

Lesson Twenty-three

(12:3-17)

THE DISCIPLINED LIFE

³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? —

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor lose courage when you are punished by him.

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

⁷It 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?

⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it

yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

12 Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled; ¹⁶ that no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

Faith is both obedience and results in obedience. Faith and obedience are results that come through the consideration of evidence and an act of the will, based upon that evidence. Hence, the Christian life begins with discipline of self through God's direction and our decision to accept Jesus as lord, subjugating ourselves to him and his will. Any such act indicates discipline.

Jesus' great commission to the apostles in Matthew 28 had the charge to "Go and make disciples . . ." He commanded such action because only those who are willing to become disciples, disciplined and therefore obedient, were fit subjects for his kingdom, the church. Disciple and discipline are inseparable, not only because they are from the same root, but also because they are imperatives for being Christian.

Everyone of those who have been mentioned in the previous two chapters was characterized by discipline, Jesus being the supreme example. Each of them brought their wills into submission to God's will, living a life of faith in God. No one can be acceptable to God without faith, but faith in God only comes through discipline of self. Keeping that faith is only possible by continued discipline of self. In our lesson text, Esau failed to obtain what was rightfully his because he did not discipline himself. The majority of those who came out of Egypt did not receive that which was promised because of the same failure.

The reader can see that the idea of discipline has been enlarged from the narrow sense which some people give it in discussion of this text. While discipline includes punishment, that by no means is the sum total of its import. As we have shown, a disciple is one who has disciplined himself to live life God's way rather than his own way. Every obedient act in life is from a disciplined disciple. Discipline, then, has to do with

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all of our life, not just what is termed punishment. The Greek term in question is *παιδεύω*, which has to do with training and development of the person in every way. Note its uses in these texts, and consider the import in each case: Luke 23:16, 22; Acts 7:22; 22:3; Romans 2:20; I Corinthians 4:15; 11:32; II Corinthians 6:9; Galatians 3:24, 25; Ephesians 6:4; I Timothy 1:20; II Timothy 3:16; Revelation 3:19. In Hebrews, we have it in 12:5-11. Study of all these will show that the word encompassed the total education of a person, all was involved in rearing a child to adulthood. That is the exact intent of God's dealing with every child of his; to bring him to adulthood, even unto the "measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ," Ephesians 4:13. The people in Corinth had not grown as they should, and thus were still babes, I Corinthians 3:1ff. Among those to whom the Hebrew epistle was sent were some who were yet on milk rather than meat, 5:11ff. Discipline was the answer in each case, a discipline that would bring the life into line with God's will, that would cast aside any encumbrance that was a hindrance, so that the race could be run successfully. As we study our lesson text, then, keep this larger concept of discipline in view.

12:3 — **consider** — The Greek term *ἀναλογίζομαι*, to reckon or study by comparison. In this text, Jesus is to be the subject of study. Adequate understanding of him will cause self to be considered. In the case of those first readers, such a study would highlight the fact that Jesus had been called upon to give his life to God in a cruel death, which was something none of the readers had been forced to do. Any honest evaluation, then, would put their present status in much better light than they were evidently seeing it.

sinners — The evidence from the gospel records, from Acts and I Corinthians 2 indicates that those who put Jesus to death were exactly such: sinners. Pilate was bad, but even he could see that the Jewish rulers were after Jesus because of envy. Both Herod and Pilate could have done other than they did.

such hostility — These terms indicate an active opposition, intentionally and adamantly opposed. The Greek word for hostility (*ἀντιλογία*) can be seen in 6:16 and 7:7, then in Luke 2:34; 20:27; John 19:12; Acts 13:45; 28:19; Romans 10:21; Titus 1:9; 2:9; Jude v. 11.

you — The Greek term is *ψυχή*, 'soul' in most other texts. Here it stands for the person, as in Acts 1:15, 'persons.'

weary or fainthearted — Any one who loses sight of Jesus and begins to think unduly about self will sooner or later grow weary and lose heart. That is the compelling reason to consider Jesus, and set one's mind on "things above, where Christ is." The remaining verses of our text give reasons why Christians should not take their attention off of Jesus.

V. 4 — In essence, though the present struggles of the first readers

were great, their life had not been taken (or required), and others before them had endured like circumstances. Hence, they just needed to stay faithful.

V. 5 — The quote brought to their attention is from Proverbs 3:11-12. The whole context of Proverbs is that of a father who loves his son, and in loving, does all that is possible to aid his growth, both mentally and physically. So it is with the Christian and his heavenly Father. God does all that he does, whatever it is, for the good of his children. Therefore, the proper frame of mind will accept with gratitude whatever God does, giving careful thought and obedient service to God.

V. 6 — **the Lord disciplines** — Surely there could be no greater honor than to be a child of God. If so, then one ought to receive with gladness that which comes from God. With this attitude, much of what the world calls "ills" will be seen rather as a means to glorify God, as did Joseph so many years ago Paul learned to utilize whatever came to him to God's glory (as in the prison at Philippi or the jail in Rome), remaining content in all cases, Philippians 4:11.

V. 7 — **It is for discipline** — That is, abiding in faith, one learns discipline in a better way and in more areas of life.

God . . . sons — As John expressed it, "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." i John 3:1. So many have refused the privilege of sonship and thus are not children of God by their own choice. If one has chosen God, and been received by God, why should one then refuse what is entailed in that relationship?

V. 8 — A child grows through obedience to the parent's care. If the parents fail, so does the child. If God does not concern himself with people, they will fail. He will, however, become involved in the life of anyone who will allow him to do so. That involvement is called discipline, and takes whatever form is needed. God suits the circumstance to the person, I Corinthians 10:13. To use Jesus' words, a yoke is fitted to each person that is just right for that person, Matthew 11:28-30.

V. 9 — Arguing from lesser to greater, those who were to first receive the letter knew that they had been willing to accept that which came from their earthly parents, imperfect though they were. Why then should they resist or resent their heavenly parent, who always does good, not evil? Jesus taught that God was better than earthly parents, Matthew 7:7-11. James wrote that "every good and perfect gift" comes from God above, 1:17.

father of spirits — This is an interesting expression. Man is viewed many different ways in the scriptures. In the Old Testament, man is commonly referred to as a living being, one having some things different from animals, but sharing a life principle. In the New Covenant, several different terms are likewise applied to man, such as flesh, body, soul,

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spirit. Soul, *ψυχή*, and spirit, *πνεῦμα*, are distinct terms, but overlap somewhat. The part of man like God is spirit, for God is spirit, John 4:23-24, and so is man. The spirit is that which has life, and animates the physical body, producing soul. Note here Luke 23:46; I Thessalonians 5:23; James 2:26 and Hebrews 12:23. At death, the "real" person, the spirit that has inhabited a physical body, goes back to God who gave it, Ecclesiastes 12:7, and the body is consequently lifeless (soul-less). The spirit is the real "us" with all the distinct things that make us what we are. While in the physical body, "we" utilize the brain, eyes, etc. to function. Yet "we" know intuitively that "we" are not equal to that body. God's Word validates that intuitive conclusion.

Shall we not . . . live? — Note how clear the point is: only submission to God will bring the life found in Jesus, John 10:10, and remove the fear of death, Hebrews 2:14ff.

V. 10 — **they disciplined** — The Greek term indicates the discipline continued. Normally, parents discipline their children from infancy until the end of the teen years.

holiness — Notice v. 14. The root term is the same as the terms used in 2:11. We have no holiness of our own, having sinned it away. What holiness we may attain is solely from God. Ref. II Corinthians 6:14 — 7:1.

V. 11 — Any sort of interference in what "I" want is resented by the undisciplined. Every Christian knows how difficult it is to bring every area of life under Jesus' lordship. Self wants satisfaction, egos demand pampering, desires insist on being fulfilled. None of us achieve any measure of Christlikeness without determined effort. The "old man" dies hard in us all. Jesus did not die on the cross without "setting his face" toward Jerusalem and drinking the cup set before him. Neither shall we accomplish what God wants without a like death to self. It is only in the way of the cross that we find the way to God's home.

peaceful fruit — As in Romans 5:1, peace symbolizes a right relationship with God, a state where "all is well with our soul."

who have been trained — The Greek term, *γυμνασμένοις*, indicates a state of life begun and maintained. We must start by faith in God and finish with faith in God. The Greek term would be represented in a word such as our gymnasium, a place of discipline through exercise. Moses' life is a good example of someone who left Egypt by faith, and eighty years later, yet trusted God. His faith produced a righteousness which comes from God, and holiness resulted from that relationship.

V. 12 — **Therefore** — Having given all these reasons for abiding in faith, the author leads into an exhortation.

drooping hands . . . weak knees — Anyone who has ever tried to run a race, or watched others attempt to do so can readily remember these things, depicting a runner falling behind, etc. The Christian life is like a race, one that must be run until life is over.

V. 13 — **make straight paths** — Notice that Christians are to make the straight paths. One of the Greek words for sin is that of stepping out of line, wandering from the right path. Recall the idea in Psalms 23 that speaks of our shepherd leading us in paths of righteousness. Solomon knew only too well that some ways seem right to man, but end in death, 16:25. Isaiah described us as sheep having gone astray, and Peter picked up that idea, reminding Christians that they have returned unto the shepherd and overseer of their souls, Isaiah 53:5; I Peter 2:25.

V. 14 — **Strive** — The Greek term *διώκω* has the idea of avid pursuit, and is often translated as persecute, such as in I Timothy 1:13.

holiness — Good texts to consider here would be such as Matthew 5:8; Ephesians 4:17 — 5:20; Colossians 3:5-17; I John 3:1-3.

V. 15 — **See to it** — The Greek word translated “see” is *ἐπισκοπέω*; our English word “episcopal” being from it. It is sometimes translated as bishop or overseer, the last word especially conveying the idea within it. Notice it in such texts as Acts 1:20; 20:28; Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7; I Peter 2:25 and 5:2.

no one fail — This indicates a mutual concern for each other, everyone being interested in the other. Galatians 6:1-2 and Hebrews 10:19-25 would give some pointers along these lines of how to consider each other, who is to do it, what purpose is to be accomplished, etc. The same word for “fail” is to be seen in 4:1.

root — Whether this is a person or something else is not specified, but Esau is given as an example of such a one. It is surely relevant to consider that what affects one may very well affect others, like leaven in a lump. Defiled would be the opposite of holy.

V. 16 — **immoral or irreligious** — These could be the same in some cases, different in others. In Esau’s case, some think he was both, others think only irreligious in respect to his birthright.

V. 17 — The time and circumstances in Esau’s case were such that he failed to obtain what was planned for him. The same thing can be true of any Christian: God has some wonderful things planned for those who love him, but only if one remains stable and steadfast, Colossians 1:23, and persevere, Hebrews 12:1, to the finishing of the race, II Timothy 4:8.

While Esau’s case may not be exactly parallel to that of the Christian and salvation, yet it is true that death closes the door to any possibility of repentance. Some suggest that even while people are yet alive, they reach such a state of mind that in actuality no chance exists for repentance. In such a case, it would also be true to say that God had closed the door to salvation, since he has made salvation hinge upon human response,

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and none (in this instance) is possible. Whether the scriptures actually teach the possibility of the above supposed case is doubtful. It is certainly a terrible potential state to contemplate.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 23:

221. Have you reviewed the total outline for the book and reflected upon how this section fits into it?
222. Define discipline and disciple.
223. What was the Mosaic law to do for people?
224. How was Paul disciplined?
225. How was Jesus disciplined?
226. Are Christians to begin as babes in Christ and end as adults in Christ?
227. What effects is discipline to produce?
228. What part do Christians play in respect to discipline?
229. How does 12:14-17 relate to the discussion?
230. To whom are the commands in vv. 12, 13, 14 and 15 directed?