

Suffering Because of Sin

Lesson 3 DIVINE DISCIPLINE Hebrews 12:5-11

Every Christian has been given the power of choice. The Christian can positively exercise his will for God or for self, for good or for sin. The Christian who chooses for God is walking by faith and dependence on Christ and will receive God's spiritual blessing.

However, if the Christian chooses to exercise his will negatively and willfully falls into sin, then he must be willing to pay the consequences for the act of rebellion. God does discipline every Christian who willfully chooses to disobey God and His holy, moral law.

DEFINITION OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE: Divine discipline is a gracious work of God, whereby in love He disciplines His disobedient children, who continue in rebellion and sin, and who refuse to get back into fellowship with God, so they may become partakers of His holiness.

CONTRASTING DIVINE JUDGMENT AND DIVINE DISCIPLINE

Christ died for every sin a Christian has ever done or will ever do, so God cannot eternally judge a Christian any longer for his sins. These sins are eternally covered by the blood of Christ ***“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”*** (Rom. 8:1). There is no way a true Christian could ever lose his salvation, for his eternal destiny is set.

The Christian's sins cannot be judged in eternity, so they must be dealt with in time. God must take action against the sin of a believer because He is a holy and just God. God will discipline the Christian for sins but he will not eternally judge the Christian. An unbeliever's sins will be dealt with in time and eternity but the believer's sins will be dealt with in time only. God never shuts His eyes to the sins of believers.

Christians are to fear God only in the sense that they fear the discipline He might bring against them. The Christian, however, never needs to fear the eternal wrath of God, for God has poured out that wrath on Christ as a substitute for the Christian.

To understand divine judgment and divine discipline, we must contrast the two:

- Divine judgment is for unbelievers; divine discipline is for believers.
- In divine judgment, God acts as a Judge; in divine discipline God acts as a Father.
- Divine judgment is against God's enemies; divine discipline is for God's children.
- Divine judgment is a judicial act; divine discipline is a parental act.
- Divine judgment is directed towards a sinner; divine discipline is directed towards a son.
- Divine judgment is for those not of God's household; divine discipline is for those of God's household.
- Divine judgment is retributive; divine discipline is remedial.
- Divine judgment flows from God's holy anger; divine discipline flows from God's holy love.
- Divine judgment is punishment for sin; divine discipline is correction for sins.
- Divine judgment is eternal; divine discipline is temporal.
- Divine judgment is a just punishment; divine discipline is a gracious concern.

It sometimes seems that God deals with His own children more severely than He deals with the unsaved world, but God's judgment will be swift upon unbelievers according to God's own time and plan.

Spurgeon said,

“The ungodly are let alone till the pit is digged into which they will fall and be taken; but the godly are sent to school to be prepared for their glorious destiny here after. Judgment will return and finish its work upon the rebels, but it will equally return to vindicate the sincere and godly. Hence we may bear the rod of chastisement with calm submission; it means not anger, but love.”

THE FACT AND PURPOSE OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE AS TAUGHT IN HEBREWS 12:5-11

Background. These Hebrew Christians were thinking seriously about leaving Christianity and going back under the Jewish religion from which they had come out. These professing Christians were receiving social persecution and they were not willing to pay the price of discipleship. From the context, it appears that much of the persecution they were suffering was because of their attitude of failing to persevere in the Christian Faith. A failure to push on in the Christian life surely invites God’s discipline.

“And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons.”

The Christian is not to forget that God does discipline for sins, and be encouraged in it. Apparently these Hebrew-Christians had forgotten God does discipline a Christian when he does acts of sin. God never winks at sin in the believer. Being a Christian does not free one from the rod of God.

Sometimes when we sin, we think God is not looking and forget His discipline hand is powerful. God must discipline His children or He would not be a just loving God. ***“He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him”*** (Prov. 13:24).

Christian, think long and hard before you willfully choose to disobey God. God’s discipline can be harsh and severe and sting with great bitterness. Consider the consequences of your rebellion. Are earthly desires and pleasures worth the risk of inviting God’s displeasure and discipline?

“My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,”

The Christian is not to despise or take God’s discipline lightly. The word “son” means a grown adult son and this indicates that even the mature as well as the immature Christian is disciplined by God. With the privilege of being a son comes the responsibility of acting like a son. God uses discipline to help the believer fulfill this responsibility. The Christian is also to think seriously about God’s discipline and not take it lightly. A failure not to take it seriously could have devastating consequences. The word “discipline” means son-training and refers to discipline of a child by his parents. God, through discipline, is son-training the Christian that he may have moral and spiritual development in Christian living. When the Christian is disciplined, he should realize God is doing it for his own good.

“and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,”

The Christian is not to lose heart when disciplined. He is not to despise discipline and he is not to despair under it. Often a spiritual child will lose heart and become discouraged when God is taking the rod to him. Even when the Christian knows he is wrong and deserves all God gives him, he sometimes despairs under the discipline.

The believer is to endure, with a trusting heart this discipline remembering God has brought it for his own good.

“because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

The Christian is to recall the Lord disciplines because He loves His children. The believer whom the Lord is loving continually (and that is every true believer) is the believer whom the Lord is continually disciplining. Sometimes the Lord has to “punish” or “scourge” His own. The word for “punish” or “scourge” means to skin alive, indicating God’s discipline is sometimes quite severe.

Discipline is not abnormal but normal experience and God brings it because He loves the Christian and wants him to walk a life that is pleasing to Christ. God is far more concerned about our Christian walk than we are.

“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?”

The Christian is to endure discipline for it is a mark of son-ship. The believer is to endure patiently when the discipline comes, knowing this is an indication he is a true believer in Christ.

For a person to say he is a Christian and yet say he has never known the disciplinary hand of God is stating he is really not a child of God. Divine discipline should in one sense comfort a Christian because it is evidence of his true son-ship.

“If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.”

The professing Christian who is not disciplined is not a Christian at all. All true Christians receive God’s discipline. If they are not, it is a definite proof that they are illegitimate and not sons in God’s family.

No Christian can sin and not be disciplined for it. If this were possible, then we would have a Heavenly Father who is not concerned for our spiritual welfare, but God is far more concerned about our spiritual growth than we are.

“Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!”

The Christian should be in subjection to God when being disciplined because God is his Father. A contrast is drawn between the actions of our earthly fathers (“human fathers”) and our Heavenly Father (“Father of our spirits”) in the area of discipline. When our earthly fathers corrected us, we respected them for it, and subjected our rebellious wills to them. This attitude should be the Christians when his Heavenly Father disciplines him. God desires the Christian to put his will in subjection to God. Through discipline, God wants to break the Christian’s will, not his spirit.

The object in training a horse is to break its will and not its spirit. So God in disciplining the Christian desires to break the will and not the spirit, for God longs for us to be active for Him.

“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good,”

God disciplines the Christian for the Christian’s own good. Our earthly fathers disciplined “as they thought best.” Sometimes this discipline was administered wisely and well and sometimes it was administered with poor judgment and anger. But God’s discipline is unchanging and always for the believer’s profit. The rod of God is used with goodness and wisdom, and it has in view the Christian’s well-being. Earthly fathers disciplined “for a little while” and this brought good, but God disciplines all the days of our Christian life to bring us real spiritual profit and growth in the Christian life.

“that we may share in his holiness.”

Holiness is the ultimate end of all discipline. This is God’s holiness, brought about through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians are commanded to be holy: ***“For it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”*** (1 Pet. 1:16). The goal of the Christian life is likeness to the person of Jesus Christ. Discipline is God’s tool to bring the Christian into a life of progressive holiness.

When God’s rod strikes our life, we must submit to it and remember this is God’s way of making us like Christ in our Christian experience.

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on; however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

The Christian is disciplined so he can bring forth spiritual fruit. It is never a joy to be under the discipline of God but it is a necessity if fruit in the life is to be manifested. The joy will come after we see God has a definite purpose in the discipline process.

If a Christian sins and later confesses it, he may have to undergo discipline even though he is in fellowship. The Christian must learn to accept his discipline in fellowship.

The Christian benefits from discipline only when his attitude is right in the discipline. Discipline is only beneficial to “those who have been trained by it.” Unless the Christian yields to God, the discipline will have no positive effect in his life, and he will be inviting more discipline.

The same sun melts butter and hardens clay. So the discipline of God melts the heart and the will of those who joyfully yield to it and it hardens and embitters those who stubbornly resist it.