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# Keeping Sons and Daughters from Hell

## Hebrews 12:3-17

*Dan Turner*

**Introduction** This morning we continue in our January emphasis on *Spiritual Formation in the Home*. We began on the 6<sup>th</sup> with Pastor Russ' moving message titled *Leading Sons and Daughters to Christ*. The texts he read and what he said challenged us to examine how we speak about salvation with our children. "Do we embrace the biblical Christ as our sole Ruler and Redeemer?" was a question he put forward. "Do we speak in biblical ways to our children concerning the gospel?" was a follow up question. Truly, this was a message not mainly to be examined but to be examined by. Russ started us off by pointing us to Christ.

Last week Pastor Devon proclaimed the glories of the church from a text and in a way that made many of us long for the enjoyment of grace in the context of God's people. His message *Bringing Sons and Daughters to Church* was matchless in many respects. The centrality and indispensability of the local church for our children to grow up unto salvation was an essential contribution by Devon to our January series.

*Keeping Sons and Daughters from Hell* is the title for this morning's message. What came to your mind as you heard this title?

- That terrifies me
- This certainly will not pertain to me today
- That's not theologically accurate
- I'm needing help
- What does that mean?
- What practical help will this message provide?

When I was given the title and tasked to preach the message, here is what came to my mind.

~ Brittany ~Joel ~Seth ~Kara

*Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched (Mk.9:43-48)*

*Shame and everlasting contempt (Dan.12:2)*

*Fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt.10:28)*

*Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil (Matt.25:41)*

*It would have been better for that man if he had not been born (Matt.26:24)*

*None may cross from there to us (Lk.16:26)*

*There will be wrath and fury (Rom.2:6-8)*

*Suffer the punishment of eternal destruction (2Thess.1:9-10)*

*The gloom of utter darkness...forever (Jude 12-13)*

*Their torment goes up forever and ever...they have no rest (Rev.14:11)*

I know just enough about Hell and know much about my children that the reality of this message was almost unbearable.

## Keeping sons and daughters from hell

Today's message is sobering...but today's message is also hope-giving

Many things need to be said concerning this topic that I will not say. The topic is broad and too big for a 40 minute time slot. As I contemplated the scope of this message and meditated upon Hebrews 12, I began to see two responsibilities parents<sup>1</sup> have in “keeping Sons and Daughters from Hell”. Limiting the message to these two responsibilities hopefully will assist us in thinking clearly over and acting carefully upon the essence of today's message taken from Hebrews 12.

The first responsibility parents/guardians have in *Keeping Sons and Daughters from Hell* will be explored this morning in Heb.12:3-11. The second responsibility will be fleshed out this evening from Heb.12:12-17.

We must pray now; for if God does not give us grace by believing his word, this exercise this morning will be in vain and our sons and daughters will be vulnerable. [pray]

The text for today is Hebrews 12:3-11. Please take out your Bibles and follow along with me as I read the text for us. [read]

Essentially, the book of Hebrews has two sides to its one theme. The writer labors to make clear and compelling that 1) Christ is supreme over anything and anyone and that 2) doubting that leads to drifting from and deserting Him leads to devastation and will result in damnation.

In our passage for today, the original readers were exhorted to endure the chastening hand of God (12:1-29). This exhortation is similar to the one in 10:32-39, but now it is more specifically in light of the fatherhood of God (v.7-11). A transition is made from the “great cloud of witnesses” of chapter 11 to the supreme example of the Son's faithfulness in his suffering in order that their faith might be perfected (12:1-4). Since Christ is the Son of God, so believers united by this faith to Christ are sons of God (v. 5). For this reason, God will deal with them as a Father does his own children (v. 5-11). In the midst of the severe warnings comes this note of encouragement: even though the readers are suffering, since they are sons they are saved. This discipline from God is proof that they are indeed sons (v. 8)—in fact, unless they are disciplined they will not grow in grace (v.12-17). Such growth is essential evidence that they will see God uninterruptedly with great joy forevermore (v. 14).

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<sup>1</sup> The primary responsibility for teaching and training children in the home falls upon the father (cf. Eph.6:4). I'm broadening the application out to parents largely due to Proverbs1:8.

With that as our text and theme, we need to sense the tone of this text. When I read it to you, what did you gather? Listening to the very words of this text what is your expectation?

The tone of the text is not playful. Light and jokey are not adjectives one would use to describe this passage. Rather we sense urgency, seriousness, a lack of triviality. This will serve us well as we think carefully over the title and task in front of us today.

The reason for this tone is that the first century church to which the letter was originally written was undergoing much suffering (cf. 10:32ff). And a basic temptation for everyone in times of difficulty is to quit. Losing sight of the object of faith and getting tired the church was settling into the world and lacking the energy for daily discipleship. This according to the writer of Hebrews was a serious condition. Wavering in doubt over God's promises cannot go unchecked. Doubting leads to drifting (2:1-4) and drifting leads to defecting (3:6b-4:13; 5:11-6:6; 10:26-31) and defecting will ultimately lead to denying the faith and living forever in the consuming fire of God (12:18-29).

The Word from God in front of us this morning is a serious Word. And so, let us now give our undivided attention to God's Word and *Keeping Sons and Daughters from Hell*.

As said earlier, from this passage we can glean two basic responsibilities aimed at *Keeping Sons and Daughters from Hell*. The first responsibility deduced from this text for parents is:

### **Teach our children about pain and persecution** **vv.3-11**

Much time and energy are committed to our children from the time they are born to the time they leave home (and our empty nesters know that it doesn't stop there). I've been at parenting now for about 15 years. And noticing my susceptibility and observing our culture it is apparent to me that we do not want our children to suffer. We work hard at giving our children a good life – good home, good food, good clothes, good church, good toys, good birthdays, good friends, good neighborhoods, good health, good schools – Nothing too terribly wrong with this is there?

But as we think together over what this text is saying, we may need to include one more good thing for our children to this list. And you can see this good thing in v.10. "...he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness". To understand the painful discipline of the Heavenly Father, we need to teach our children about pain and persecution. To partner up with the gospel and the Holy Spirit (cf. 2Cor.6:1) to keep our sons and daughters from hell we must teach them about suffering.

### **By considering the Son** **v.3-4**

We teach them about pain and persecution first by considering the Son; vv. 3-4.

## **In his endurance of pain and persecution**

**v.3a**

The weak and wandering church in the first century needed their faith strengthened. This aim sounds similar to the 21<sup>st</sup> century church. They received plenty examples of living by faith in future grace as seen in chapter 11. Now the author wants the readers to notice Jesus as the supreme example of persevering in the midst of pain and persecution. When becoming weary on the way and growing faint in heart because there seems to be no end in sight we need to teach our children to consider Jesus (cf. 3:1).

When they consider him what are they to see?

### **He is both pioneer and perfecter of our faith (cf. v.2)**

Looking at the O.T. saints as examples of living by faith is a good thing (as seen in chapter 11). But here, we have one who is *par excellence*. He is according to Rev.1:5 “the faithful witness” to the Father in the face of persecution even to death, which he conquered and then he became the cosmic ruler [Beale, *Revelation*, 190]. Our sons and daughters must understand when facing pain and persecution that Jesus is both our faith’s pioneer and perfecter.

#### **Pioneer**

They must be taught that Jesus is the pioneer of the faith. He is presented here as the one who blazed the trail that leads to glory that travels through suffering. He is seen as the initiator and leader of the faith. The author wants us to see that as Jesus went before all the O.T. saints he goes before us. “Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt” as Jude tells us and “Jesus who nourished the people in the wilderness” as Paul tells us is the same Jesus who takes us out of the slavery of sin and sustains us in the painful seasons of a fallen world. This is the One to whom we must look when tempted to quit.

#### **Perfecter**

Not only do we see him as our faithful leader but also as our Perfecter of the faith. He perfectly obeyed the Father through his humble beginnings, through the persecutions as he taught in the Synagogues and villages, through the agony of mocking, flogging, insults, even death on a cross. How his “not my will but yours be done” echoes throughout these words in v.2-3. That he did not use supernatural powers to abort the mission made him the perfecter of our faith. That he endured such hostility from sinners without sinning in thought, word or deed makes him our perfecter of that faith. That shedding his blood on the cross while hanging nakedly sealed the victory for his people as he ascended to and sat down at the right hand of God. Victory was procured for God’s people. He submitted to shame and death by keeping his eyes upon future joy – a joy that will be shared with those for whom he died as sacrifice and lives as high priest. This, beloved, is the One to whom we must look when tempted to quit. Our sons and daughters must be taught about pain and persecution by first seeing Jesus like this.

### **For our endurance in pain and persecution**

**v.3b-4**

Now the plain application of v.3a is found in v.3b-4. As our sons and daughters come to faith in Jesus (as talked about two weeks ago) and are nourished in and by His church (as seen last week) we must teach them endurance through pain and persecution. They will face obstacles and setbacks and temptations and sin. They will become discouraged and challenged by peers to give in to their flesh and sin deliberately (cf. 10:26; 11:25).

We must teach our sons and daughters about pain and persecution by helping them to consider Christ in all the awfulness of the cross and the awesomeness of the resurrection. And the practical reason for this teaching is noticed in v.3b-4. They need encouragement through pain and persecution lest they grow weary and fainthearted.

One of the most dangerous conditions we or our children can experience is “growing weary or fainthearted”. If our sons and daughters do not consider Christ when they are experiencing pain or persecution for their faith they will become discouraged. And as set forth in the book of Hebrews, doubting gives rise to drifting, drifting leads to defecting which will eventually drive them to the destination of hell.

This must be our focus as parents and guardians of sons and daughters. We must always consider Christ. Learn to look at him in the book; the Bible. Learn to see and savor Him in the book; the Bible. Talk to him in prayer. Keep your eyes upon him in trials. Then use the occasion of difficulty to teach your children about Jesus and His redemptive suffering. This will be their only hope. This will become their highest example. This will be their ultimate encouragement.

### **By submitting to the Father**

**v.5-11**

So we've seen how to teach our sons and daughters about pain and persecution by considering the Son. This was preserved for us in v.3-4. Now we want to continue thinking upon teaching our sons and daughters about pain by submitting to the Father as seen in v.5-11.

### **Through reminding them of how He talks to us**

**v.5-6**

First, a look at how God talks to us. Notice how v.5 starts out. “And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons”. The problem of wanting to quit the race of the Christian run is not mainly found in our circumstances. It is seen here as “forgetting” what the Word says. And the Word “addresses” us. That means that the way God talks to his people is through His word. Our sons and daughters are called to submit to the Father as seen in v.9. If they are not hearing Him by heeding the Word, they will become discouraged and they will subtly begin the drift.

When our sons and daughters are hurting, you must take the occasion to guide them back to the Scriptures. Be aware that they forget how the Lord

talks to them. They forget the Scriptures. You must remind them of how He talks and what He says to them.

The writer of Hebrews saw a relationship between the temptation to become discouraged and what the writer of Proverbs 3 said. So take your sons and daughters directly to Proverbs 3 and notice how a father urges his son to understand that wisdom will bring him blessing 3:11-20; blessing through paying attention to the teaching of his father, blessing through embracing and being embraced by the LORD's steadfast love and faithfulness, blessing through trusting in the LORD with all their heart and not leaning on their own understanding, blessing through humility, blessing through loving others sacrificially, and lastly blessing through submitting to the LORD's discipline in the midst of pain (Pr.3:11-12).

We need to teach our children about pain and persecution by submitting to the Father through reminding them of how he talks and what He says to us.

### **Through reminding them of how He treats us**

**v.7-10a**

Second, teaching them about submission to the Father through reminding them of how He treats us. This can be seen in v.7-10a.

Let's think upon this for a moment. When things are going easy and pleasing, our sons and daughters tend to say "God is good". They earned a B on a difficult test, they received comments on their My Space that were sweet, their birthday party was well attended and many presents were enjoyed, they tried out and made the basketball team, Bobby thinks she is cute and Brandy thinks he is hot, they got permission to stay up til midnight at their last sleep-over. When things are going easy and pleasing, our sons and daughters tend to say "God is good".

Now this comment is not inaccurate but it can be revealing if we are not saying the same thing when times are tough. In this passage times were excruciatingly difficult. The first century church was undergoing severe suffering at the hands of hostile sinners (cf. 12:3). Some were tortured. Others suffered mocking and flogging and chains and imprisonment. Some were stoned and loved ones were sawn in two. They had their homes ransacked and became homeless (cf. 10:32-36; 11:35b-38). In such severe suffering what do you suppose their temptation was? Look carefully at v.7. Notice that the writer wants them to remember something about the nature of God; namely how the LORD treats them.

We and our sons and daughters when undergoing pain must keep in mind that we are not treated as enemies of God. He is not angry with us; we who trust in Christ. He does not treat us as opponents who need to be defeated. He is not masochistic and loves to see pathetic people suffering. Rather, He is a Father. He loves and cares for His children. We must teach our sons and daughters about the love of God in the midst of pain. [*ill. of 2yr. old just spanked*]

We must help them understand verse 6; that He loves them as He disciplines them. That he treats them as his sons and daughters is clear from v.7.

Therefore, they must endure the discipline of the Heavenly Father by remembering that they are treated as His children to whom He demonstrates His love.

To free our children from the paralyzing effects of discouragement and self pity and anger and pride, beloved pay close attention to v.7-10 and help your children understand the Lord's activity in pain.

We must teach our children not to instruct the Lord over how He must love his people. We must discipline and instruct our sons and daughters how to learn from Jesus what love truly is. We must show our sons and daughters in the Bible that His love for His children actively takes away their attitudes and actions that would reduce their desire and capacity to love the best – who is Jesus Christ. As one preacher has put it, “Love is doing whatever you need to do to help people see and savor the glory of God in Christ forever and ever” [Piper].

In light of v.3, our sons and daughters must see that the painful love of their Heavenly father keeps Christ central in their affections. Train up your children by reminding them of how He treats us – and that is “as sons & daughters”.

### **Through reminding them of how He trains us**

**v.10b-11**

So far we've seen that we have a responsibility to our sons and daughters to teach them about pain and persecution. This responsibility is fleshed out in Heb.12:1-11 which instructs the church over how not to lose heart but rather to endure pain and persecution. We have said that we are to do this for our children by teaching them to do two things. 1) Consider the Son 2) Submit to the Father. For the last 10 minutes, this last aspect of “submitting to the Father” is what we've been focusing on.

Now in v.10b-11 we come to another way of submitting to the Father in difficult times. We are to remember and teach our children about how He trains us.

When our sons and daughters begin to notice that in all pain and perplexity and even persecution, the Heavenly Father has their best interest at heart, they will inevitably respond differently. When they accept hardship as loving discipline at the hand of God they will trust Him. As they welcome disappointments and difficulties as something designed by their heavenly Father for their good, they will cease to respond in resentment and rebellion. They will enjoy a harvest of peace and righteousness because they have been trained by the LORD.

To take this message to a pointed conclusion I call us to reflect upon an episode in the Bible whose theme reflects our concerns today (cf. Gen.19)

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 is one of the most gripping passages in the Bible. This chapter is about God rescuing the righteous and destroying the wicked. It describes much of both depravity and deliverance. The LORD rescues His people from their own sin and from the wrath of God. His people as we see in this passage began to flee from danger and pursue shelter AS THEY BELIEVE THE WARNINGS FROM GOD.

Lot was urging the sons and daughters to leave this old city and pursue a new beginning. As he taught about the justice of God and how to receive mercy from God his “sons-in-law” thought he was kidding. They laughed at Lot when Lot meant business. The sons-in-law took Lot’s words lightly and then took God’s wrath eternally.

My counsel to each of us shaped by the content and tone of Hebrews 12 is:

1. Life is serious. Don’t teach reality through triviality.
2. Teach the sons and daughters that:
  - a. Hell is real.
  - b. Hell’s pain is a perpetual penalty for sin.
  - c. None of Jesus’ pain was a penalty for his sin. It was for his people’s sin.
  - d. Resting in and relying upon Christ’s sinless life and cross death is eternal salvation.
  - e. Following Christ is painful and worth it.
  - f. Following Christ requires
    - i. Considering Him in all His pain
    - ii. Submitting to the Father in all our pain.

Hebrews 12:3-11 makes plain the reality in which our children live. To help keep our sons and daughters from hell will require us to teach them about pain and persecution. We must daily clarify for and confront each of us with the truth that all our suffering is under the banner of God’s loving discipline. Our pain and suffering in this life are not accidents God responds to and uses somehow. All pain is lovingly designed by our Heavenly Father to discipline each of us unto holiness. That is the reality in which our children live. We must teach them carefully and prayerfully the biblical notion of suffering. We are to do this in order to help our children forge strong convictions concerning God’s wise and gracious sovereignty in their pain. This will lead them away from hell and into the arms of the Heavenly Father.