

Suffering Because of Sin

Lesson 4

HOW TO DETECT DIVINE DISCIPLINE

2 Samuel 12:9-12

Divine discipline is only for the true child of God. It flows from a holy, loving, and a just God who is jealous for the worship of His people.

Divine discipline is for sins a person commits after his conversion to Christ. All the sins a person committed before conversion are forgiven. God does not discipline a person for sins done before he trusted Christ as personal Savior and Lord. God says those sins are put away as far as the east is from the west and that He remembers them no more.

After a person trusts Christ, he may suffer the consequences of his sin but God does not hold it against him. For instance, a person who was saved from sin of alcoholism may not take another drink but may suffer with disease of the liver for the rest of his life. All men have scars because of sin done before conversion, and must suffer the historical effects of that sin.

However, unsaved people, who do not come to Christ for forgiveness of sins will die in their sins, and God will bring His eternal wrath upon them because they are sinners with no Savior. Non-Christians will one day experience the divine judgment of God.

A Christian can have any sin he commits forgiven if he genuinely repents of it, but God will discipline him for that sin. God never winks at the sin of Christians. The question naturally arises as to how we know that we are undergoing divine discipline. Is this suffering the result of divine discipline or divine testing? There are two basic ways to know when you are undergoing divine discipline: (1) you are aware of breaking the holy, moral laws of God, realizing that you have sinned against God; and (2) you have a sense of conviction and guilt about some sin you have done because the Holy Spirit makes the sin plain to you.

If you are not aware of the sin or under conviction when suffering, then your suffering is the result of divine testing and not divine discipline.

It is only natural when a person gets sick to question whether this is divine discipline from God. I visited a friend in the hospital who had a serious disease. He asked me if this sickness could be divine discipline. I said, "It could be, but it probably is not." He said, "Why not?" I asked him if he was aware of any sin which he had deliberately done against God's will. He said, "No, but I am sure there are always sins of omission." I said, "I am talking about willful sin." Again he said, "No." Then I said, "Are you under any deep conviction about sin at this point?" Again he said, "No." Then I said, "You are not experiencing divine discipline, but you are experiencing divine testing, and God has you in this sickness to test your faith and to glorify God."

We must be aware that much suffering and tragedy are the result of the Christian falling under the discipline of God because of sin. It is a serious matter to play games with God, for He knows all your sins and will surely discipline you for them.

I suggest that when you do sin you confess it immediately, for God might be gracious and not discipline you for it. Immediate confession may ward off God's discipline. If God decides to discipline anyway, then all you can do is wait out the discipline in fellowship with your Lord.

THE NATURE OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE

Divine discipline has certain characteristics and it takes different forms but we can detect it when it happens to us.

Extreme conviction. The most common type of divine discipline is great conviction of soul in which there is unrest, frustration and mental anguish. The result of this discipline is that a person is miserable. This is

clearly taught in the life of Peter when he denied the Lord three times. The Bible says that when he thought about his denial of Christ, he wept bitterly.

One time when I was explaining to one of my boys the necessity of human discipline to teach a child to be obedient, my boy asked me, "Daddy, who disciplines you?" I said, "God disciplines me in my heart." Thinking that this was not nearly as bad as getting a physical spanking, he said, "I would rather have God spank me in my heart rather than you spanking me on my bottom." Then I thought to myself, I would gladly take the physical rod of man any day than the rod of God that comes to the human heart for disobedience. It is hard to explain to a child about the divine discipline of God upon all His spiritual children, young and old.

Failure of human plans. Divine discipline may be seen in the failure of our plans. God simply crushes our little world that we have built around us. This can be seen in the life of Moses who prepared and looked most of his life to take the nation of Israel into the promised land. God changed Moses' plans when he sinned against God. Moses disobeyed God by striking the rock when God commanded him to speak to it, and God kept Moses from entering the land with his people. He was left to die on Mount Nebo.

General circumstances. Another type of divine discipline is seen in our circumstances, when things just do not seem to go right. We find that we do not have God's blessing on the simple things of life.

Rebuke of others. Divine discipline sometimes comes through another person's rebuke of our actions. ***"Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a whip, or in love and with a gentle spirit?"*** (1 Cor. 4:18-21). God uses men to discipline us and our natural reaction is to fight back. The Christian who sees this rebuke as from the Lord will say "thank you" for it, and know that a rebuke of a friend is a great blessing.

Poor health. God's discipline sometimes comes to a believer through illness. God actually brings sickness into the Christian's life because of his rebellious spirit. This is seen in the lives of the Corinthians. Some of those who were partaking of the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner were being disciplined through sickness. ***"That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep."*** (1 Cor. 11:30). This does not mean that all sickness is a result of sin but some probably is.

Tragedy and suffering. Sometimes God's discipline is very severe and he brings tragedy, crises, heartache and suffering to the Christian and to his loved ones. This is taught in the life of David, who sinned against God by adultery and murder. God not only disciplined David but his whole family and caused the child of adultery to die.

Church discipline. God also uses the local church as a means of bringing divine discipline on the Christian. Discipline by the local church is one of the more severe forms of discipline. God's authority is carried out through the elders of the local church; therefore to be disciplined by the local church is to be disciplined by God. This is seen in the Bible in the incident of the man living in fornication who was part of the local church in Corinth. They were to put him out of the church hoping this would bring him to repentance. ***"Expel the wicked man from among you."*** (1 Cor. 5:13b).

AN EXAMPLE OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE (2 Sam. 11—12)

Introduction: David, King of Israel, is a classic example of divine discipline. David was a true believer and a man after God's own heart. David was severely disciplined by God because he took Bathsheba in adultery and had her husband Uriah murdered to cover up his sin. While David continued to reign as King of Israel after his sin and after he confessed it, David was disciplined by God for the rest of his life on this earth.

Failure to Walk with God: David was out of fellowship with his Lord before he ever took Bathsheba in adultery. David became indifferent to his responsibility as King of Israel and did not go out to battle as

kings were to do (11:1). David was in rebellion to God. This seemingly insignificant sin would lay David wide open to temptation to do an even greater sin.

Folly of Disobedience: David knew God's holy, moral law. Yet, he willfully broke five of the Ten Commandments. He somehow thought that God would overlook his sin. How wrong he was! He sinned and he had to pay the consequences for the act of rebellion.

David desired and lusted after another man's wife. He broke the commandment, "**You shall not covet**" (2 Sam. 11:2-3).

David actually stole another man's wife. He broke the commandment, "**You shall not steal**" (11:4a).

David took Bathsheba and had sex with her. He broke the commandment, "**You shall not commit adultery**" (11:4b).

In order to cover up for his sin of adultery David gave an order to Joab, his chief general, to place Uriah the Hittite (Bathsheba's husband) in a battle where he would be killed. This order not only assured Uriah's death but the death of the other soldiers that were with him. David was directly responsible for the murder of these men. He broke the commandment, "**You shall not kill** (murder)" (11:14-15).

One sin led to another sin, one cover up led to another cover up and one lie led to another lie. David forced others and himself to tell lies about the real reason for Uriah's death. He broke the commandment, "**You shall not lie**" (11:21-25).

David thought he could get away with his sin, but God sees all that we do. God never lets our sin go by. The thing that David had done "**displeased the Lord**" (11:27b).

Finality of Conviction: As soon as he committed the sin David began to experience conviction in his soul for deep down he knew that he had displeased God. He went through the great anguish of soul.

"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'—and you forgave the guilt of my sin." (Psa. 32:3-5).

Finally, after about one year, David confessed his sin to God (12:13). I am sure that through that year David had all the externals of a Spirit-filled believer. He carried out his ruling duties and probably went to the temple to worship. But in his heart he was miserable.

Fury of God Against Sin: God disciplined David. The sting of God's rod for David was severe, but God did it because he loved David (12:9-12). God used the prophet Nathan to rebuke David for his sin. He said, "**You are the man**" (12:7).

Bathsheba became pregnant, but God caused the child of adultery to die (12:14-24). David wanted that child, but God disciplined David by taking the child. The child was innocent and David guilty, but God touched something closer to David's heart than his own life—his child. God can take one of your children if you continue to be in a state of rebellion to Him.

Amnon, David's son, was guilty of adultery with his half sister, Tamar (13:1-22). Now David's children became involved in the same kind of sexual perversion as did David.

Sometimes our sins are disciplined by having those same sins show up in our children. Amnon, a son of David, was murdered by Absalom, another son of David by another wife (12:23-33). Again we see one of David's sins, murder, occurring in his own children.

David's ultimate discipline came when Absalom, his son, rebelled against David with the express purpose of overthrowing David's government. (2 Sam. 15). From the time of this sin, David had troubles in ruling the state (2 Sam. 20).

Lessons from David's Sin: When one falls into deep sin, he has usually been out of fellowship for a good while before it happened. Unconfessed sin leads to rationalization and more sin. God lets no acts of sin pass by Him. God severely disciplines his children when they sin because He loves them. God may be severe in discipline with his children in one area and yet be gracious in another area.

WARNING TO CHRISTIANS

- If you choose to sin, be prepared to pay the consequences for your sin because God disciplines all of His children for willful disobedience.
- If you choose to go out and get drunk, be prepared to feel the rod of God, for He may allow you to have an accident or something worse.
- If you choose to take drugs, God may allow you to destroy your mind and spend time in a mental institution.
- If you choose to commit premarital sex, then be prepared to suffer the consequences of a sexually transmitted disease, AIDS, an unwanted child, a forced marriage, or, even worse, the guilt of an abortion.
- If you choose to disobey Scripture and marry an unbeliever, then be prepared to live a life of misery with a person who cares nothing about spiritual things.
- If you choose to live only for materialistic ends then be prepared to accept some financial crisis or even worse, perhaps your children will catch your materialistic attitude and never trust Christ.
- If you choose to have an adulterous affair with another person, be prepared to have family problems and perhaps lose your marriage.
- If you choose not to submit to your husband or not to love your wife be prepared for conflicts in your home, especially with your children.
- If you choose not to study the Bible and pray, be prepared to face frustration, crisis and great conviction of soul.