

Verses 12 and 13 conclude the section on fatherly discipline which began in verse 4. This section is meant to encourage believers as they face the very real temptation to apostatize from the faith, to fall away from the assembly of the believers (10:25), which equates to denying the Lord Jesus Christ since the church is His body. Such apostasy may indeed be “the sin which doth so easily beset us” (compare 10:26 with 12:1 and 4) which believers struggle against under the trials, afflictions, temptations, and pressure from a culture opposed to God and religion opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ.

To properly train us to endure under such opposition, our Heavenly Father disciplines us, not out of anger or even as a punitive response to our sin, but out of love, to prepare us to bear up under trials with the ultimate objective of producing holiness in us (12:11). The author seems to equate the afflictions from the world with the discipline of our loving heavenly Father.

The Nature of the Father's Discipline

The author's concern at the opening of this section (12:4-13) is that the correction of the Lord, our heavenly Father, will be despised and discouraging (12:4). But it should not be, for the following reasons:

- The discipline of the Lord is proof of our **sonship** (12:5 – 8)
- The discipline of the Lord is motivated by a **fatherly love**
- The discipline of the Lord is our being **instructed** by him

“chastening” (v. 5) is *paideuō* the word for the training and instruction of children

- The discipline of the Lord is our being **received** by him

“receives” (v. 5) is *paradechomai* the word for the taking of a child by the hand and claiming as one's own.

- The discipline of the Lord is grounded in his **intimate and complete knowledge** of us (vv. 9 – 10)
- The discipline of the Lord is admittedly unpleasant, but it bears **pleasant fruit** (v. 11)

“Wherefore...” v. 12

Recognizing the nature of the Lord's discipline – that it is for our good – should lead us to be encouraged despite the present circumstances.

“...lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees”

The imagery is from Isaiah 35, specifically Isaiah 35:3 where the context is the promise of a coming kingdom. The author to the Hebrews adapts that imagery to his exhortation that the kingdom has come in Jesus Christ while the final blessings still await us.

In Isaiah 35, God's people are returning from exile. In Hebrews (and presently) God's people are “strangers and sojourners” who “seek a country” (11:13-16). Isaiah is addressing “them that are of a fearful heart,” not unlike those addressed in Hebrews who are wearied and fainting in their minds. The author is exhorting these Hebrew Christians to strengthen the weak and discouraged with the promise of what is to come. Isaiah 35 is the image of what is to come:

- God will come and save you (which he has done in Jesus Christ) (Isaiah 35:4)
- Blind see, deaf hear, lame walk, mute speak (fulfilled in Jesus Christ) (Isaiah 35:5-6a)
- Streams in the desert (Isaiah 35:6b-7)
- A highway to Zion (Isaiah 35:8)
- Songs and everlasting joy, joy and gladness, sorrow and sighing flee away

“...make straight paths for your feet...” (v. 13)

“straight paths” an exact quote of the instruction to sons in Proverbs 4:14 and 4:26-27. Proverbs 2:15 describes the way of the wicked as “crooked” (Proverbs 2:15). There are other warnings throughout Proverbs regarding avoiding wrong paths (see 1:15; 2:12; 2:20; 3:23).

But the “straight paths” and “the way” which the author has in view here is also Isaiah’s “way of holiness,” (compare Hebrews 12:11 and 14) which is the way which God has prepared for the righteous to take new Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (11:10, 13-16; 12:22; 13:14). To do so, “straight paths” are required for their feet. These “straight paths” are the paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3) and holiness, themes from Isaiah 35 which the author picks up here.

The emphasis is not on making the way smooth, because it clearly isn’t, given all that the author has said about discouragement and weariness in the context. The emphasis is on the *believer keeping himself straight*, as in indicated by the closing line in v. 13 *“...lest that which is lame be turned out of the way...”*

“...lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but rather let it be healed.” (v. 13)

The language of the lame being “healed” draws on the imagery in Isaiah 35 of “the lame will leap like a deer” (Isaiah 35:6). The author of Hebrews is exhorting his readers to “make straight paths for your feet” so that they will not be turned out of the way that leads to the heavenly Zion. They are to follow after righteousness and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord (12:14). Those who are spiritually lame (wearied, faint, ready to draw back and apostatize) will find healing only if they walk in straight paths, by which the author means, only if they continue to follow Jesus.

“...turned out of the way...” is a clear reference to the entire theme of this letter: warnings against denying the faith, departing from the living God, an evil heart of unbelief, drawing back to perdition, casting away their confidence, not enduring to the end. Pursuing righteousness under trials with eyes fixated on the future fulfillment of present promises is the essence of living by faith and the only defense against falling away.