

## DIVINE DISCIPLINE

Hebrews 12:1-29

Key Verse: 12:8

"If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline),  
then you are illegitimate children and not true sons."

Hebrews 1:1-10:39 mentions that Jesus is the Son of God and he is our High Priest, King and Prophet. Chapter 11 is about the men and women of God who pleased God with their faith. Chapters 12 and 13 are the conclusion of this book. In chapters 12 and 13, we learn basic requirements and spiritual struggles which are involved in the life of faith.

### I. Jesus, the perfecter of our faith (1-6)

First, a great cloud of witnesses (1a). Look at verse 1. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." This verse clearly tells us the people of God are not spectators, but runners or athletes, and their race is marked out for them. This is true. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." When Paul said he had fought a good fight and finished the race, he meant he had kept the faith. He lived a life of faith and ran the race to the end.

In verse 1, the life of faith is compared to running. It is not easy for the people of God to run the race all the time when worldly people

are usually having fun. Ungodly people seem to be free from the burdens common to men (Ps 73:1-7). They are prosperous and arrogant. So the prophet Habbakuk said to God, "Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Hab 1:13b). Even the mightiest man of spirit, Elijah the prophet, complained to God in 1 Kings 19:10b, "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." But God said to him, in 1 Kings 19:18, "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel--all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." The people of God cannot escape spiritual conflict and struggle.

Running the race all by oneself seems to be too lonely. To human beings, loneliness is the hardest part to overcome. But the Christian race is not lonely. In view of history, the number of faithful Christian members are the absolute majority. So the author of Hebrews says in verse 1a, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...." The life of faith is not lonely. The cloud of heroes and heroines of faith is fervently cheering us on to run the race well, to run the race to the end, and to receive victor's crowns one by one.

Second, let us run light (1b). Verse 1b says, "...let us throw off everything that hinders...." In running, it is good for one to run light. If one carries several suitcases, he cannot run well. Though it is painful, we must throw them off because they hinder our race. Most importantly, in order to run the race we have to overcome our sinful desire, which messes up our lives altogether.

Third, "let us run with perseverance" (1c). These days, "have fun," is our greeting. Nobody is willing to say, "persevere." As we know well, a Greek soldier had a mission to deliver a message to the commanding officer in the headquarters. On the way, he was badly injured. But he did not give up on the way. He ran and ran for 26 miles, bleeding. As soon as he delivered the message, he fell down on the ground and breathed his last. Here we learn that he persevered beyond the power of death and ran the race of message deliverance. This was the birth of the marathon race. There are many kinds of games in the Olympics. But the marathon race is the focal point of the Olympics. The marathon race starts on the last day of the Olympics. All the spectators in the stadium are waiting to see the victor coming into the main Olympic stadium. They want to see the victor's greatness in perseverance and to see him be crowned.

Fourth, our race is marked out for us (1c). Verse 1c says, "...let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Our race is marked out for us. What does it mean that "our race is marked out for us"? It means that our race is to pray that God would establish the kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the United States. Most importantly, our race is pressing forward to the kingdom of God as holy pilgrims.

Fifth, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" (2-4). Look at verse 2. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." When Jesus came to this world to heal the sick and preach the gospel, sinful people scorned him and shamed him. But Jesus obeyed God's will unto death, death on the

cross. And God did not abandon him. God freed him from the agony of death. God raised him on the third day and seated him at the right hand of the throne of God. In this way, Jesus became the perfecter of our faith. Let's read verse 2. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." We have to hear these words in the hope of perfecting our faith. So the author of Hebrews says in verse 3, "Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." Look at verse 4. "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." As we know well, faith is the victory. By faith we can overcome the world. Therefore we must struggle to the point of death to overcome our sinful nature.

Sixth, do not lose heart (5-6). Look at verses 5,6. "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.'" When we study the word of God and live a life of faith, from time to time we despair inwardly, mainly because we cannot live up to the teachings of the Bible. As a result, some people make light of God's word. Other people then lose heart due to their guilty consciences. Here we learn that we should not lose heart because of our sins, but come to God again and again with a repentant heart.

II. Divine discipline (7-13)

First, endure hardship as discipline (7-9). There are many people who think of hardship as punishment. But the people of God must think of hardships as discipline. These days, the original meaning of "education" is largely ignored. To the modern psyche, "education" means to master a certain skill for a better life in the future. But originally, "education" was for the growth of one's inner man. Without education, men become like alley cats. Without education, they do not honor God. They do not thank their parents or pray for their country.

There is a problem. Education involves discipline. General Robert E. Lee was a genius in military strategy, because he was disciplined in the U.S. Military Academy. Beethoven became a father of all musicians down through the generations because his father locked him up every day until he finished a huge amount of music homework. Education is for the sake of self-discipline. A person's inner man must be trained through education.

Look at verses 7 and 8. "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons." When our parents do not discipline us, they spoil us and make us useless. When God does not discipline us, it is the same as not loving us.

God disciplines us for our good. Especially, God disciplines us so that we may grow in his holiness. The former fisherman, Peter, did not learn the holiness of God in Jesus because he was political. But later,

when he saw Jesus shedding his blood, he realized that Jesus is the Holy God. He said in 2 Peter 1:4, "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires." Jesus said in John 17:18, 19, "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified." Jesus sanctified himself so that his disciples would be made holy. In the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father, hallowed be your name," means that our God is the holy God and we must recognize him as the holy God.

When we learn the holiness of God, America will be established as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. If we don't learn the holiness of God, America will be the land of lawless Sodomites. Most people yearn most for the holiness of God in their souls. They want to imitate the holiness of God. But they fail because they refuse to participate in divine discipline. Those who do not receive divine discipline are illegitimate children to God.

Second, discipline produces the harvest of righteousness (10-13). Look at verse 11. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." To get a Ph.D. is not easy. To participate in the divine discipline is not easy. But when we participate in the divine discipline, we can harvest righteousness and peace, and the kingdom of God will come on earth.

We have many things to do in the world. In our span of life, we have

so many things to do, so many books to read. But first and last of all, we must participate in the divine discipline. Then God will bless this country as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And at the same time, we can please God and we can be a blessing to others. Therefore, we must do our best. Look at verses 12 and 13. "Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 'Make level paths for your feet,' so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed." Even if we are helpless to participate in divine discipline because we are broken and dispirited and too selfish to do it, we must not give up. We must do our best to participate in the divine discipline as a matter of life and death.

### III. Warning against refusing God (14-29)

First, make every effort to live in peace with all men (14-15). Look at verse 14. "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." Up until now, the author of Hebrews exhorted how to live a life of faith in detail. In this part, he warns us to have a right attitude toward God and his words. First of all, we should not make everybody our enemies. We must do our best to live in peace with all men. How can we live in peace with all men? We must remember the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When God gave us his one and only Son Jesus Christ, he gave us everything (Ro 8:32). Because God gave us the privilege of living in his world, we are abundantly blessed. Yet most people think a lot about potato chips, but they do not honor God. What is worse, they do not thank God. Those who do not thank God are spiritual lepers. Those who know how to thank God are truly godly men. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10b,

"For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect...."

Look at verse 15. "See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many." Here, "bitter root" means pride, animosity, rivalry, or anything else harmful to others. We can forgive others when we remember God's grace.

Second, we should be faithful to God (16-17). There are two kinds of unfaithfulness. First is sexual immorality. Second is unfaithfulness to God's covenant. For example, Esau was an unfaithful man. He had no appreciation for true values and was profane in his outlook on life. He despised God's blessing, that is, his birthright. He traded his birthright to his younger brother, Jacob, for a bowl of soup. Esau valued food for his stomach more than God's blessing. The problem was that he did not repent, but only regretted that he became the younger brother to his younger brother. He died of worldly sorrow (2 Cor 7:10). In this way Esau remains forever as an immoral person to God. May God have mercy on us, that we may not be unfaithful to our holy God.

Third, God's covenant people (18-21). After the Exodus, God gave his people the Law. When the Law was given, the holy mountain shook and made a thunderous sound. For the Law of God was so holy and holy that the mountain could not endure, but became shaky and smoky. At the mountain, God gave his people his word. His word links God and his people. His word makes people covenant people. When his people have

his word in their hearts, they are God's covenant people. We are special because we are God's covenant people. We are special because we have a vine and branch relationship with God and his Son Jesus Christ. It is important that we have God's covenant in our hearts.

Fourth, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God (22-29).

Let's read verses 22-24. "But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." In verse 23, the word "firstborn" does not refer to Jesus, because it is written in plural form. It means all the people of God, whose names are written in heaven. In the last part of verse 23, "the spirits of righteous men made perfect," are the ancestors of faith such as Enoch, Abel and Noah. These people belong to the old covenant (25). The new covenant came through the blood of Jesus, the Mediator. When God gave his word through Moses, the holy mountain shook. So it was easy for them to be a covenant people. But Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, is gentle and humble. So people can ignore his new covenant. We should not be ignorant people under the Law. We should be people of God in Jesus Christ, who is our Prophet, Priest, and King (24).

What is the result of the life of faith? Look at verse 28.

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."

When we live a life of faith, run the race, and fight a good fight, we receive a kingdom that cannot be shaken. This is our hope and a source of real joy which overflows in our souls.

There is a slight impression that people receive education ignoring discipline, especially divine discipline. It is tragedy that, from grade school, education does not emphasize discipline, especially divine discipline. If they do not receive discipline, they cannot be the children of God. May God restore family discipline and school discipline and divine discipline in this country.