

Hebrews

I. The Christian’s Wise Response to God’s Discipline

- A. **Hebrews 12:12-14** . . . Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, [13] 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. [14] Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.
- B. In these last two chapters of Hebrews we see the theme of discipline – **self-discipline** and **God’s discipline**. And if it is important enough to God to make discipline a theme in these two chapters, it should be important enough for us to learn the lessons about discipline He is wanting us to learn.
- C. As a reminder, God’s discipline is for the purpose of teaching and training us in holiness, not punishment for lack of holiness.
- D. Prayer

II. The Christian’s Response To God’s Discipline

- A. **Hebrews 12:12-13** . . . Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, [13] 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.
 - 1. The first word in these two verses is “**therefore**” and it refers back to the exhortation concerning God’s discipline in our lives. Once again let me remind you that His discipline is for the purpose of teaching us how to be holy as He is holy. In other words, our growth in holiness of life is the direct purpose of God’s discipline.
 - a. Now lest we think that God’s discipline in relation to hardship and suffering always comes first, let me remind you of the words of God following His last use of the word “**therefore**.”
 - b. **Hebrews 12:1-2** . . . **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, [2] 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.

- c. What we see here in this 12th chapter of **Hebrews** is that God is telling us what we must do to grow up in the faith so as to become people of faith like those referred to in **Hebrews 11**, and to become children who share in their Father's holiness.
 - (1) Doing what God says – that is, obeying the assignments given – at least to the degree we understand them – will take us a long way down the path of growing in godliness, but it will not take us all the way.
 - (2) And so God adds those lessons which can only be learned through the experiences of hardship and suffering.
 - (3) And in addition to these two forms of training, God adds His corrective discipline as needed – that is, when we choose to disobey Him and take matters into our own hands so as to head off into sin.
 - d. It is this threefold picture of learning, which is (1) learning by fulfilling assignments given, (2) learning through the experiences of hardship and suffering God either brings or allows, and (3) learning through His corrective discipline – that we want to have in mind as we come to the “**therefore**” of verse 12.
2. **Hebrews 12:12-13** . . . Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, [13] 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.
- a. The essence of the message in these two verses is this: **Cooperate with God's training process rather than ignore it, resist it, or work against it.**
 - b. In other words,
 - (1) since we know God gives us assignments – such as reading and meditating on the scriptures, getting rid of even the good things in life that slow us down from running to win or which impede our learning, throwing out besetting sins, and keeping a fixed focus on Jesus,
 - (2) and since we know God teaches us through trials and testing, difficulties and sickness, and other such hardships and suffering,
 - (3) and since we know God brings corrective measures into our life when we rebel and go our own way into sin,
 - (4) make the training process of God easier on yourself by cooperating with Him.

- c. And how do we cooperate with Him? These two verses give us two things that are important for cooperating with Him:
- (1) **First**, strengthen those areas where you are weak, because God's training methods will not only expose your weakness, they will leave you sore and exhausted in those areas of weakness. So what is the point here?
 - (a) It is the pain and tiredness from training that shows you are making progress. But that same pain and tiredness can bring on resentment or feelings of anger over the training process or toward the trainer himself.
 - (b) It is resentment and anger over having to endure what you don't want to endure that motivates resistance to the training process, or it motivates you to make choices and behave in ways that work against or even sabotage the effectiveness of the lessons God is teaching you.
 - (c) So instead of passively letting the hardships and sufferings of the training process be the only means of gaining strength where you are weak, nurture your own hungering and thirsting for righteousness and use that desire to figure out some things you can do to get stronger in your areas of weakness. In this way you will join God in strengthening your weaknesses, and this in turn will make the training process easier.
 - (2) **Second**, make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.
 - (a) Running a marathon is **hard enough** with a healthy body. It **becomes harder** when you have a bit of lameness due to a pulled muscle or a sore knee or a sprained ankle. It **becomes even harder** when you foolishly and needlessly add your own twists and turns to the course that is laid out before you.
 - (b) In that same way, getting an education – even in God's school of discipleship – is **hard enough** for the healthy, mature Christian. It **becomes harder** for those of us who are not yet healthy in our faith because we are still working through some pretty serious issues from our past that continue to hold us

back from what we ought to be. It **becomes even harder** when we knowingly and willfully cling to one or more incumbrances – however good they are, or when we hold on to one or more favorite sins – however small or hidden, or when we neglect vigilance and return to a favorite sin previously thrown overboard, or when we focus on the things and pleasures and riches of this world more than we focus on Jesus.

(c) When you make God's training process harder, you are setting yourself up for discouragement and despair – which in turn sets you up to eventually lose heart – which then opens the door to seeking relief in ungodly places and unholy ways from God's educational process.

(3) And what is the main point God is making here? Wise Christians cooperate with God's training process. Foolish Christians resist and even sabotage the process and in so doing make themselves weaker and more crippled than before.

d. Now there is one more important point God is making in these two verses – and though we have heard this truth many times in the past, it is worth saying again.

(1) The language God uses in **Hebrews 12:12-13** indicates that this is both an individual activity and a group activity.

(2) In other words, each of us needs to take charge and figure out ways to strengthen our own weaknesses and avoid making unnecessary twists and turns along the way while at the same time we need to help each other get stronger and avoid foolish twists and turns.

B. **Hebrews 12:14** . . . Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

1. It is possible to read this verse as a standalone statement stuck between the preceding and following verses rather than a verse that is part of complete thought about being trained by God to share in His holiness.

2. I don't see it that way, and here is why. Having just exhorted us to cooperate with His training process by getting personally and corporately involved – as opposed to passively waiting for God to change us – God gives us two directives or goals to help us figure out our part in strengthening our weaknesses and keeping our path straight. And the unique thing about these two directives or goals is that to pursue them you must also pursue most everything else needed for living a life of faith and becoming holy as God is holy. In other words, these two directives are like blanket goals that cover most, if not all of what God wants to teach us about sharing in His holiness. With this in mind, let's look at them both.

3. **Pursue peace with all men** or as **Romans 12:18** puts it, **if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men** – and the all men means everyone, without exception.
 - a. To ascend to this level of Christian living is no small task. It requires the kind of faith that makes God our primary source of security, and it requires many changes in our thinking, attitudes, feelings, speaking, and behavior. My point is – that this level of Christian living requires a character change that encompasses almost every aspect of living a holy life. Why was this important to the first readers, and why now to us?
 - (1) The first readers of this epistle had endured some costly and painful persecution. And as we know, to be persecuted as a Christian is to be unjustly treated simply because of your faith in God, and in His son, Jesus Christ. For them, to pursue peace with all men included all those who were persecuting them.
 - (2) Now I think it is safe to say that most of us have a hard time being civil, let alone seeking peace with those who mistreat us or criticize us or say unkind things to us. In fact, many of us base our treatment of others on how they are treating us. But God is saying here that if we want to get involved and do our part in making progress toward holiness of life, pursue peace with everyone.
 - b. To help us see how far reaching this single directive is, I want to take us to two portions of scripture outside Hebrews.
 - (1) **I Peter 2:18-23** . . . Servants, **be submissive** to your masters **with all respect**, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

[19] For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. [20] For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. [21] For **you have been called for this purpose**, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, [22] Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; [23] and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but **kept entrusting Himself to Him** who judges righteously;

- (2) **Matthew 11:28-30** . . . Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for **I am gentle and humble in heart**, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.
- c. If you will take this directive from God to heart and make it your goal to pursue peace with everyone – though it won't result in everyone being at peace with you – it will result in spiritual growth and greater faith in most every area of your life.

4. **Pursue the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.**

- a. The **first** truth expressed here is that of pursuing the **process** of sanctification. The process of sanctification is that process which takes us from what we were prior to salvation and makes us into what we ought to be now that we belong to God. In directing us to pursue the process of sanctification, God is telling us it is our responsibility to take an aggressive role in the process of sanctification.
- (1) You see, sanctification is not a passive process for the Christian – as if it were all up to God.
- (2) Sanctification is a two-party process where each party takes an aggressive role in bringing about the intended results of the process. In that God is greater than us and we are dependent on Him for everything, His part is far greater than ours. Yet the importance and size of His part

- does not negate our part. And this is why God tells us to take an aggressive role in the process of sanctification.
- b. The **second** truth expressed here is that no one will see the Lord without passing through the sanctifying process.
 - (1) Jesus put it this way in his Sermon on the Mount: **Matthew 5:8** . . . Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
 - (2) Some of us think salvation is all that is required to see God. Some of us think living a holy life is what is required to see God. The scriptures teach that both are required – and the inference here in **Hebrews 12:14** is that sanctification is just as important as salvation.
 - (3) God talks about aggressively pursuing sanctification in **I John 3:2-6** . . . Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [3] And **everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.** [4] Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. [5] You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. [6] No one who abides in Him sins; **no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.**
 - c. Now let me make the connection between pursuing peace and pursuing sanctification. Just as pursuing peace with all men requires many changes in many areas, so aggressively pursuing the process of sanctification brings about changes in all the areas God wants to purify so we can share in His holiness. And the beautiful thing about these changes is that they enable us to see God.

III. Conclusion

- A. May you hunger and thirst after righteousness and cooperate with God's training so that you can enjoy intimate fellowship with Him in this life and face-to-face fellowship in the next.