

Hebrews 12:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

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? The argument proceeds from lesser to greater. If we respected ('gave reverence,' enetrepometha, ἐνετρεπόμεθα) earthly fathers who disciplined us, how much more should we submit to our heavenly Father? 'Fathers of our flesh' refers to biological fathers who corrected physical children; 'Father of spirits' emphasizes God as creator of our immaterial, eternal souls.

The phrase 'be in subjection...and live' connects submission to divine discipline with spiritual life. The Greek zēsomen (ζήσομεν, 'we shall live') indicates eternal life, not merely physical existence. Submission to God's corrective training produces holiness and maturity that characterize genuine spiritual life. Resistance to divine discipline, conversely, evidences spiritual death or immaturity leading to destruction.

This teaches that proper response to divine discipline is willing submission, not resentment or rebellion. If imperfect human fathers deserved respect when they disciplined us for our good as they understood it, God—who is perfect in wisdom, love, and knowledge—deserves far greater submission when He corrects us for our ultimate good. His discipline always aims at our sanctification and eternal blessing, making submission the only reasonable response.

Historical Context

Ancient Mediterranean culture emphasized paternal authority and children's duty to respect fathers even into adulthood. The fifth commandment, 'Honor thy father and thy mother' (Exodus 20:12), established this principle in Mosaic law. Fathers held legal authority over children, including right to discipline. The argument from lesser (flawed human fathers) to greater (perfect divine Father) would have been compelling to first-century readers familiar with household authority structures. Paul similarly uses this argument in Ephesians 6:1-4, connecting earthly and heavenly fatherhood while emphasizing discipline's formative purpose.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does comparing human fathers' discipline with divine discipline help you submit more willingly to God's correction?
2. In what areas are you resisting God's discipline rather than submitting to the 'Father of spirits'?
3. What does the connection between submission to discipline and spiritual life teach about the nature of sanctification?

Interlinear Text

εἰτα	τοὺς	μὲν	τῆς	σαρκὸς	ἡμῶν	πατρὶ	εἴχομεν
Furthermore	G3588	G3303	G3588	flesh	of our	fathers	we have had
	G1534			G4561	G2257	G3962	G2192
παιδευτὰς	καὶ	ἐνετρεπόμεθα·	οὐ	πολλῷ	μᾶλλον		
which corrected	and	we gave them reverence	not	much	rather		
G3810	G2532	G1788	G3756	G4183	G3123		
ὑποταγησόμεθα	τῷ	πατρὶ	τῶν	πνευμάτων	καὶ	ζήσομεν	
be in subjection	G3588	fathers	G3588	of spirits	and	live	
G5293		G3962		G4151	G2532	G2198	

Additional Cross-References

Numbers 16:22 (Spirit): And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?

Numbers 27:16 (Spirit): Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,

Isaiah 42:5 (Spirit): Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

Job 12:10 (Parallel theme): In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind.

John 3:6 (Spirit): That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Zechariah 12:1 (Spirit): The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

Isaiah 38:16 (Spirit): O Lord, by these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit: so wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.

Exodus 20:12 (Parallel theme): Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

1 Peter 5:6 (Parallel theme): Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

Isaiah 57:16 (Spirit): For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.