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The Disciplines of the Christian Life

Hebrews 12:1-29

Introduction

Perhaps most of us associate chastening or discipline from the Lord as only a corrective measure that must be applied to a believer's life because of what Hebrews 12:1 refers to as the "sin which so easily ensnares us." Actually there are at least three aspects of God's discipline that may be applied to the life of a believer. **First**, there is the "Discipline of Correction" that is exemplified in David, who was confronted by Nathan and his discipline administered by God, 2 Sam 12: 13-15. **Second**, there is the "Discipline of Instruction," that Abraham endured in the sacrifice of his son, Isaac, Gen 22:1-19. Another example of the "Discipline of Instruction," is that of Job who was chastened by God to instruct him and us about the enigma of pain and suffering, Job 1-3; Jn 9:1-15. **Third**, there is the "Discipline of Construction," which is another evidence that you belong to the family of God. God allows some to experience discipline for constructive purposes. This kind of discipline was experienced by Joseph when he was sold into slavery by his brothers, becoming a slave in Potiphar's house, and a prisoner for a crime he did not commit, Gen 39:1-23. It was also experienced by Daniel in the den of lions, suffering for his righteous stand in praying to God, see Dn 6:10-23.

1. The Discipline of the "Race," 12:1

- Every believer alive is in the "race." This sporting event of the foot race is used especially by Paul as an analogy of the Christian life, see Phil 3:12-16; 1 Cor 9:24-27; Eccl 9:11.
- Training produces discipline, Prov 22:6, "Train up a child . . ." The writer of Proverbs declares that we are to show our children the right things to do. Then we are to insure that they **do** the right things.
- Lay aside every "weight." A "weight" can be any unnecessary accessories that would impede our progress in the Christian life, Isa 5:18.
- Lay aside "besetting" or "ensnaring" sins such as those mentioned by Jesus in Luke 21:34, "carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life." Paul also says we are to "put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language," Col 3:8. These are representative of the sins that so easily ensnare us.

2. The Discipline of Christ is our Example, 12:2-3

- Jesus is our only hope, the author from the Greek ἀρχηγός, *archagos*, meaning the "originator" or "architect" and finisher, Greek τελειωτής *teleiotan*, meaning "perfecter" of our faith, 12:2.

- Jesus endured the cross to provide our salvation and our sanctification. He accepted the assignment of the cross with joy because He knew the victory it would bring for sin and salvation in the lives of believers, 12:2.
- He "despised" or held in derision the shame of the cross so that He could join the Father on the throne of heaven, 12:2.
- Jesus, then, is our example of One who shows us a well-disciplined life to follow. He endured opposition from sinful men and He did it gladly. Knowing what He did for us, we should be encouraged and not grow weary or be discouraged, 12:3, see Gal 6:9; 2 Thess 3:12-13.

3. The Discipline of God's Love, 12:4-6

- In our struggle against sin, the writer exhorts us to resist sin and sinful people, to the point of being willing to shed our own blood. It is reminiscent of Jesus' struggle against sin in the garden on our behalf, 12:4; Lk 22:44.
- All discipline, whether corrective, instructive, or constructive, is a wonderful affirmation of the genuineness of our salvation. God does not discipline the lost. He allows them to experience the wages of sin, Rom 6:23. He warns them of judgment to come, Rev 20:14, and allows punitive judgment to befall them in this life as well, see Deut 32:39-43.
- Discipline is evidence that you are a true believer. The writer reminds anyone who has forgotten that Proverbs 3:11-12 reveals that we are not to "despise" God's chastening or detest His correction because they are an evidence of His love for us, 12:5-6.
- The word "chastening" Greek παιδεία, *paideia*, is used, in some form, eight times in verses 5-11. Seven times it is "chasten" in verses 5, 6, 7 (2 times), 8, 10, 11, and one time it is "corrected" in verse 9. God's chastening is to be expected, accepted, and endured as a sign of God's loving discipline in the life of a believer.
- Discipline is also an evidence of the security of believers, or as we Baptists say, "once saved, always saved." If you can lose your salvation by some act of sin or defiance against God, then the idea of discipline is meaningless and irrelevant. If you sin as a believer and then become lost, obviously you have to get saved again, as some denominations teach. But the point of this passage is that when a believer sins, God applies discipline out of love and works to restore the broken fellowship, see Isa 59:1-3; 12:7-8.

4. The Discipline of Endurance, 12:7-11

- Note that the "if" of certainty that begins verse 7, means "when." When you "endure" remember that God is dealing with you as His child and out of fatherly love. So when you endure chastening, it is a sign of the

legitimacy of your faith. Otherwise, if chastening is non-existent in your life, it is a sign that you may not be a child of God, 12:7-8.

- Human fathers administer discipline and we comply with respect for their God-given authority. Shall we not welcome the right of God to bring chastening to our life when needed? The dividend of chastening is profitable for us in that it produces holiness, 12:9-10.
- No chastening is a desirable experience, but often painful. But, in the end of it all, it produces peaceful righteousness for those trained by it, 12:11; Prov 22:6. This does affirm for us that chastening has a positive purpose in the plan of God for the life of a believer regardless of the reason for the chastening, (corrective, instructive, or constructive).

5. The Discipline of Restoration, 12:12-13

- The loving motive of God's purpose in chastening as an act designed to restore the relationship of a believer, or prepare a believer for greater usefulness is already established by implication in 12:5-11. That purpose for chastening is made explicit in 12:12-13. One goal of chastening is to produce personal holiness in the life of a believer, 12:10, 14.
- God designed chastening for use in the life of a believer to strengthen us spiritually and to provide spiritual healing. It is to help straighten our walk with the Lord so that our spiritual lameness can be healed, 12:12-13.
- This is another in a series of exhortations designed to encourage us to live consistently in our walk with God, see Heb 3:13; 4:1, 11; 6:11 and here.
- This also is a reminder that the body of Christ consists of many parts just as the human body does. No part is of any use by itself, but all parts work together for the good of the whole body, 1 Cor 12:2-27. When we are personally restored to right fellowship with God, the whole body of Christ receives benefit.

6. The Discipline of Peace and Repentance, 12:14-17

- Pursue peace! Pursue holiness! The use of the imperative here "pursue," which is the Greek *διώκω*, *dioko*, which is a command, indicates that peace and holiness do not come to us automatically or fall upon us by accident. We must "pursue" these godly characteristics. Peace is the Greek *εἰρήνη*, *eirana*; holiness, *ἁγιασμός* *agiasmos*, actually should be "sanctification," the process of developing holiness within us, which is God's will for the life of every believer, 1 Thess 4:3.
- By pursuing the grace and peace that leads to repentance, God will give us the grace to endure chastening. Repentance leads to holiness and godliness.
- If we resist the grace God makes available to us in chastening, then the "root of bitterness" will replace the peace that we should have.

Whenever God chastens a believer, by His grace we will either get better or we will become bitter, 12:15.

- The writer gives us a prime example as an illustration. Esau resisted sanctification by his profane life and ungodliness. He married idolatrous wives. He alienated himself from his family and in the end became very bitter, *Gen 27:34; 36:1-43*. It is a sad testimony that his descendants were the Edomites, who became the most bitter enemies of the people of God, *Ezek 25:12-14, Amos 1:11-12; Heb 12:16-17*.

7. The Discipline of Fear: Sinai, 12:18-21

- Sinai is mentioned here because it represents the Old Covenant, which was foundational but temporary. God's eternal home is not Sinai! But the focus is not so much on the geographical location as it is a focus on the presence of God. The mountain was placed under ban, and no person or animal was allowed to touch it under penalty of death because the mountain became holy at the presence of God, 12:18-21; see *Ex 19:10-13*. All of this brought fear on the people, *Ex 19:16*.
- The restrictions imposed at Sinai are similar to those imposed in the tabernacle where only the high priest could enter the holy of holies and that only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The ban against touching the mountain called attention to the separation between a holy God and sinful humanity. Even Moses trembled with fear, 12:21.
- The purpose of Sinai and the Law was to show the sinfulness of humanity versus the holiness of God. The Law was a mirror to show us the perfections of God and allow us to see how far from the righteousness of God we are, see *Rom 8:1-11*.

8. The Discipline of Grace: Mount Zion, 12:22-24

- Zion represents the grace of the Gospel, which flowed from Calvary, located on the northern part of Mount Zion. This represents salvation by grace through faith. Look at all the elements of the New Covenant that are presented here: (1) the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; (2) the innumerable company of angels; (3) the general assembly and firstborn registered in heaven; (4) the presence of God, the Judge of all; (5) the spirits of just men made perfect; (6) Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant; and (7) the blood of sprinkling better than Abel's offering.
- While Sinai was foundational, Zion is finality. The truth of the Gospel is that there is no other means of salvation but God's once-for-all sacrifice on Calvary, Jesus. He is the only Mediator of the New Covenant. While the Law brought fear, Calvary brings peace and holiness. While Sinai marked the separation of humanity from God, Calvary marked the

fellowship between humanity and God through Jesus Christ, God's only Son and our Savior.

9. The Discipline of the Unshakeable Kingdom, 12:25-29

- The writer admonishes his readers not to refuse to hear him. Those who refused to hear Jesus while He was on the earth did not escape the judgment of God. How much more responsible are those who refuse to hear Him who speaks from heaven? Those who received the Law at Sinai but refused to believe God did not enter the Promised Land. The blessings of the New Covenant are far greater than the Old Covenant. The consequences of rejecting the New Covenant also are far greater, 12:25; see 10:28-29.
- Next, the writer of Hebrews quotes Haggai 2:6 in 12:26 and then he tells us that this phrase from Haggai, "*Yet once more*," indicates the removal of those things being shaken, as things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain," 12:27, see 1 Cor 3:11-17. The "*Yet once more . . .*," also indicates a third "shaking." The first shaking was Sinai, Ex 19:18, the second at Calvary, Mt 27:51, and "*yet once more . . .*" is the third shaking of 2 Pet 3:10 that will occur at the return of the Messiah as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and Righteous Judge of heaven and earth.

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (12:28-29; Dan 2:44; Mt 22:44). But if we hold to Him when He shakes the heavens and the earth, we shall not be moved! (See Ps 16:8; 62:2, 6.)

- Haggai follows his message of the shaking in 2:6 with a call to personal holiness, Hag 2:10-19. Peter also has a call to holiness in 2 Pet 3:11-18, following his description of the shaking in 2 Pet 3:10. The writer of Hebrews joins both Haggai and Peter in presenting the shakable kingdoms of this world that one day will give way to an unshakable kingdom. This Kingdom will come when "*Yet once more*" (2:6; Heb 12:26) God will shake the "heavens and the earth" so that the removal of those things that can be shaken may pass away, and the unshakable King and Kingdom may remain forever and ever, Amen and Amen! (12:27). "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire," Heb 12:28-29.