾ That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. ⁽¹³⁾ In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, ⁽¹⁴⁾ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. (See vv.4-11)

God's Children are Governed by The Spirit

We have said that the indwelling Holy Spirit is the evidence that we belong to God. However, if we claim to possess the Spirit of God, then the Spirit of God must govern or control every aspect of our lives. In other words, we must not only be *indwelt* by the Spirit, but we must also *walk* or *live* by the Spirit. We must follow after the mind and will of the Spirit of holiness, and not after the desires of the old sinful nature which is still within us.

Holiness in our lives is the hallmark of adoption. It is the outward evidence of the Spirit's sanctifying work within the believer. Thus, the Scripture says:

Romans 8:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

This is how we know that we are the adopted children of God. We must be led by God's Spirit—and God's Spirit is holy. We must follow God's way and will for our lives, and we must bring forth ever-increasing amounts of spiritual fruit, to the glory of God. Thus, to his disciples, the Lord Jesus said:

John 15:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. (See vv.1-15; cf. Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Col. 1:6)

What is true in relation to Jesus' apostles, is true also in relation to all those who would believe on Christ through the apostles' preaching and teaching: preaching and teaching that is found now in the Word of God.

Concerning the necessity of being led by the Spirit, the Scripture says:

Galatians 5:16-18

⁽¹⁶⁾ *This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ⁽¹⁷⁾ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. ⁽¹⁸⁾ But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law. (See vv.1-15)

Galatians 5:19-21

⁽¹⁹⁾ Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, ⁽²⁰⁾ Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, ⁽²¹⁾ Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:22-23

⁽²²⁾ But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, ⁽²³⁾ Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:24

⁽²⁴⁾ And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

Galatians 5:25-26

⁽²⁵⁾ If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ⁽²⁶⁾ Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

Like Father, Like Son

There is a common maxim that says *like father, like son*. Often, the reference carries derogatory or deprecatory overtones. However, we acknowledge that our heavenly Father is always righteous, just, holy, and true. We also acknowledge that the characteristics of our Father in heaven include love, mercy, kindness and compassion. Therefore, by God's grace and the Spirit's power, his redeemed and holy children must endeavour to pattern their character after that likeness. Those who are not being made like him in character and conduct are demonstrating that they are not the adopted children of God.

Part 6

Privileges of Adoption

In ordinary legal adoption, the degree of privilege afforded to the adopted child may vary from one country to another or from one state or province to another. In many countries, an adopted child receives exactly the same rights and privileges as a natural-born child. This includes his full share in the rights of inheritance. In some countries, however, an adopted child may not receive the same standing in law as a natural-born child. In consequence, he may find himself at some disadvantage—especially concerning the rights and privileges of inheritance.

This kind of situation, however, does not arise when God adopts a repentant and believing sinner into his family. As a redeemed child of God, that person receives the full rights and benefits of sonship. There is no question about his position as a son of God, or about his rights of inheritance. Every adopted son or daughter of God becomes a joint heir with Christ, and will share in the same inheritance with the Son of God. Thus, God's Word says:

Romans 8:15-18

⁽¹⁵⁾ For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. ⁽¹⁶⁾ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: ⁽¹⁷⁾ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

⁽¹⁸⁾ For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time *are* not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (See vv.19-23)

Galatians 4:4-7

⁽⁴⁾ But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, ⁽⁵⁾ To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. ⁽⁶⁾ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. ⁽⁷⁾ Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (See vv.1-3)

Responsibilities of Adoption

As a full member of the family of God, each child of God assumes all the responsibilities incumbent upon him. He has duties to perform, and this involves getting to know his Father's will for his life, and being obedient to his heavenly Father's purposes.

Children, however, can only get to know what is required of them if they receive appropriate instruction from their parents. They can begin to fulfil their filial duties toward their parents only when they know what these duties entail. A child, therefore, has to learn about these duties from his or her parents. In the same way, every child of God has to learn God's will and ways from his or her heavenly Father.

In regard to everything concerning faith and practice, God reveals his will and ways for his children in the Bible. There is no other source of such information. It is, therefore, our responsibility as children of God to learn everything about what the Bible teaches, and to apply these teachings to our lives. It is our responsibility also, to teach what we have learned to our children—and to teach them diligently; thus bringing them up in the training and instruction (KJV, nurture and admonition) of the Lord.

To this end, God' Word says:

Ephesians 6:4

⁽⁴⁾ And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (See vv.1-3)

Again, as the children of God, we must not only believe on Christ, but also suffer for his sake. God calls upon each of his children to bear reproach for the name of Christ. This, too, is our responsibility as the adopted and true children of God. Thus, the Scripture says:

Philippians 1:29-30

⁽²⁹⁾ For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; ⁽³⁰⁾ Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me. (See vv.27-28)

Similarly, the apostle Peter says:

1 Peter 3:13-17

⁽¹³⁾ And who *is* he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? ⁽¹⁴⁾ But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled *{Isaiah 8:12}*; ⁽¹⁵⁾ But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: ⁽¹⁶⁾ Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. ⁽¹⁷⁾ For *it is* better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. (See vv.8-12)

Children of Light

The apostle John refers to God as a God of love, and as a God of light. Thus, the Scripture says:

1 John 4:8

⁽⁸⁾ He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. (See vv.9-11,16)

1 John 1:5

⁽⁵⁾ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (See vv.6-7)

Concerning God, the apostle Paul says:

1 Timothy 6:16

⁽¹⁶⁾ Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom *be* honour and power everlasting. Amen. (See vv.13-15)

When we say that God is light, we mean that he is transcendently pure and holy. The Lord God Almighty sets himself apart totally from sin in any shape or form. When, therefore, we speak of the children of God as being the children of light, we are referring to the fact that God has adopted us into his family so that he might train us in holiness and purity of life.

Before God made us his own children, our sins and evil deeds alienated us from him and from his love and fellowship. Then, we were children of darkness—for we could not see, nor could we comprehend, the Light of the world. Nor did we wish the light of God's Word to expose our sinful deeds.

Now, however, this light has illumined our souls and brought forgiveness for all our sins. By his sovereign grace, God has delivered us from the kingdom of darkness, and has translated into the kingdom of light—the kingdom of his own dear Son. We are now, therefore, children of light; i.e. children of righteousness, holiness, and truth.

Walking in the Light

Concerning our responsibilities as children of light, God's Word says:

Ephesians 5:1-2

⁽¹⁾ Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children: ⁽²⁾ And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour. (See vv.3-5)

Ephesians 5:8-10

⁽⁸⁾ For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light: ⁽⁹⁾ (For the fruit of the Spirit *is* in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) ⁽¹⁰⁾ Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. (See vv.6-7)

Those who claim to be God's children must endeavour to walk as Jesus walked. As the Scripture says:

1 John 2:6

⁽⁶⁾ He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Those who do not depart from the deliberate practice of iniquity to walk with Christ, do not belong to Christ. Thus, it is written:

2 Timothy 2:19

⁽¹⁹⁾ Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his {*Num. 16:5*}. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (Cf. Nahum 1:7)

Thus, the Scripture also says:

Ephesians 5:11-13

⁽¹¹⁾ And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*. ⁽¹²⁾ For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. ⁽¹³⁾ But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. (See vv.14-17)

As far as it lies within us, we must endeavour to conform our whole manner of life to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Light of the world. No sin—no evil—can dwell in the presence of light. Rather, it is exposed and expelled by the light. As the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, he will bring to light anything in our life that is dishonouring to our Father in heaven. It is our responsibility to forsake that which dishonours God, and to honour him with all our heart and soul.

Thus, God's Word says:

Malachi 1:6a

^(6a) A son honoureth *his* father, and a servant his master: if then I *be* a father, where *is* mine honour? and if I *be* a master, where *is* my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you... (See vv.6b-14)

Part 7

Loving Discipline (1)

A Father Corrects Disobedience and Rebellion

Sometimes, children can prove obstinate and stubborn, or wayward and rebellious. They may resent giving up those things of which their parents disapprove.

Frequently, however, a child wilfully refuses to heed the lesser warnings and correction given by his parents, and persists instead in his disobedience and rebellion. In such cases, the child's parents may at length be compelled to exercise a more severe form of discipline. Such discipline can, at times, prove very painful—not only to the child, but also to the parents. The application of discipline, however, is part of the parent's duty and responsibility to nourish, sustain, and preserve their children. God holds Christian parents responsible for raising their children in the training and instruction (or nurture and admonition) of the Lord.

So it is with our Father in heaven. When we, as his children, will not yield to our Father's will, or when we refuse to obey the teaching of his Word, our heavenly Father may discipline us for our own good.

This is the topic we will be considering shortly. Before doing so, however—and to avoid any possible misunderstanding regarding what the Bible means by discipline—we will consider firstly the meaning and scope of the word *discipline*. Then, secondly, we will summarise the various forms of discipline that the Lord may apply to the lives of his adopted children.

Meaning of the Word, 'Discipline'

Very often, people assume that discipline is equivalent to punishment. This, however, is a misleading and very inadequate description of discipline. The Bible does not confine discipline to chastisement or punishment alone. It has a much wider scope, and much greater application.

In Greek, the word translated *discipline* (*sophronismos*) literally means *saving (or preserving) the mind*; i.e. by calling a person to soundness of mind, or to the exercise of self-control. In Latin, however, the word that is translated *discipline* is related to the word *discere*, meaning *to learn*. This, in turn, is similar to the Greek word *manthano*, also meaning *to learn*. Thus, a person who is learning (by a process of education), is a person who is being 'disciplined'. This is why the Lord's followers were called disciples. The word *disciple* (Gk., *mathetes*, a learner) is directly related to the word *discipline*.

The Lord's disciples were pupils or learners. They were not being punished! They were being trained. As they listened to the words of the Lord Jesus, they were learning about spiritual truths and learning to apply these truths to their own personal lives. Later, when the Lord told his followers to *make disciples* (Gk., *matheteuo*) of all nations, he was commanding his disciples to *instruct* all nations about God's way of salvation. Again, the Lord was telling his followers to provide these new converts with sound *teaching* in the basics of the faith.

In the Bible, therefore, to discipline someone means to instruct, to teach, or to train that person. It also means to learn by receiving such instruction, teaching, or training from others. This covers a wide range of teaching or training which does not include any punitive element.

There are, however, some forms of discipline that do include a punitive element. We must not overlook these forms of discipline; nor must we minimise their importance and value. To simplify the wide range covered by this term, we will summarise some aspects of Biblical discipline on the pages below.

Different Forms of Discipline

For easier reference, we have sub-divided the different forms of discipline into two categories: non-punitive, and punitive discipline. In practice, there may be some degree of interaction or overlapping between these two categories. We should note that the following examples of discipline represent only a small number of possible cases or situations. There are some forms of discipline that have not been included below.

Non-Punitive Discipline

1. *Instruction and Training*

Discipline involves *instruction* and *training*. We are being disciplined when we are being instructed from the Word of God, or when that Word is being explained and applied to us. Similarly, we are being disciplined when someone shows us a particular verse or passage of God's Word that, we are forced to acknowledge, has a valid application to some aspect of our lives. Again, when the Holy Spirit brings us under conviction of sin, we are being disciplined by the Lord. Finally, a child is being disciplined by its parents when it is being instructed and trained diligently in all the ways of the Lord.

(Prov. 22:6; 2 Tim. 2:24-26; 3:14-17)

Scripture References (Instruction and Training)

Proverbs 22:6

⁽⁶⁾ Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

⁽²⁴⁾ And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all *men*, apt to teach, patient, ⁽²⁵⁾ In meekness instructing ⁴ those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; ⁽²⁶⁾ And *that* they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will. (See v.23)

2 Timothy 3:14-17

⁽¹⁴⁾ But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned *them*; ⁽¹⁵⁾ And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ⁽¹⁶⁾ All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ⁽¹⁷⁾ That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (See vv.12-13)

2. *Exhortation and Command*

Discipline involves *exhortation* and *command*. As part of the teaching we receive from the Word of God, we constantly are exhorted to follow certain courses of action—such as pu-

⁴ *instructing*: Gk., παιδεύω (*paideuo*) educate or discipline—instruct with correction, or teach.

riety of conduct, and holiness of life. Similarly, God's Word commands us not only forsake every sinful thought, word and deed, but also every kind of evil (including sinful attitudes and dispositions). That Word also commands us to resist or flee from every form of temptation: temptation from the world; temptation from the flesh (the corrupt or sinful nature); and temptation from the devil. These exhortations to holiness of life and conduct, and the commands to forsake evil, are different forms of discipline. They both involve instruction and training that is designed to result in obedience to, or compliance with, God's will in our lives. The summary code of moral and spiritual discipline finds expression in the Ten Commandments. (Exod. chapter 20; Deut. chapter 5)

(2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Thess. 5:22; Jas. 4:7; 2 Pet. 5:8-9)

Scripture References (Exhortation and Command)

2 Corinthians 7:1

⁽¹⁾ Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (See 2 Cor. 6:14-18)

1 Thessalonians 5:22

⁽²²⁾ Abstain from all appearance of evil.

James 4:7

⁽⁷⁾ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (See vv.8-10; cf. Eph. 4:27; 6:11)

1 Peter 5:8-9

⁽⁸⁾ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: ⁽⁹⁾ Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (See vv.10-11)

3. Admonition and Correction

Discipline involves *admonition* and *correction*. In his Word, God admonishes or warns us against pursuing wrong courses of action, or against indulging the desires of the 'flesh' or sinful nature. Attitudes and practices of this nature are inconsistent with our adoption as children of God and children of light. If, however, we fail to heed God's warnings, he will apply some form of correction to our lives, to bring us to repentance. This form of discipline is designed to be reformatory, so that we will acknowledge our sin and guilt; forsake that sin—seeking our heavenly Father's forgiveness—and pursue God's will for our lives. It is God's will that we should be sanctified. It is God's will also that we should serve and honour him in all that we do.

(Ps. 119:67,71; 1 Thess. 4:2-8; 2 Tim. 4:1-2)

Scripture References (Admonition and Correction)

Psalms 119:67

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.

Psalms 119:71

⁽⁷¹⁾ *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*

1 Thessalonians 4:2-8

⁽²⁾ For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

⁽³⁾ For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: ⁽⁴⁾ That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; ⁽⁵⁾ Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God: ⁽⁶⁾ That no *man* go beyond and defraud his brother in *any* matter: because that the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. ⁽⁷⁾ For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. ⁽⁸⁾ He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 4:1-2

⁽¹⁾ I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; ⁽²⁾ Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. (See vv.3-4)

The foregoing examples illustrate non-punitive discipline. In the section that follows, we will consider some examples of punitive discipline.

Part 8

Loving Discipline (2)

Punitive Discipline

4. Chastisement or Punishment

Discipline involves *chastisement* or *punishment*. If we fail to heed the lesser warnings of God, and if we persist in indulging the desires of the sinful nature—or in disobeying God in any other way—then, eventually, God will apply a more severe form of discipline. This form of discipline is intended to be punitive and painful. Our loving heavenly Father inflicts this punishment upon us, to bring us to our senses. God designs such punishment to make us acknowledge, confess, and utterly forsake our disobedient and sinful behaviour. He also intends it to be the means of restoring us to his fellowship and favour. The actual form of punishment may be varied (see below); but it is analogous to the use of the rod as a punitive discipline for a rebellious and wayward child.

(2 Sam. 7:14-15; 1 Cor. 11:31-32; Heb. 12:5-11)

Scripture References (Chastisement or Punishment)

2 Samuel 7:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: ⁽¹⁵⁾ But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took *it* from Saul, whom I put away before thee. (See vv.12-17)

1 Corinthians 11:31-32

⁽³¹⁾ For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ⁽³²⁾ But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (See vv.27-34)

Hebrews 12:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children,

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: ⁽⁶⁾ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. {*Job 5:17; Prov. 3:11,12*} (See Heb. 12:1-4)

Hebrews 12:7-8

⁽⁷⁾ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ⁽⁸⁾ But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Hebrews 12:9-11

⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? ⁽¹⁰⁾ For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness. ⁽¹¹⁾ Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (See vv.12-14)

5. **Loss of Blessing**

Discipline may involve *loss of blessing*. This form of discipline can include loss of temporal blessings such as health, strength, abilities, employment, possessions, or any or material blessings. This may be accompanied by loss of spiritual blessings. This could include loss of close fellowship with God; loss of interest in spiritual things; loss of desires after holiness and growth in grace, or loss of any other kindred blessings. Again, loss of blessings may be extended nation-wide; e.g. when, in his providence, God withdraws the blessings of nature, and brings drought, famine, or plague to a land. Similarly, if a nation repeatedly sins against God, God may eventually withdraw that nation's peace and security. He may then inflict upon it a judicial punishment such as war, or some other large-scale devastation or disaster.

(2 Chron. 7:13-14; Ps. 38:1-22; 118:18)

Scripture References (Loss of Blessing)

2 Chronicles 7:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; ⁽¹⁴⁾ If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (See vv.12-16)

Psalms 38:1-9

⁽¹⁾ A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance.

O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. ⁽²⁾ For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. ⁽³⁾ *There is* no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither *is there any* rest in my bones because of my sin. ⁽⁴⁾ For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as a heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

⁽⁵⁾ My wounds stink *and* are corrupt because of my foolishness. ⁽⁶⁾ I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. ⁽⁷⁾ For my loins are filled with a loathsome *disease*: and *there is* no soundness in my flesh. ⁽⁸⁾ I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.

⁽⁹⁾ Lord, all my desire *is* before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee. (See vv.10-22; cf. Ps. 32:1-5)

Psalms 118:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

6. ***Illness or Disease***

Discipline may involve *illness* or *disease*. Certain forms of illness or disease are brought upon ourselves by our sinful manner of life. The Lord may permit this to happen in order to discipline us more severely, and to warn us of graver consequences if we do not repent and seek his forgiveness. This form of discipline is not always recognised as such—but the Lord certainly uses it to chastise his wayward children. However, we must not suppose for a moment that all forms of illness and disease are punitive. All forms of ill health stem directly from the effects of the Fall and from God's judgment upon mankind and upon the earth. However, we must emphasise that God does not intend every form of illness to be a punishment for specific sin in our lives. On the contrary, the Lord sometimes permits illness to be the means of bringing us closer to himself and to lead us toward greater blessings in our lives.

(Ps. 106:28-29; 107:17-22; 1 Cor. 11:29-30)

Scripture References (Illness or Disease)

Psalms 106:28-29

⁽²⁸⁾ They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead. ⁽²⁹⁾ Thus they provoked *him* to anger with their inventions: and the plague broke in upon them. (See vv.30-31; cf. Num. 25:1-9)

Psalms 107:17-20

⁽¹⁷⁾ Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. ⁽¹⁸⁾ Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. ⁽¹⁹⁾ Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, *and* he saveth them out of their distresses. ⁽²⁰⁾ He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered *them* from their destructions. (See vv.21-22)

1 Corinthians 11:29-30a

⁽²⁹⁾ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ^(30a) For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you...

7. ***Physical Death***

Discipline may involve *physical death*. Sometimes, we may sin wilfully and persistently against the Lord, stubbornly refusing to heed his corrective instructions and flagrantly disregarding the warnings contained in his Word. On such occasions, the Lord may apply the ultimate form of discipline to his disobedient and wayward child. The Lord may eventually withdraw that person's life to prevent him from committing further and greater sin and rebellion, and to preserve his soul for eternity. This happened with Israel when the entire nation, aged 20 years and over (excepting Joshua and Caleb alone), perished in the desert because of their repeated unfaithfulness and wilful disobedience to God's express commands. This happened also in the early church, when Ananias and Sapphira died at the hands of the Lord because they had lied to the Holy Spirit. Again, it happened in the Corinthian church when some of the Lord's people, who had despised the sacred nature of the Lord's Supper, suffered the punishment of death for their sin. All these things were written down in the Word of God as an example and warning to us.

(Num. 14:29-34; Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30-32)

Scripture References (Physical Death)

Numbers 14:26-34

⁽²⁶⁾ And the LORD spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron saying, ⁽²⁷⁾ How long *shall I bear with* this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. ⁽²⁸⁾ Say unto them, *As truly as I live*, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: ⁽²⁹⁾ Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me, ⁽³⁰⁾ Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, *concerning* which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. ⁽³¹⁾ But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. ⁽³²⁾ But *as for* you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness: ⁽³³⁾ And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. ⁽³⁴⁾ After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, *even* forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, *even* forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. (See vv.1-45)

Acts 5:1-5

- ⁽¹⁾ But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, ⁽²⁾ And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.
- ⁽³⁾ But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back *part* of the price of the land? ⁽⁴⁾ While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.
- ⁽⁵⁾ And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. (See vv.6-11)

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

⁽²⁷⁾ Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ⁽²⁸⁾ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. ⁽²⁹⁾ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ⁽³⁰⁾ For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. ⁽³¹⁾ For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ⁽³²⁾ But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (See vv.17-26)

Part 9

Degrees of Discipline

Although it is only a suggestion based on the foregoing remarks, we might represent the different forms of discipline as an ascending scale. We may summarise this scale as follows:

Degrees of Non-Punitive Discipline

1. *Instruction and Training*

Instruction and training includes all forms of spiritual teaching or education. This form of discipline may be applied from a child's early years onward. It may be effected by parents in the home, by Sunday School and Bible Class teachers and by pastors and other leaders of the church. Parents, however, remain primarily responsible for this form of discipline. God will hold parents accountable to him for the diligence they have shown—or have failed to show—in teaching their children. Similarly, God will hold parents primarily responsible for bringing up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord.

2. *Exhortation and Command*

Exhortation and command includes all forms of encouragement in the faith, together with instruction in the necessity of obeying God's Word, and of obeying every Biblical doctrine and principle. Regular exhortation and encouragement is particularly necessary lest a child becomes disheartened and discouraged by an excessive application of corrective discipline. Whatever form it may take, we must always apply or administer discipline in love. We must aim to instil hope in the child—never despair.

3. *Admonition and Correction*

To admonish is to warn (e.g., of the consequences of pursuing a wrong course of action). To correct is to show where or why something is wrong, and to indicate clearly the right way or the right course of action. This includes the necessity of heeding the express warnings contained in the Word of God. It includes the necessity of showing why certain (perhaps generally accepted) courses of action are wrong, and of indicating clearly from the Word of God the right course of action.

Degrees of Punitive Discipline

4. *Chastisement or Punishment*

This is a punitive discipline that includes all forms of chastening designed to effect repentance and correction. This form of discipline extends—if necessary—to the use of the rod; i.e. corporal punishment. To neglect this form of discipline when it is rightly due is to disobey the express teaching of God's Word. Such punishments, however, must always be rooted in love and concern for the individual, and must *never* be applied out of malice, caprice, or uncontrolled or unjustified anger.

5. *Loss of Blessing*

This is a punitive discipline—possibly used in conjunction with #4 above—which is designed to lead to confession and forsaking of sin, and reconciliation with our Father in heaven. Our heavenly Father provides us with every good and perfect gift, and we must be careful to acknowledge these gifts as coming to us from his hands; i.e. by his grace or providence. At times, God may suspend or withdraw one or more of the blessings that he has bestowed upon us. If this happens, then we must consider the possibility that the loss of such blessings may have occurred because of some unconfessed sin in our lives for which our Father in heaven is disciplining us. The kind of blessings God may suspend or withdraw includes such things as health, strength, abilities, employment, wealth or possessions; or any spiritual blessings like inward peace, contentment or tranquillity.

6. *Illness or Disease*

When applied as a punishment, this is a punitive discipline with similar design to #5 above. We must observe, however, that many forms of illness or disease are not intended to be punitive (although they are related to the judgment inflicted upon all mankind, and upon the earth, at the Fall). However, there are other forms of illness that *are* intended to be punitive. These are the illnesses or diseases that would not have occurred had our sinful life-style or conduct not contributed toward their onset.

7. *Physical Death*

Physical death (the death of the body) is the ultimate form of punitive discipline that God sometimes inflicts upon his people. He does this to effect temporal judgment and punishment, thus saving those people from eternal judgment. Those who wilfully and continually treat the teachings of God's Word with contempt, or who repeatedly despise the lesser judgments of God, leave themselves open to this kind of discipline. Similarly, those who profane that which is holy by their sinful manner of life or conduct, also make themselves liable to this kind of punishment. Under circumstances such as these, loss of life ensures the preservation of a believer's soul.

The chief end of all forms of discipline is holiness of life and conduct. Because of its importance—especially in relation to parents and their children—we have taken time to consider in some detail the various forms of discipline. Now however, we will consider how God applies such discipline to his own adopted children.

Part 10

Filial Duties

As those who are the true children of God, we receive all the rights and privileges of sonship or adoption. However, each child of God must be prepared to assume all his or her filial duties and responsibilities. Filial duties and responsibilities are those duties and responsibilities that a child owes to his parents. These are summarised in the fifth commandment by the expression:

Exodus 20:12

⁽¹²⁾ Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (Cf. Deut. 5:16)

And in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, by the injunction:

Ephesians 6:1-3

⁽¹⁾ Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. ⁽²⁾ Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; ⁽³⁾ That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. {Deut. 5:16} (See Eph. 6:4)

Again, in Paul's letter to the Colossians, it is written:

Colossians 3:20

⁽²⁰⁾ Children, obey *your* parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. (See v.21)

Regarding the children of God, filial duties are the duties that we—as God's children—owe to our heavenly Father. These duties include love, reverence, respect, trust, humility, honour and obedience. If, however, we fail in our duties and responsibilities to our heavenly Father, then God may discipline us for our own good. In this case, God may apply either a non-punitive or a punitive discipline to our lives.

In practice, God may apply discipline to his children by means of human agency, or by changing circumstances in our lives or work from favourable to unfavourable. Alternatively, the Lord may remove certain blessings or benefits from us, or he may bring us into particularly difficult and trying situations.

In each of these examples, God acts on our lives through his works of providence. The examples cited represent just a few of the ways in which our heavenly Father might discipline us to correct some sinful tendency, course of action or attitude of mind. The Lord applies these corrective measures to our lives to produce greater obedience to his will, and to promote increasing holiness of life and conduct.

Fatherly Discipline

As a Father—a Father who faithfully nourishes, sustains, and preserves his children—God has promised to provide for, uphold, and protect us. In addition, he has promised to bless us in all our ways. This, of course, is a conditional promise. It is suspended upon our attitude to our heavenly Father's will, and upon our wholehearted and willing obedience to God and to his Word—in everything. If, however, we fail to honour God as our Father, or if we neglect to obey or apply his Word to our lives, then we must expect God to discipline us.

Although sometimes painful, God disciplines us out of his never-ending love and compassion for us, so that he may purge out of our lives anything that displeases or dishonours him. It is also God's purpose

in chastening us to mould our character and conduct in line with his goal for us. This goal is ever-increasing holiness of life, and purity of thought and behaviour.

God's discipline is founded in his eternal love and mercy for each of his adopted children. Concerning this fatherly discipline, the Scripture says:

Deuteronomy 8:5

⁽⁵⁾ Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee. (See vv.1-6)

God does not discipline us merely for the sake of inflicting pain, grief or sorrow. Rather, out of his deep love for us, he disciplines us painfully only when we will not respond to other methods of correction. Discipline is the proof that we belong to God, and are loved by him. Thus, God's Word says:

Hebrews 12:5-6

⁽⁵⁾ And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children,

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: ⁽⁶⁾ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. {*Prov. 3:11,12*} (See Heb. 12:7-14)

A child who is not disciplined, is a child who is not loved.

Even more to the point, a child whom God does not discipline in love, is a child who does not belong to God. In one way or another, God disciplines every child whom he receives and adopts as his own. Thus, to the church at Laodicea, the Lord said:

Revelation 3:19-22

⁽¹⁹⁾ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. ⁽²⁰⁾ Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

⁽²¹⁾ To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. ⁽²²⁾ He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. (See vv.14-18)

Part 11

Punitive Discipline is Not Harmful

It is a great mistake, and contrary to the teaching of the Bible, to imagine that the *correct* use of punitive discipline may be harmful. We can cause no greater harm to a child than by failing to discipline that child—even to the point of using an appropriate measure of corporal punishment when this is justified and necessary. However, whatever form of discipline we may apply, we must always apply it in love and compassion—*never* in malice, caprice, or uncontrolled anger. Thus, concerning one who belonged to God (Solomon), the LORD says:

2 Samuel 7:14-15a

⁽¹⁴⁾ I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: ^(15a) But my mercy shall not depart away from him... (See vv.12-17)

Concerning David and his descendants, God says:

Psalms 89:27-29

⁽²⁷⁾ Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. ⁽²⁸⁾ My mercy will I keep for him forevermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. ⁽²⁹⁾ His seed also will I make *to endure* forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. (See vv.20-26)

Psalms 89:30-33

⁽³⁰⁾ If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; ⁽³¹⁾ If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; ⁽³²⁾ Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. ⁽³³⁾ Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. (See vv.34-37)

2 Samuel 7:14

⁽¹⁴⁾ I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

If he or she sins persistently and wilfully against him, God will apply punitive discipline to his son or daughter.

To *punish...with the rod of men* is to punish by means of some human agency. For example, for their persistent sin and rebellion, God's people were eventually taken captive into Babylon, where they remained in exile for almost 70 years. The godless Babylonian nation became the 'rod' of God's anger. Yet—exceedingly painful as this rod proved to be—God applied it to his people only out of his intense love for them. Thus, through Jeremiah the prophet, God says:

Jeremiah 30:10-11

⁽¹⁰⁾ Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make *him* afraid. ⁽¹¹⁾ For I *am* with thee, saith the

LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. (See vv.1-9)

Jeremiah 30:14-15

⁽¹⁴⁾ All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; *because* thy sins were increased. ⁽¹⁵⁾ Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow *is* incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: *because* thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. (See vv.12-13)

Jeremiah 30:16-17a

⁽¹⁶⁾ Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey. ^(17a) For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD ... (See vv.17b-24; see esp. v.22)

As can be seen from the above example, it is possible sometimes to understand the 'rod' of discipline in a metaphorical sense. In such cases, the punishment may be understood to be some kind of discipline that is analogous to corporal punishment, and which has the same kind of effect; i.e. it is very painful.

At times, God's Word may speak of the rod metaphorically. However, other instances exist where the Bible clearly intends us to understand the rod as referring literally to corporal punishment, or to a form of punishment producing very similar effects, and which is designed to achieve correction and repentance.

Thus, God's Word says:

Proverbs 3:11-12

⁽¹¹⁾ My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: ⁽¹²⁾ For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth. (See vv.5-10)

Proverbs 13:24

⁽²⁴⁾ He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him quickly.

Proverbs 19:18

⁽¹⁸⁾ Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.

Proverbs 22:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ Foolishness *is* bound in the heart of a child; *but* the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.

Proverbs 23:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ Withhold not correction from the child: for *if* thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. ⁽¹⁴⁾ Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.

Proverbs 29:15

⁽¹⁵⁾ The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left *to himself* bringeth his mother to shame.

Proverbs 29:17

⁽¹⁷⁾ Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul.

God is Treating us as Sons

Let us remember the purpose of discipline:

Hebrews 12:4-8

⁽⁴⁾ Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. ⁽⁵⁾ And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children,

My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: ⁽⁶⁾ For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. {*Prov. 3:11,12*}

⁽⁷⁾ If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? ⁽⁸⁾ But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (See vv.1-3)

Hebrews 12:9-11

⁽⁹⁾ Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected *us*, and we gave *them* reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? ⁽¹⁰⁾ For they verily for a few days chastened *us* after their own pleasure; but he for *our* profit, that *we* might be partakers of his holiness. ⁽¹¹⁾ Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. (See vv.12-14)

Although, at times, God will punish—sometimes severely—yet he will never take away his love or his mercy from his own children. Discipline—even punitive discipline—is the proof that we are God’s legitimately adopted children. As such, our Father in heaven will never disown or disinherit us: for, in Christ Jesus, we are forever precious in the sight of God.

