

28. Understanding the Importance of Discipline

In the last several topics, we have seen that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the faith of the Old Testament saints. As we come to Hebrews 12, we see that these Old Testament saints are called a great cloud of witnesses. We are going to see how to help our children understand and imitate that faith as God helps them grow and mature in their spiritual lives. This is important because God allows discipline to happen in our lives in order to help us learn to walk in faith. That is why it is important to understand the purpose of the discipline that God allows in our lives.

Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Here, we see that the writer of Hebrews compares the Christian life to a long-distance race. To effectively run in a marathon or other long-distance race, the runners make the choice to do certain things and avoid other things. The same thing is true in our Christian lives.

In Hebrews 10:38, the writer of Hebrews told the Jews, “Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” We saw that some of the Jewish Christians were wavering in their faith. In chapter six, we saw that there were Jews who had heard the teachings about Christ and had rejected the truth and never come to Christ for salvation. Those who had rejected were now causing others to waver. That is why the writer wanted the Jews to understand all of the examples of true faith from the Old Testament. As a result, the writer now encouraged these Jews to set aside every weight. We have seen that the Old Testament laws, feasts ceremonies, and ordinances were only a shadow, not the real thing. Instead, they were given to point forward to the fact that Christ would pay for sin once-for-all by His death and resurrection. As a result, the Jews are here encouraged to lay aside the Levitical system, because it was like a weight that would hinder them in their spiritual development.

Second, the writer pointed out to the Jews the needed to lay aside the sins which so easily beset us because these sins hinder spiritual growth. That is also true in our lives. 1 John 1:8-9 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Here, we see the importance of regular confession so that we can experience moment by moment cleansing from sin.

The Jews were encouraged to set aside the Levitical law, and their daily sins, so that they could run with endurance the race that was set before them. We need to do the same thing as we run the race that Christ has set before us. The word translated “endurance” means *the deliberate purpose in our hearts to keep going regardless of how many times we are tempted to give up or even slow down*. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:24, “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.” The thing that makes it

possible for us to run our race on this earth is to keep our eyes focused on Christ. He is the One who gave us faith and will bring that faith to maturity as we keep our eyes on Him. He also gave us a perfect example to follow as He endured the cross and gave no thought to the shame that was involved as he hung on the cross. As a result, Christ is now seated at the right hand of the Father where He makes intercession for us.

Hebrews 12:3-6 goes on to say, “For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.’” The reason why we can look to Jesus as our model to follow is due to the fact that He was obedient to the Father and endured the verbal mocking, the physical suffering and most of all the separation from the Father in order to pay for our sins. As we are continually reminded of the example of Christ, that example will give us strength so that we do not become weary or discouraged in our souls. The Hebrews, to whom this was originally written, had not suffered to the point where they had been killed as they fought against sin, even though others had suffered that way.

Then, the writer quoted from Proverbs 3:11-12, which says, “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights.” The word translated “chastening” is only used in Ephesians 6:4, 2 Timothy 3:16 and four times in these verses. The word means *the whole training of a child, including the discipline*. In Ephesians 6:4, it is translated “training”. In 2 Timothy 3:16, it is translated “instruction”. In these verses, it is translated chastening four times. In these verses, it is focused on the discipline or correction part of training. We are reminded, here, that the Lord corrects us because of His love for us. The purpose of discipline is to correct, so that a person can grow strong and mature. We discipline a young tree by placing stakes beside the tree and tying the tree to the stakes so that the tree will grow straight until it grows strong enough to continue to grow straight by itself. That is the goal of the Lord to help us grow strong so that we can stand firm.

That is why Hebrews 12:7-11 goes on to say, “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Like the Jewish Christians, when we, as Gentile Christians, experience the discipline of God in our lives, God is dealing with us as sons and daughters who He wants to help grow strong and mature in our spiritual lives.

In contrast, if a person does not experience discipline from the Lord, it means that the person does not yet belong to the Lord. Ephesians 2:1 says, “And you He made alive, who were dead in

trespasses and sins.” A lack of spiritual discipline means a lack of spiritual life. The word translated “illegitimate” means *one who is not born in lawful wedlock* and usually referred to one who was born to a concubine or female slave. The Jews would understand this word because of the fact that Ishmael was the child of Abraham through Hagar, the servant of Sarah. A study of the life of Ishmael, in the book of Genesis, does not show that he ever placed his faith in the promises of God. Galatians 4:29-30 says, “But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’” Although Ishmael was a physical son of Abraham, from Galatians, we see that he was never born according to the Spirit.

We read that we also had human fathers who disciplined us to correct us. As a result of that correction, we learned to respect our human fathers. At this point, it might be important to explain the difference between discipline and punishment. Discipline is given to a child in love to correct the child and help the child to develop respect. When human parents give punishment to take out their own anger, without love, the child becomes resentful, instead of developing respect. Many human parents punish instead of giving discipline in love to correct the child.

When human parents discipline their children, those parents are trying to do what they think is best for those children. Sometimes human parents do not know how best to discipline a child because of our limited human knowledge. That is why Christian fathers are told, in Ephesians 6:4, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” We will provoke to wrath if we punish in anger instead of disciplining in love. In contrast, God knows what is best for us and so He disciplines us with love. He wants to make our spiritual lives profitable.

Even when corrective discipline is done in love, it can be painful. As a result, as Christians we may not experience the joy of the Lord in our lives during times of discipline. However, the purpose of discipline from the Lord is to lead us to confess our sins so we can experience the results of forgiveness and cleansing in our lives. When David confessed his sin to the Lord, he said, in Psalm 51:12, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.” We want to help our children understand the importance of confession of sins.

We also see the results of the discipline of the Lord as we see that it “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that the purpose of godly discipline is to help our lives become conformed to the image of Christ. That fruit of righteousness is the good works that the Lord makes it possible for us to carry out as we yield our lives to Him and allow Him to work in our lives. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand the purpose of godly discipline.