

“Do Not Regard Lightly the Discipline of the Lord”
(Hebrews 12:1-13)

Introduction: I touched on a subject this morning that I would like to deal with more fully tonight, the subject of God’s discipline. It is important that we understand that there is such a thing as the discipline of the Lord, otherwise sometimes we simply will not be able to make sense out of our experiences. It is also important so that we will know what to do when we encounter it. If the Lord is seeking to teach us a lesson which we have not yet learned, He will continue to work with us in this area until we overcome it. And sometimes, until we do overcome it, we cannot move forward in the Christian life the way that we would like to. But we must bear in mind as we do study this important subject that God’s discipline is good, it is gracious, it is meant to help us excel more in that which is really our heart’s desire, greater holiness, greater Christ-likeness.

Our text of Scripture this evening covers this topic fairly fully, and so all that I will seek to do is to take you through it step by step to see that

We must not take lightly the discipline of the Lord.

I. Let us look first of all at the flow of thought of the author to the Hebrews. Verses 1 - 4 of chapter 12 form a transition thought from the faith chapter, chapter 11, to what follows in chapter 12:4-13.

- A. He writes in verses 1 and 2, “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, fixing 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.”
1. The word “therefore” draws a conclusion from what has preceded.
 2. He tells us that since we have so many who have gone before us and have lived the Christian life, and have found approval by their faith, we should strive to do what they did.
 3. Chapter 11 catalogues many of the heroes and heroines of the faith. We should carefully consider the witness of their lives and seek to do the same as they.
 4. Therefore, imitating them we are to lay aside our encumbrances.
 - a. These are the impediments to our progress, the things which get in our way.
 - b. Certainly sin is one of those things. But since he follows with the idea of sin, we should understand these things as those which lead us to sin.
 - c. As Bunyan described the town of Vanity Faire, it was a place full of all things lawful and unlawful which could tempt Pilgrims into leaving the straight path and giving up their race towards heaven: lands, homes, properties, family members, and things like this.
 - d. These are those things which are not necessarily sinful in themselves, but which serve to take the edge off of our zeal for Christ. They then become sin for us, for they produce that which is contrary in our lives to Christ. They can become entanglements, things which keep us from making progress toward the celestial city.

- e. And so we are to cast them aside. We are to be rid of them, so that they do not hinder us from doing that which is most valuable to our souls well-being.
5. Secondly, we are also to lay aside the sin which so easily entangles us.
 - a. Sin is always a possibility for us. Our indwelling corruption is like a coiled snake waiting to strike. John Owen has commented that it is never more active than when it seems the most quiet. And once that coiled serpent strikes, it is very difficult to free ourselves from its power.
 - b. Therefore, we are to avoid the snares which the devil has carefully laid in those areas in which we are most vulnerable.
 - c. And when we fall into one, we must seek to escape it. It so easily entangles us, but we must lay it aside, or it may even cause us to come to a complete halt.
 6. And then we are to run the race that is set before us with endurance.
 - a. We are to live the Christian life with patient endurance, with steadfastness, with perseverance.
 - b. Unless you consistently press forward in the race all the way to the end, you will not reach the finish line.
 7. And lastly we are to do so fixing our eyes on a suitable goal: Jesus Himself.
 - a. He is the author and perfecter of faith. He is the One who begins our faith, supernaturally causing it to be by His Spirit. And He is the One who finishes it, who bring it to completion.
 - b. We are to look to Him not only out of thankfulness for beginning this precious race, but also for the grace to complete it.
 - c. But we are also to look to Him for an example, for an example of patient endurance under suffering.
 - d. Notice that He set His eyes, not on the conflict that He would endure, but on the joy that He would obtain. And with this set before Him, He endured the suffering of the cross, not just the physical pain of the whip, the thorns and the nails, but the much more excruciating pain of becoming the sin-bearer of His people and undergoing the wrath of God on the cross.
 - e. But having gone through this shameful death, the cursed death of the cross, He obtained His goal: He sat down at the right hand of God, the place of honor, the place of authority. He overcame and has set down.
 - f. We are to follow His example as well. Even as He set His eyes on the joy of the honor of His Father, we are to fix our eyes on our greatest joy and pleasure, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.
- B. In light of this, verses 3-4 now seeks to orient us to the following section on the discipline of the Lord, by exhorting us to take a closer look at Christ. “For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin.”
1. Consider this Jesus, the One who was hated of men.
 - a. We mustn’t forget that Christ, in His work of redemption, as a man, also underwent

the discipline of the Lord. It was not discipline for sin, for He committed no sin, and discipline is not always for sin. Rather, it was for instruction. It is meant to teach us obedience, patience, and hope.

- b. The author to the Hebrews writes, “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (5:8-9).
 - c. Christ was and is the perfect and sinless Lamb of God. But as a man, He learned things. He grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52). The author to the Hebrews says that He learned obedience, and He became complete, perfect, fully equipped for the work to which the Father had called Him, to be our Great High Priest, who could sympathize with our weaknesses.
 - d. And the way that He learned this obedience was through suffering. He suffered hostility at the hands of sinners. Remember this morning, we saw that the psalmist was afflicted by arrogant men that he might learn God’s statutes. So Jesus also suffered that He might learn. There were gathered against Him in Jerusalem Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles, and the peoples of Israel to do all that the Father had determined (Acts 4:27). And through this, Christ learned obedience from the Father, even at the hands of wicked men.
2. And Christ endured. He endured this hostility against Himself. We are to consider Him and His endurance so that they may not grow weary and lose heart. We have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in our striving against sin.
- a. Jesus did. He resisted His natural inclination of self-preservation. He did not try to save His own skin. If He had, then He would have sinned against the express will of the Father who had sent Him into the world for this very purpose.
 - b. Jesus also endured to the end that He might make a full atonement for sin and save His people from their own destruction. In this way He may also be said to resist to the point of shedding blood in his striving against sin.
 - c. We too are called to resist sin, to resist it even to death, in our striving against it.
 - d. I think in the more immediate context the reference is to not give in to compromise to save our own lives.
 - (i) The people of God endured many things at the hands of wicked men, but did not give in that they might obtain to a better resurrection.
 - (ii) Christ did not knuckle under to save His own life, but shed His own blood on Calvary’s cross to fulfill the will of the Father.
 - (iii) This letter was addressed to a people that was suffering for their faith in Christ. It is clear that they were suffering persecution. He writes in chapter 10:32-36, “But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.”
 - (iv) They had suffered, and from all the indications of the letter, they were faced

with suffering again. It is believed that this epistle was written at a time when the Christians were beginning to be distinguished from the Jews by the Romans. Judaism was the only religion which was legal, outside of the Roman religious system of emperor worship. When it was becoming apparent through the persecution of the Christians by the Jews that they were not considered of the same faith, they began to persecute them as well.

- (v) And so were they going to suffer for Christ, as Christ had suffered for them? Or were they going to return to the Jewish ceremonial system and escape that persecution. They had not yet had to strive to the point of shedding blood, but they soon may.
- (vi) We have not done so either, but there may come a time when we will.

II. This is the context into which his discussion of the discipline of the Lord takes place.

- A. The author to the Hebrews indicates that his audience had forgotten a fundamental principle of the Christian life.
 - 1. He writes, “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 REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES’” (vv. 5-6).
 - 2. The Christian life is a life of discipline.
 - a. The word means “discipline, instruction, and training.”
 - b. It is used in the NT only two times outside of this context. It is used in Ephesians 6:4, where Paul says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” And it is used in that very familiar passage 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” In both cases we can clearly see that the idea of training and instruction is intended.
 - c. In a larger sense, all of life is a training ground for the Christian to prepare him or her for the service of the Lord. Even as athletes competing in the games need to discipline themselves for the race, and as soldiers in an army do the same that they might be effective soldiers, even so Christians are to be disciplining themselves for service in God’s royal army.
 - d. But in a more narrow sense, the Lord disciplines us in specific instances to teach us specific things. Here, He is bringing persecution on the Hebrews to teach them patient endurance in suffering, that they might learn obedience, and that they might learn to rely more on His mercy and grace to bring them through.
- B. And so what is their reaction to this discipline supposed to be?
 - 1. They are first of all not to regard it lightly. “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord.”
 - a. This is something which they are to take seriously.
 - b. When the chastening hand of God is upon you, it is upon you for a good purpose. He is seeking to free you from some sin or to teach you some important truth or to inculcate within you some important virtue.
 - c. Do not regard it lightly, but seek to learn what it is that He is trying to tell you.

Every adversity He brings into our lives is to teach us something of our sin and of the right way in which to walk. We must seek to discover it.

- d. Notice that I said every adversity. When you apply the rod to your child, does he or she like it? Probably not, even when they understand what it is for, they still don't like the pain it brings. "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful" (v. 11). God does not discipline with easy and pleasurable things.
2. On the other hand we are not to buckle under it. "Nor faint when you are reproved by Him."
 - a. There are some who wither away at the slightest hint of God's disfavor. But the Lord says that we are not to faint, or give up, when He rebukes us.
 - b. God also brings these things into our lives to build strength and fortitude into us.
 - c. We must take it seriously, on the one hand, but we must not crumble under the force of it, on the other.
 3. Why? "For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."
 - a. There is the motivation of love behind what He is doing. He disciplines you because He loves you. You must never forget that. Christ was able to endure what the Father had brought upon Him because He was aware of the fact that the hand that was smiting Him loved Him. You must as well.
 - b. Notice that there is nothing contradictory in the mind of God between loving and discipling, but rather the perfect agreement.
 - c. There are some who will not discipline their children with the rod because they don't think that this is loving. Yet here God is said to discipline and literally "to beat with a whip" every son whom He receives. Who is right, the psychologist, the one who won't raise a finger to discipline his children because he thinks it is savage or demeaning, or God? You decide.
- C. Granted now that there is discipline, that we are not to take it lightly, and that it is for our good, how are we to conduct ourselves under it.
1. First of all, we must endure it.
 - a. I think that the beginning of verse 7 is better understood as a command than as a statement. "Endure discipline."
 - b. We must endure it because God has a loving purpose in it.
 - c. And we must endure it because God is dealing with us as with sons. He is doing the same thing which earthly fathers do, "for what son is there whom his father does not discipline" (v. 7). He is the divine archetype, from whom we are to obtain an example for our child-rearing.
 2. Secondly, take comfort in it.
 - a. If you don't receive this discipline, of which all of God's sons receive, then you are not His children at all!
 - b. "But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (v. 8).
 - c. Far from resenting it, you should welcome it and be afraid if it is not yours.

3. Thirdly, subject yourselves to it.
 - a. “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” (v. 9).
 - b. If we subjected ourselves to our fathers of our flesh when they chastened us, should we not much more do so to God, who is the Father of our spirits, especially when our eternal life and existence depends upon it?
 - c. The life which he here refers to may be eternal life which we gain by subjecting ourselves to God through faith in Christ Jesus. To not do so would be to seal our destruction eternally.
 - d. Or, because the context is referring to the disciplining of God’s children, it may mean that if as His children, we do not subject ourselves under His discipline, then He may discipline us by taking our lives. This may explain why out of the many who left Egypt, only two men from that generation of war actually entered into the land of Canaan. Those who were excluded included Moses, Aaron and Miriam.
 - e. We should do so all the more when we consider that when our earthly fathers disciplined us, they did so only according to human wisdom, and sometimes in anger.
 - f. But God does so perfectly, “for our good, that we may share His holiness” (v. 10). It is not easy to undergo, as I noted earlier from the context, “Yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (v. 11).
4. “Therefore,” he concludes, “strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, 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” (vv. 12-13).
 - a. Shore up those areas of your life which need it. Straighten out your paths, that is, stop your sinning, repent, and do what is right. Subject yourselves to God.
 - b. If you do not, that lame limb will be further twisted and put out of joint. God will bring more severe discipline.
 - c. But if you do, then you will be healed. This may be what is in view in James 5, where the one who is sick is to call for the elders to pray for him and to anoint him with oil. If they do so in faith, “the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him” (5:14-15). Our afflictions and illnesses are sometimes caused by the chastening hand of the Lord, and are only aggravated when we do not repent of them, but stiffen our necks more and more against them.
5. People of God, discipline is a part of the Christian experience. It is that which is a mark of our sonship in Christ. If we are without it, we should seek to subject ourselves to God that it might be ours. And if it is ours, we should endure it patiently, take comfort in it, seek to learn from it, and reorder our lives even more stringently according to God’s holy word that we might have His hand of blessing upon us.
6. May the Lord help us all to learn and to benefit from His discipline that we might be more and more freed from sin, and more and more conformed to His image, that we might be a more holy, godly, and fruitful people for His glory and honor. Amen.