

The Discipline of the Lord

Hebrews 12:3 ESV (Pg. 585) Consider him (Jesus) who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. **4** In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. **5** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. **6** For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” **7** It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? **8** If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. **9** Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? **10** For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. **11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

- I. We’ve been looking at the ways God has chosen to govern the church. We talked about Jesus as the head of the church, as well as the offices of elders and deacons. We will now move from **who** God chooses for governing, to **how** governance is to proceed. How does God keep the church in order?
 - A. As followers of Jesus, we have been designated **disciples** of Jesus, just as his original 12 followers were. Being a disciple means that you are Christ’s student.
 1. This is significant to our discussion. I want you to take note of the similarity between the English words “disciple” and “discipline”. This helps us to grasp what is meant by the phrase (the message title) “the discipline of the Lord”.
 2. A disciple is **who** you are, discipline is **what** happens to us, or in us; or what is given in order to make us a disciple. If learning is what a disciple does, then discipline is the teaching method that is used to help us learn.
 - B. But often we fear discipline because we confuse **discipline** with **punishment**.
 1. Discipline always concerns our growth and transformation into holiness; punishment, on the other hand, is all about judgement, condemnation, and ultimately destruction. We will look at this more deeply in a moment.
 2. Discipline is always something to be embraced and even pursued; punishment is something that we must be delivered from by Christ. If you are still afraid of punishment, you don’t understand Christ’s salvation.
 - C. Our text today began by telling us that Jesus is our example, showing us how to faithfully endure the discipline that is necessary to our lives. We were told to consider his example so that we would not grow “weary or fainthearted”.
 1. How is Jesus our example? Hebrews says that Jesus was made “perfect through suffering”¹, later it says that he learned obedience through what he suffered². What does that mean? Wasn’t He perfect and obedient already?
 2. Sam Storms writes that this “perfecting” “does not mean that Jesus was sinfully flawed or that he was morally imperfect and had to be purified and cleansed.”³ Rather, obedience and perfecting “was a process by which he was shown to be fully equipped and qualified for his office.”⁴

3. “The perfection here has to do with completing one’s preparation to fulfill a task. He is saying that Jesus was fully qualified as our High Priest to make a sufficient atonement for sin and was able to secure for us a righteousness that becomes ours through faith because he faithfully obeyed his Father and offered up a sinless sacrifice for sin.”⁵
- D. So we consider Jesus in our own experience of disciplinary suffering because we too are being prepared to fulfill a task: that task being to eternally display the redemptive glories of God the Father, even in a world that has rejected him.
1. Patience in discipline proclaims that what we have in Christ is far more valuable than a carefree life. Our willingness to submit to the Lord’s purposes for our discipline declares his Lordship right over us, and our recognition of the superiority of his design and destiny for our lives.
 2. **1 Peter 1:6 ESV** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** so that **the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** This verse tells us:
 - a) We rejoice in our suffering and regard it as necessary, not abnormal, for the process of preparing us for God’s purposes in our lives.
 - b) Faith is a commodity that is only as valuable as it is proven. Unlike the perishable things of this life like gold and silver, tested faith is priceless!
 - c) Your faith is never tested with the goal of destroying you, but to grant you a testimony that will result in praise and glory being lavished on Jesus.
- E. The writer of Hebrews also points out that the necessary discipline that comes our way will always be incomparable to the suffering that Christ has endured for us, saying, “you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.”
- II. He then encourages us to look at what our discipline teaches us “**And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”**
- A. He quotes Proverbs 3:11-12 to the Jews he is writing to, and tells them that though it was originally written by Solomon to his sons, to read it as an exhortation directly from God, and in it, God is calling them his own children!
1. I wish we would learn to read scripture like that, remembering that the Bible, though written in specific historical context to a specific audience, has something to say to all of us who trust him, right now, in 2018!
 2. This is what Paul meant when he wrote that **all Scripture** is inspired by God and profitable for making us complete, and equipped for every good work⁶.
- B. From the passage in Proverbs, he also makes the point that discipline is evidence, not that God is angry, but that he both loves and accepts us! Have you ever seen an out-of-control child in public?
1. I don’t know about you, but I don’t generally hold the child culpable for his or her behavior. I look to the parents, and wonder why they would be so negligent as to let the three-year-old tyrant’s reign of terror continue!
 2. Correction would be proof that the kid is loved, and their best future was desired. Without discipline given to the child, that cannot be assumed.

- C. The writer of Hebrews says that, “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?” The suffering you would avoid is not judgement, it’s discipline!
1. It’s proof that you are God’s beloved child! He not only loves you just the way you are, He loves you too much to leave you that way.
 2. The next verse makes that clear: “If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” Baby daddy’s don’t discipline kids! Often they are not even present! Discipline is the gift of a loving, present, and engaged Dad, the kind God exemplifies!
- D. “Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?”
1. Some of us balk at the thought of discipline because we had harsh or even abusive dads. Often we judge God against our dad’s performance.
 2. We should reverse that. We should judge every father, from the very best to the very worst, against God. We would find that where our dads weren’t perfect, and even where they utterly failed, that God *is* perfect, and he has **never failed us**, and he never will. He will never leave us or stop loving us.
- III. “For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.” I have 4 adult sons that I am very proud of. They are wise, diligent, and upright. Most of all, they all love and are serving Jesus Christ. Nothing could make me more happy to report.
- A. But we’re at a weird juncture in our relationship. Some of you older parents have already been here, and most of you younger parents are oblivious that this day is coming for you sooner than you think. My full disciplinary input has been made. I used to be the captain. I can now only be invited by them to advise.
1. They are truly on their own. Time will tell if Ginger and I did a good or poor job, and if they were listening or not. We disciplined them for “a short time as it seemed best” now they must learn how to use what we invested in them.
 2. But I’m not afraid because of their demonstrated character, and because the discipline of the Lord goes on, now that Ginger and I have “retired”. God is determined that they will share in his holiness, because, in reality Ginger and I were only temporary stewards, but He is their eternal Father.
- B. There are many ways God will discipline my kids from here on out, as well as the rest of us who believe and are submitting to his will in our lives:
1. Sometimes God will directly discipline us. He does this mostly through the circumstances he allows us to experience, especially the unpleasant ones. He may use sickness, lack, persecution, and injustice at times in order to reinforce our trust, as well as building our confidence that He is enough.
 2. He may use other people.
 - a) In the Old Testament, God often used the Assyrians or Babylonians to accomplish His corrective purposes in Israel. The person you want have removed from your life, might just be the one God has placed there to make you who he wants you to become!
 - b) But he also uses people who are “on our team”; people that love us and have our best interests in mind: parents, teachers, bosses, and the church (we’ll talk more about the church’s role next week.)

3. We said it earlier, but God's correction is *never* a punishment. The goal of God's corrective activity is always for our growth and benefit. If you have placed your trust in Jesus, any punishment that you have ever deserved, or ever will deserve has already fallen on Jesus. Because of this, we shouldn't fear God's discipline or correction; in fact we should seek it. **Psalms 139:23 ESV Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!**
 4. Another way that God disciplines us is through the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, internally prompting us to judge our own attitudes and activities and to willingly conform them to God's will and purposes.
 - a) Scripture calls us to submit to discipline. This is what Jesus meant when he told us to take up our cross and follow him⁷. It what Paul meant when he told us to put to death whatever is earthly in ourselves⁸.
 - b) This means we don't ignore things until we're convicted of them, but we actively seek to live in holiness, desiring whatever pleases the Lord.
- IV. Our passage concludes with a very profound observation: **"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant"**. Most of us, recognizing its unpleasantness, avoid discipline at all costs. This is a huge mistake.
- A. No one enjoys being disciplined! No one ever says "I can't wait to deny myself all that fat and sugar so I can drop 30 pounds! I can't wait to pull all-nighters so I get my degree! I can't wait to scrimp and save so that I can retire! What fun!
 1. Quite frankly, we often can't see the promised reward because of the seemingly high cost of accomplishment. If that wasn't the case, everyone would be skinny, well-educated, and financially secure!
 2. But what the discipline of the Lord is producing in us is worth vastly more than any of those other temporal things. we are pursuing eternal harvest!
 - B. The Greek word used for discipline means "whatever...cultivates the soul, especially by correcting mistakes and curbing passions; instruction which aims at increasing virtue"⁹. The Lord's discipline results in holistic life improvement.
 1. Instead of thinking of a child sent to the corner in shame, God's discipline in our lives should make us think of an athlete training to participate in the Olympic games, or a soldier at boot camp preparing for war.
 2. God is cultivating our souls so that we can accomplish what he wants us to accomplish, and become what he wants us to become; and all for his glory! We are looking for something that can't fade, won't expire, can't be shaken or stolen: the praise and glory of our great God throughout eternity.
 - C. And that is the ultimate nature of the promise! Though discipline is not pleasant at the time, Hebrews says **"later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"**.
 1. We have been made forever righteous because of what Christ has done on the cross and through his resurrection and ascension; but it is through the discipline of the Lord that we see the fruit of the righteousness we possess.
 2. But this promise is conditional. Only those willing to be trained by discipline see the fruit of it.

3. If you ever wonder why someone seems to be more spiritually mature, it is likely because of their willingness to patiently endure discipline and suffering.
 - a) If I think of the saints that have made the deepest impact on my life, invariably it is those who have suffered for Christ without resisting or complaining: the persecuted, missionaries who have given up luxuries to spread the gospel, those who have endured sickness and loss, etc.
 - b) Though the discipline wasn't pleasant, they endured, and what a harvest their lives have brought forth! May it be so with all of us!
- V. We are about to come celebrating to the Lord's table. As we come, and you are considering what God's word has taught us this morning about discipline and suffering, let me give you a passage to consider.
 - A. It comes from the same place as our regular communion passage, 1 Corinthians 11. After the place where Paul tells them of the last supper, how Christ broke the bread and shared the cup, saying, "This is my body, and this is the new covenant in my blood", he challenges them about the way they were participating in the Lord's Supper in their own church.
 1. In Corinth, it was common for the well-to-do to edge out the less fortunate, gobbling up all the food and wine before the poor could partake.
 2. It was so bad that Paul eludes to the fact that many of them were actually getting drunk right around the communion table. In this context, he talked to that church about the discipline of the Lord...
 - B. **1 Corinthians 11:27 ESV** *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.*
 1. Paul is not bringing the hammer of punishment down. He is pleading with the church, while they are bringing forth no "fruit of righteousness", to do the honest work of examining themselves in the light of the gospel, in the light of what is happening at the table, and in the light of what the table represents.
 2. He tells them that if they fail to do so, if they continually mock the sanctity of the table that God will do the examining; that they will literally "eat and drink judgement on themselves". In fact, he says God has already begun to discipline them: "many of you are weak and ill, and some have died".
 - C. **"if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged."** We must be on the lookout for the things that exist in all of us that are displeasing to the Lord. Where are we failing to uphold his holiness? To humbly submit to his Lordship? Where are we bowing to idols and justifying our own pride? May God help us to see these things clearly, judge them as evil, and put them death conclusively!
 1. The best way not to be corrected and disciplined severely by the Lord is to be preemptive whenever the Holy Spirit shines his light on the garbage in our fallen natures. **"if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged."**

2. This is God's purpose in the discipline that he so graciously brings our way: our redemption, not our condemnation. "when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined **so that** we may not be condemned along with the world."
- VI. As you come to the table today, my prayer is that you will come rejoicing in Jesus' victory over your sin, the devil and the power of death. But I pray that while you are doing that, you can simultaneously come repenting of the things that the Holy Spirit would illuminate in you; things like lust and anger, fear and hatred, unforgiveness and impatience, greed and pride, deceptions and addictions, and 10,000 other things that I didn't mention, all things personal to you.
- A. Rejoicing and repenting are not mutually exclusive; in fact they go quite well together!
 - B. But how do we know of what we need to repent? The first step is to ask the Holy Spirit. The second step is to listen. The third step is to obey; not resisting him, but rather submitting to him.
 - C. Take a moment right now to do that. I'm going to put Psalms 139:23-24 back on the screen. Meditate on it's words and make them your prayer for awhile. That's what repentance looks like.
 - D. **Psalms 139:23 ESV** Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! **24** And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
- VII. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

¹ Hebrews 2:9

² Hebrews 5:8

³ <https://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/what-does-it-mean-to-say-jesus-was-made-perfect>

⁴ ibid

⁵ ibid

⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

⁷ Matthew 16:24-26

⁸ Colossians 3:5-17

⁹ <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G3809&t=KJV>