

Hebrews: the Supremacy of Christ above all Things
Fatherly Discipline
Hebrews 12:3-11

Text:

Hebrews 12:3-11 (ESV)

³ 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. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”

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? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 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.

Introduction:

It is paramount this morning for you and me to think like athletes. For some of you that will be simple because you are an athlete; while for others it will require the greatest exercise of your imagination because you have never been an athlete.

Why think like athletes? We will think like athletes because the author of this passage is thinking like an athlete. Remember the analogy he began to develop back in v.1 of running a race? Do you remember the rules for running that he mentioned there? You must run in such a way that you do not get disqualified (“lay aside every sin”); and you must run in such a way that you do not get distracted (“lay aside every weight that encumbers”). So he is working with an athletic metaphor to help us understand endurance. The athlete does not simply need to endure the race; he must also endure the training process. That is to say, he must become adept at discipline.

Are not athletes, by very definition, disciplined? Listen to this question; it can be taken in two ways: “Are not all athletes disciplined?” What are the two ways to hear this question?

1. All athletes are disciplined in the sense that they are trained by an outsider – a trainer or a coach. All athletes are disciplined. When they slip up in practice they are required to run laps, do push-ups and perform the tedious drills over and over again. They are disciplined with pain and trained by rigid and repetitive drills inflicted and enforced by a trainer, a coach.
2. What is the result? The end is that all athletes, by very definition, are disciplined. That is, they are motivated to run, practice, work-out and push themselves *whether they feel like it or not*. They are disciplined. An athlete wakes up at 6 a.m. and before he has even had his first thought go through his head, he is already lacing up his running shoes and reaching for the door knob. He did not have to entertain himself with a mental conversation as to whether or not he

wanted to get out of bed and whether or not it would be worth the effort and pain. He simply gets up and performs his duty because it is now *second nature*.

Now I want you to hear again two different phrases that I used in this example – two phrases that become a simple and working definition of what it means to be disciplined: to be disciplined means that you do what is necessary whether you feel like it or not because it is now second nature to you. Did you hear the two phrases? The two phrases are: (1) “whether you feel like it or not” and (2) “second nature.”

It is one thing to be disciplined in athletics. Paul says “bodily exercise profits little” (1 Tim. 4:8) and his point is not that it has no value but that its value pales in comparison to be spiritually exercised unto godliness, of being trained in the words of the faith and of good doctrine (1 Tim. 4:7). In other words, there are many believing Christians who are way too disciplined in athletics while completely neglecting the spiritual disciplines.

The presupposition behind Hebrews 12 is that all believers need endurance. All believers need to run the race through to the end without sin and weight. So, we need discipline. We need a good coach who knows how to get us from slow and sloppy as regards holiness and righteousness to sleek and systematic as regards our pursuit of holiness.

Do you want to be disciplined unto endurance? Do you want righteousness and holiness to become second nature to you? If you say, “Yes! I want discipline!” then you must welcome **pain** and **process**!

Every athletic team knows its quitters. As soon as the summer “two-a-days” begin, those dog days of summer, the undisciplined quit. So too, the Christian race knows its quitters. Do you remember the way Jesus described apparent followers in the parable of the soils? “A sower went out to sow...” (Matt. 13:1ff) and some seed fell along the path, some fell on rocky ground w/o soil, some fell among the thorns and some fell on good soil. Do you remember how Jesus interpreted those four kinds of soil? That which fell on the rocky ground immediately sprang up a shoot, but because it had no depth, it was scorched by the heat of the sun. Jesus said, that represents those who hear the “word of the kingdom,” the gospel, and immediately receive it with joy. There appears to be spiritual life, but because they have no depth, when trials and persecutions come, they wither away.

The Hebrew audience here was in the midst of that very crisis of faith. They had received the word of the kingdom and now, persecution was coming. Look back to chapter 10:

Hebrews 10:32-36 (ESV)

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. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

Now here in chapter 12 the author says that even though you have tasted suffering and even now that you feel the desire to cave-in beneath the weight of the pressure that threatens, “in your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (v.4). The struggle hasn’t reached martyrdom yet. No one had died. The possibility looms large on the horizon and I do not want you to grow weary and faint hearted. Do you see that in v.3?

The theme is the need for endurance when feelings seem sovereign. Do you hear me? When feelings seem sovereign, we quit!

Just ask yourself, “What precedes the actions of caving-in, of selling-out, or of turning-back?”

- Before the player goes to the coach and announces his decision to take up chess and forego football, what preceded that action?
- Before a wife takes action in serving her husband divorce papers, what precedes her finding the lawyer?
- Before the man puts the hose in the tailpipe of his car, what precedes that action?
- Before a teenager goes to the teacher to drop out of the hard science class, or goes to quit his/her job, what preceded those actions?
- Before an apparent follower of Jesus turns away, what happens first?

The answer is weeks and months, perhaps even years of growing weary and fainthearted! You see, quitting is profoundly a heart-issue. Caving-in, selling-out, and turning-back are the result of weeks, months and perhaps years of not responding to pain, conflict, suffering and trials with a biblical mindset. And when the heart gets tired and the mind is weary, feelings become sovereign. All we want is for the pain to go away.

So notice what happens. The source of my pain is football, my husband, my kids, my job, my enemy. We start to think, then say, and then believe things like, “I can’t do this anymore.” “I just want to stop hurting.” “I’m finished.” Once we have gone from thinking it to saying it to believing it, we have made our feelings sovereign and all things sovereign must be obeyed. So in obeying our feelings we do whatever is necessary to satisfy those feelings. So, we end marriages – problem solved! We quit jobs – problem solved! We take psychotropic drugs that only numb and suppress the feelings – problem solved! We put the hose in the tailpipe – problem solved! The bad feelings are gone in each case!

There is something profoundly idolatrous and wrong about making our feelings sovereign. When feelings become sovereign, perception becomes reality. Truth is no longer objective; it is subject to my perception. The way I see things is the way things are. Friends, this is a grossly limited way of living life. This paralyzes with fear and impedes all future growth with a lack of foresight. What you and I need is for a more stable sovereign than fickle feelings.

Here is where to begin: Let’s give credit to whom credit is due. Is your husband the cause of your pain? Are your kids the cause of your stress? Is your job the cause of your turmoil? Oh, let there be no doubt that these things contribute to our suffering; but they can never be labeled as the “*ultimate causation*.” Marriages, parenting, employment, health, finances, relationships, and the like are not the ultimate cause to your suffering.

Who gave your body? Who provided for you this job? This child? This man? This woman? You see behind it all, under it all, around it all is the sovereign hand of Almighty God.

Church, I do not want you to lose heart and grow weary in the midst of your struggles. That means I want for us to be strong in heart and enduring in life. When you grow weary and begin to lose heart, to whom are you losing heart? Who is it that you beginning to lose trust in? The answer is Your heavenly Father who does not run or rule His universe the way he should! For the way I think it should be is the way it must be! I know you can hear how idolatrous and wrong it is to make our feelings sovereign.

That is my introduction and here is my thesis: We must be disciplined to see all our suffering as the rigid discipline of a loving Father.

You may have doubts at times as to whether or not God loves you. “If he loves me, why do I hurt so badly? Why is there no end in sight for my pain?” God has a word for you this morning: “Consider Jesus!” Do you see the first words v.3? What I mean by that is this: whatever you charge God with in your suffering, you have to be able to charge God with in Christ’s pain. Though you and I might be tempted at times to charge God with not loving us, we can certainly never say that about Christ. We know that God always loved his Son. Ahh! CLICK! V.5: “Or have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?” Do you see? God acts in his discipline of you the very same way he acted toward Christ. He is an absolutely loving Father to all his sons, whether natural son – Christ, or adopted sons – Christians. This is the main point of this passage.

Now...discipline comes in two packages – positive and negative – and both packages “seem” painful. The word “seem” is crucial to the text. It is found in v.11, “For the moment all discipline seems painful.” The word means “to be of opinion.” When we say, “It seems to me...” we mean “In my opinion.” Is that right? So perception either becomes reality or it must be judged by reality. When perception is reality – feelings are made sovereign. The alternative is to become adept – or disciplined – at judging our perceptions, our feelings, or our opinions, in light of reality. In other words, we must adjust our focus. Christians are not to be living by feelings but with focus. This may be painful; but the plant that grew weary and fainthearted under the sun’s scorching heat did so because it had no depth of soil. The way you and I get depth is to become disciplined in our focus.

This is a plea for making doctrine central to your life. This is a plea to get you to become a reader so that theology gives you depth, gives you focus and you will have endurance. There is a reason why we preach, read your Bible regularly, pray often, memorize Scripture, journal your thoughts, fellowship in the church, come to the Lord’s table religiously. There is a reason why we preach and plan and prod you toward the spiritual disciplines – disciplined people are focused and focused people are disciplined. Athletes are focused and their focus drives their routine and their routine keeps them focused.

So discipline comes in two packages – positive and negative. That is all discipline is corrective and instructive for training purposes. The extra laps and push-ups that come as chastisement are profitable just as the drills and chalk-talks are profitable for instruction.

Both aspects are here in vv.5-6. The author quotes Proverbs 3.11-12. Listen:

Hebrews 12:5-6 (ESV)

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when *reproved* by him.
⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and *chastises* every son whom he receives.”

There are three different words used here. The first is discipline which refers to the entire training process. The second word is the word reprov'd (rebuke or convict) and the third is the word chastisement which means to scourge or whip. There is certainly a place for the rod of correction. But it is absolutely improper to think that God whips us out of anger. Far from it, the text says he does everything out of love. Look at the phrases, “The Lord disciplines the one *he loves*, and chastises every son whom *he receives* (as opposed to those rejected)” (v.6).

Vv.7-8 returns to the thesis statement again: “when pain enters your life, God is treating you as sons.” Suffering is a sign that God loves you! Not to be disciplined means not to be a son.

And now we get to speak of God’s character in his training process. Compare God with earthly fathers and you will see the difference. The comparison is literally between our “fathers according to the flesh” and our “Father according to the spirit” (v.9).

Here is the contrast:

Earthly fathers:

Discipline for a short time

As it seemed best to them

Heavenly Father:

Implied lengthy life-long process

for our good

And the desired result in all of God's discipline is that you and I might share in his holiness. In other words, it is in our best interest, it is for our best good that we grow in holiness. Trials, pain, and suffering are the means whereby we are sanctified. Suffering is sanctification in action.

Christians with depth are able to perceive pleasure behind the pain. That is the point of v.11.

God's children are supposed to be able to perceive peace behind the pain.

And here at the end of v. 11, the author uses an entirely different word again. This is now the fourth different word for discipline. The ESV translates it as trained. It is the word *gumnazo* – from which we get our English word, gymnasium. God sends trials and tribulations into the life of his children because they exercise faith and produce a harvest of righteousness.

Now, I keep saying that this is the way it works for Christians with depth of soil. That is proven by Paul when he uses two of these words in 2 Timothy 3:16

2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

So you say with your mouth that you love God more than anything. Let's bring some pain into your life and test that allegiance. So you say that you believe God is good. Let's put some suffering into your life to test that theory.

Will you or will you not make the right assessment once the pain hits. That's the business of righteousness.