

The Lord's Discipline
Hebrews 12:3-11

Persecution

Last week we were encouraged by the writer of Hebrews to 'Look to Christ' as the One who ran a perfect race of endurance. We also looked at the Old Testament saints who perceived the future coming of Christ and this gave them endurance. This morning's passage exhorts us to 'Look to Christ' in yet another way.

Let me ask, how many of you have ever been discouraged and tired as a Christian? How many of you have ever felt beaten down by the world and even wondered if you had the stamina to continue? How many of you have been ridiculed or abused by unbelieving family and friends? The original readers of this letter to the Hebrews were weary and tired in their bodies and souls. They were being persecuted by the Jews to the point they were about ready to quit and return to Judaism. The Jews in general and their families and friends in specific, who remained Jewish, were hostile to these believers in Jesus. These converted Jews to Christ were being isolated and rejected and suffered the loss in relationship with family and neighbors. If they were employed, some lost their jobs and if they owned businesses people boycotted them. Some things do not change, some have experienced these same things. If you have not you need to prepare because the way things are happening in our time persecution is coming.

For these early Christians, the cause of their weariness came from the hostility and persecution from unbelieving sinners most severely, but also, in the conflict within the church. This passage in chapter 12 connects back to chapter 10 of Hebrews where we read, ³² “**But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,** ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” (Hebrews 10:32-34) The protracted persecution is wearing these believers down. They did well at first as they underwent persecution. These early believers, at first, suffered well for the glory of Christ but as time went on, they grew weary and tired in their souls. We also can be worn down by those who reject us and persecute us, and the church is to be a place of refuge and support and energizing us spiritually.

In this passage the apostle reminds these saints of one critical point, a key truth. This truth, when understood correctly, would reignite the spark in their souls they needed to endure. This one truth would change everything. That truth was the ***hostility from sinners was really God working***. This would not have been the normal thinking for these early Christians nor is it for us. We do not often think that God uses ungodly people to accomplish His purposes in our lives.

The universe is at God’s command. He determines the numbers of stars in the heavens and the number of grains of sand along the ocean. He is sovereign over all people, both those who He has called as His own and those who are not His. He can use the evil armies to render judgment on His own people to promote repentance. He can give success to evil people in business so they will accomplish His purposes. In this case, God used evil people to challenge these saints and make

the evaluate what they really believed. God used evil people to stretch the saints spiritually whom He loved in order that they would become better equipped to bring Him glory. God used persecution for His children to fully understand what it meant to live for His glory, for what was required for them to be a witness to the fallen world of Jesus as the Christ; to be saints that produce fruit for the kingdom, they would need endurance. The writer here continues his analogy of a runner in a distance race. Any runner knows they will only get better as they endure the pain of training and practice. This growing spiritually through trials was necessary and for the good of the saints in the early church and it has been true for ever generation since.

Like it or not, we grow spiritually the most as we suffer through various trials that come our way. God knows exactly what trial to use to cause us to grow spiritually and to build endurance. We often do not think about God sending us difficult times for our own good. For some reason we think God only sends us the sprinkles on top of our ice cream or the icing on the chocolate cake. This text is very clear, as the writer shows us, that the hard experiences believers endure come from God in the form of loving discipline.

Discipline and Punishment Defined

When we think of discipline, we most often, if not always, have in mind punishment. We think of committing a sin and then God punishing us like an earthly father sometimes punishes a child who breaks curfew or disobeys. This is not the right thinking. There is a difference between discipline and punishment. God calls us as parents to discipline our children for correction, but He does not call us to punish for them to suffer. It is an abusive parent that punishes instead of disciplining a child. In the 55 verses found in scriptures concerning punishment, 50

are in the Old and 5 in the New Testament. In all cases the punishment in these verses is not meant to correct but is judgment. Of the 40 verses found in scriptures about discipline they are meant for correction. Jesus says in Revelation chapter 3,¹⁹ **“Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.”** Jesus disciplines those who are His to teach and correct – He brings one to repentance and to correct their thought and behavior.

Let me define discipline: ***it is to instruct or educate or correct; to inform the mind; to prepare by instructing in correct principles and habits; as to discipline one for a profession or for future usefulness.*** This word comes from the word ‘disciple’, just like Jesus trained His disciples in the manner they were to live and teach after He was resurrected. He trained and correct His disciples to right behavior and thought. Discipline means to strengthen or to train in righteousness; much like a runner is strengthened as he trains for endurance.

Before we really get started in this morning’s text, I want to make clear the doctrine we are speaking of today. Doctrine is a truth concerning God that is taught and made clear in the Bible. This passage is concerned with the doctrine of **God’s providence**. As Paul wrote to the church in Rome, **“I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.”**¹⁸ **For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.”** (Romans 16:17-18) Sound doctrine comes from God and His Word - not from men.

The word ‘**providence**’ does not appear in any verse of the Bible but that does not mean the concept is not biblical. Romans chapter 8, verses 28 to 30 are often used to speak of God’s providence,²⁸ **“And we know that for those who love**

God all things work together for good, for those who are called **according to his purpose.** ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” The truth is, even though, the word ‘providence’ is not found in the Bible, the concept is on almost every page of the Bible.

The truth being taught and I want you to take away with you this morning, if you remember nothing else, is that **mankind is in need of instruction and training in righteousness (*discipline*) and God uses whatever means He chooses to accomplish this (*God’s providence*).** God works His plan for mankind’s salvation and the playing out of history in a way that allows mankind to work with Him through both blessings and discipline to accomplish His will and to bring Himself glory. Think of; Moses and Pharaoh or Jonah and the sailors or Joseph and his brothers and there are many more examples of God’s providence being accomplished as He disciplines those who belong to Him and judgement of others who are not His.

Now as we prepare to dig into verses 3 to 11 of Hebrews chapter 12, let us begin with prayer.

Consider Christ’s Endurance (vs. 3-4)

An interesting fact to note as we begin is the writer incorporates wording and concepts in verses 3 to 11 from the Old Testament books of Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Samuel, Job, Proverbs and Isaiah and, New Testament books of Matthew, Galatians, James, 1 Peter and Revelation. This demonstrates his

knowledge of scripture and his consistency with God's entire Word found in the Bible.

Now let's begin. The first appeal the writer gives to his readers is for them to consider the source of their salvation, Jesus Christ. Reading verses 3 and 4, "Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." More important than what God did in the lives of the patriarchs of chapter 11; Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Joseph, more important was the work God did in the life of His Son.

The Greek word *analogisasthe* – look to screen – can anyone announce this word? Here is the way to pronounce it - (an·al·og·id·zom·ahee). This word only occurs here in the New Testament, it is translated as 'consider him' in the opening of verse 3. This word is used in the mathematical sense of 'calculate' and clearly implies a careful assessment when one performs math. The readers are being exhorted to calculate and weigh carefully the endurance they need to be faithful to Christ when contemplating their own hardships. The reader is turned away from themselves to focus their gaze on Christ.

I remember when the movie, "The Passion of the Christ" came out and there began a controversy. People argued about, who crucified Jesus? Some said it was the Romans because they actually drove the nails. Some said it was the Jews because they plotted to see it carried out. It is true that they all had their parts to play but ultimately it was God who crucified Christ. It was God's providence in action. It was Jesus' mission to come to earth and die for the sins of His people. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the Pharisees, Pilate, Herod, the Romans, and the Jewish people all worked to carry out the plan of

God's Providence. God orchestrated the events from all angles. He was in control of everything and Christ was crucified just as God willed.

The point here is that once one realizes the most terrible deed in all of history was orchestrated by God, namely the crucifixion of Christ, then it should be easier to see that all of life's events, those we experience; good and bad, are also orchestrated by God. Luke gives us an example, in his record of Peter's declaration how God brought all things together to accomplish His purpose. Reading Acts, chapter 2, verses 22 and 23, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—²³ **this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.**"

On the one hand, God determined and planned Christ's crucifixion to happen just as it did. On the other hand, men carried out their actions because of their own evil desires. God in no way performed any of the evil in which it took to bring this event about or any other evil throughout history. Evil men are held responsible for they acted by their own desires but at the same time carried out God's decree. So, God's providence is a huge truth to wrap our finite brains around and is a mystery we may never fully or completely comprehend while we are here on earth and this is where our faith comes into play.

Jesus was also working toward the same end of fulfilling God's providence. Jesus was faithful. He accomplished God's plan for Him. He did not quit. This is the point the writer is making when he wrote in verse 2, "**looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the**

throne of God.” Standing firm in the truth of God and living the gospel of Christ in the midst of an evil world is what God calls us to. We may be tempted at times to quit, especially in times of persecution. However, the apostle is reminding his readers that they and we are to stand firm just like Jesus did in the midst of His persecutors.

God’s Discipline (vs. 5-11)

The point to focus in on and remember as we examine verses 5 to 11 is that the God is a loving Father who disciplines every child that belongs to Him. He teaches us through life experiences and trains us in righteousness. God disciplines us for our good and His glory.

Verses 5 to 11 contain a great deal of information and it is a good deal to take in as we consider God working for our disciplining and correcting our thoughts and actions. Jesus wanted to help us understand both discipline for correction and punishment for judgment by giving this truth as recorded in John chapter 15, “**I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”** (John 15:1-6) So, why does the God the Father prune us? Is it to discourage and bring us down? No, it is to correct us and to make us better. As we endure the pruning necessary and as we

remain in Christ, we will bear much fruit. Both aspects must be there; we must abide in Christ and endure God's pruning if we are to live to glorify God.

What does discipline tell us? As verses 6 and 7 says, "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." *(Proverbs 3:11-12)* ⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? When we are disciplined, we should praise the Lord because it is a reminder that we are sons and daughters of God our Father. On the other hand, if we are never disciplined then we should be concerned that perhaps we are not really His children. This is what the writer is expressing in verse 8, "If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons."

Verses 6 to 8 take us back to the key truth that was presented earlier. A truth we need to accept and understand; **mankind is in need of instruction and training in righteousness (*discipline*) and God uses whatever means He chooses to accomplish this (*God's providence*)**

To help the reader understand these truths the writer moves from heaven to earth with an example of our earthly fathers and discipline. Reading at verse 9, "Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?" ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." As believers we should be able to understand and live by God's Word and know when He disciplines us it is for our good and His glory.

Since the writer has given us an earthly example of proper discipline it is a reminder to us as parents that it is our responsibility to discipline our children. We discipline children as we teach them right from wrong and to correct behavior and thought. As we set parameters, we must also be ready to discipline children when those parameters are broken. As we discipline our children, we are loving them as sons and daughters. The goal as parents is to discipline in a loving, firm and consistent manner. We desire our children to grow into responsible adults that know and live for God's glory. All people - adults and children alike need to be pruned to bear good fruit in their lives and for God's kingdom. This is the point, as the writer ends with verse 11, [“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”](#)

The writer addresses a universal truth. No one likes discipline, especially the one being disciplined. I do not like it when it happens to me and my kids did not like it when it happened to them. But that is not the issue. The issue is not whether it is pleasant or not. When parents do not discipline their kids, many times it is because they are selfish and do not want to engage in an unpleasant task that usually is not a one-time event but takes energy and investment of time over years in order to produce a productive child.

We live in an ungodly age that tells us spanking is wrong. We live in an age that tells us almost all discipline is wrong. Discipline should happen at home. School is not the place as the primary location for discipline. When there is misbehavior in the school - teachers would appreciate it if the parents were involved and took care of the discipline at home; for this will produce better behavior at school.

Notice what discipline is – it is training. Our writer goes back to the example of the endurance race and specifically says that God’s children are trained by discipline. Just like the athlete who really does not enjoy the pain of daily training, nobody likes the pain of discipline. Just like through the athlete’s hard training and through godly discipline we spiritually grow yielding fruit for the kingdom. When God prunes His children, it is for the specific purpose for them to grow in righteousness.

I pray that we understand a little more fully today that we have a part to play in our training by submitting to God and accepting His pruning and discipline to enable us to grow spiritually. Like an athlete we must train daily by prayer, studying God’s Word and seeking His will in our lives. So, the question we each need to consider and answer is, are you engaged in daily training? Are you striving toward the finish line? Are you letting the world take your focus off of Christ?

A truth we need to accept and understand and live is **mankind is in need of instruction and training in righteousness (*discipline*) and God uses whatever means He chooses to accomplish this (*God’s providence*).**

Praise God that He controls all events in order to bring about His providence. Praise the Lord that He also disciplines His children for our good and His glory. Amen and amen!