

Discipline – God’s Training Gymnasium

Jesus did not leave us here at the mercy of circumstances. As members of His Body, we are containers of Christ Himself (Col 1:27 and 1 Cor 6:17). We are equipped to introduce His life, His love, and His power into each situation we face. We have not been left on the defensive or called to preserve the status quo, but equipped to let Jesus happen through us.

What that means for the church – that’s us, the born again – to be relevant, vibrant, healthy and attractive to the unsaved, Christ in all His righteousness, holiness, joyfulness and integrity must be seen in and through us, his born again people, at all times.

Now, when we are born again a great exchange takes place within us, out goes the sin nature and we become partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Pet 1:3-4). Or as Paul puts it:

2 Cor 5:17 ... *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”*

But that does not mean everything from that moment is “automatic” as far as our sanctification or character development is concerned. Yes, the work God has begun in us He will complete (Phil 1:6), but He has decreed that we are to be part of the process of sanctification or our working out of our salvation (Phil 2:12-13). Our co-operation in the process is essential. His Nature is given, it’s birthed in us, but His character is developed in us through a training process.

Now God in His great wisdom, mercy and love has given us His Word, the manual for living and the means by which we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, get to know Him and His ways and understand how we are to submit to Him, so His life and characteristics can be developed and expressed in and through us.

2 Tim 3:16-17 ... *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*

Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. In His prayer in John 17 He cried out to the Father with this request on our behalf:

John 17:17 ... *“Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.”*

So as we meditate on His word, the truth, and comply with His instructions we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. But if we don’t take it seriously or disregard His commandments or instructions then, because He so loves us, He will employ other methods to help in the process of our sanctification. And that is what we will consider now – the discipline of the Lord for those He loves.

Heb 12:1-15 ... *“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; ⁵and you have*

forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; ⁶ For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." ⁷ It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸ But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. ¹¹ All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. ¹² Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."

Here it is clear for all of God's family members that if we do not respond to His instruction and teaching, He will, out of love for us, resort to chastisement. ... *"For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."*

He chastises us for two main reasons: on the one hand to safeguard us from continuing in the ways of darkness, the dangers that are a constant threat to the Christ-life, and very importantly, to sanctify us, to develop the characteristics of godliness in us. His focus is to stimulate and grow the fruit of the Spirit in us. It's the beautiful and desirable fruit of the Spirit expressed through our lives which will be attractive to the people of the world around us. When we constantly emit love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control we will draw people to Christ.

But it is important that we understand that God's chastisement does not work in us automatically. The mere fact that we are being chastised does not mean that we will necessarily benefit from it. It's only as we understand the reason behind our chastisement, the truth being taught us, and diligently apply it to ourselves, that we will derive any benefit from it.

God's discipline can come in many different forms, through all sorts of different means, circumstances and situations. However, it is important to understand that not every unwelcome happening in our lives is necessarily a chastisement from God. Satan is constantly on the prowl to try a trip us up and will try and throw trouble our way. However, because God is God He is ultimately in control of everything, and even the Devil and his works are subject to what God will allow or disallow. But we need not fear because ... *"We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son"* (Rom 8:28-29).

So now let us consider how we are to respond to the trials and tribulations of chastisement, for there are right and wrong ways to respond, and only the right response will bring benefit to us.

We will start with the wrong responses:

1. ... ⁵ *"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord."* To regard it lightly, to pay no attention to it, not to take it very seriously, and by laughing it off not allowing it to affect us, is wrong. Trying to act tough instead of weighing it up and considering it and allowing it to do its work in us, we do our utmost to shake it off and to get rid of it. That's a wrong, unteachable and hard-hearted approach. In this passage we are warned very definitely and very solemnly against this wrong response to God's discipline.
2. ... ⁵ *"nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him."* This refers to the danger of submitting to discouragement when we're disciplined. This is too hard, I can't bear it, and we grumble and complain against God. We are not to faint and give up and give in and flop down in a state of hopelessness. That response will be of no benefit to us.
3. ... ¹⁵ *"that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled."* Responding with resentment and bitterness to God's dealings will lead to a person becoming difficult, self-centred, grumpy, hard to get on with, and very dissatisfied with life. Bitterness is like a festering sore. Such people become very hard to help.

So regarding lightly the discipline of the Lord, fainting when reprov'd, or responding with resentment and bitterness are not the right ways to respond to God's chastisement. These responses will negate any benefit intended through the Lord's discipline.

Then there are the correct responses to discipline:

1. ... ⁵ *"the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons."* We are addressed as "sons", not as "children or infants," so our response must be that of a mature son. In other words, when disciplined pull yourself together and don't behave as a child – kids cry and sulk. Verse 5 actually says ... *"you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons."* So, the right thing to do as a mature son is to *remember* the word of exhortation. So whenever you're disciplined don't look at the thing you're facing in and of itself and get upset, but rather search the scriptures, see what the Word has to say concerning the matter – ... *"remember the exhortation which is addressed to you."*
2. ... ⁵ *"you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons."* We focus on the word "addressed." This implies a "reasoning." God reasons with us as mature sons. So we are to listen, think, and apply thought process to whatever the exhortation is that is given to us. God has purpose in His discipline, and our response is that we are to seek to understand that purpose so we can conform to whatever it is God is wanting to do in us.
3. ... ⁹ *Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?"* Verse 6 made it really clear ... *"For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."* Our heavenly Father loves us. His discipline is given out of love not anger, and therefore our response must be one of reverence and thankfulness toward him for caring enough to lovingly discipline us for our good. ... ¹⁰ *"He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness."*
4. ... ¹¹ *"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."* Now here is something really important to grasp. ... *"those who have been trained by it."* *"Have been trained"* is the translation from the Greek word γεγυμνασμένοις gegumnasmenois. The root from which this word comes is γυμνάζω gumnadzō (verb) – 'to train in gymnastic discipline'

and the noun form γυμνός *gumnos* – ‘naked, without clothing.’ So contained in this word – “*have been trained*” – is the following: We’re in God’s training gymnasium. Nothing is hidden from Him. We stand as it were naked before Him and He sees our every deficiency. He knows what is needed to build up the areas of our lives that need attention, and His training program, His discipline, is tailored to build us up in these areas.

But for His discipline to be of value to us we must respond by being open and honest before Him. We must be willing to strip off everything in our lives and stand as it were naked before Him, not hiding anything, acknowledging that He sees us as we are and be willing to admit our failures or sins. ... *“If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9). As we then acknowledge where we have gone wrong and accept His corrective discipline, and follow His training program as set out in His word we are built up and ... *“afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”* So our response to God’s loving discipline is to strip off, to ... ¹⁻² *“lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith.”* Our “clothing” – our sins which so easily entangles us – will restrict us and not allow us to carry out the required exercises, so these must go. Just think of going into a gymnasium to try and exercise clothed in a suit and tie if you’re a man, or in a long evening gown and high heel shoes if you’re a woman. Your clothing would certainly restrict, or make very difficult, your ability to exercise properly.

But there’s more to this passage from Hebrews. ... ¹²⁻¹³ *“Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.”* There is a picture here of a person suffering from some kind of joint disease. You notice that the hands are weak and the knees are feeble causing a lameness. This person has become somewhat diseased, troubled in the joints. It is most likely that not only are the joints diseased but the muscles around the joints have become weak and atrophied. So what is needed is not only a treatment for the diseased joints, forgiveness of sins, but also some physiotherapy to build up the muscles, application and obedience to God’s word. So along with the medications the patient needs to do his or her part in carrying out the exercise plan.

God has you in His spiritual gymnasium. He has stripped you, examined you, and has laid out a plan to build up all your deficiencies. Now all you have to do is to submit to Him and do exactly what He tells you. Listen to the Instructor, go through the exercises, and if you do so it will give you “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”

Strip off – examine yourself and confess your sin. Go to His word and hear what He has to say and follow His instructions. His word brings healing, and the exercise of His instructions brings you strength.

As you do this may you grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and may He be seen in and through you in all you think, say and do.